Saturday morning and the art studio is abuzz with activity. One little girl teaches her dad how to sew using the running stitch, while another dad helps his son mix the perfect skin color for his mom’s portrait. The room is filled with over 30 fathers and their children making art inspired by, and for, their moms. This is “Pop’ Art,” one in a series of family and parent-child workshops I offer in my Choice-Based Art Studio.

When I create these studio experiences for parents and families, it is about much more than the final product students take home. Like all the work done in my art classroom, it is about the process, the exploration and the shared experience of art-making that holds the value.

When I transitioned to a Choice-Based style of teaching, I knew I would need support from all members of my community for it to become a success. An important, and often overlooked, part of that community is the parents. I felt it was crucial to explain the difference between the teacher-directed art projects they were accustomed to and authentic child art. I had a simple goal when I first began my parent workshops: to educate parents about the pedagogy of a Choice-Based art program. It grew to be so much more.

**IN THE FIRST WORKSHOP: “THE ART STUDIO EXPERIENCE,”** I explain the why and the how of my program and describe a typical class. Next, “Creating a Home Art Studio,” gives parents ideas for developing creative spaces for their child with examples of materials and tools, and ideas for engaging their child in meaningful conversations about their art. The third workshop, “The Art and Literacy Connection,” focuses on developmental stages of child art and the important connections between scribbling, mark-making, material manipulation and literacy skills.

At our first workshop, I ask parents to share memories from their elementary art experiences. Parents remember creating “holiday” art projects like pumpkins and hearts, if they had an art teacher at all. They often remark that they creating “holiday” art projects like pumpkins and hearts, if they had an art teacher at all. They often remark that they created “holiday” art projects like pumpkins and hearts, if they had an art teacher at all. They often remark that they themselves.

PARENT COMMUNICATION. One unintended but valuable benefit of these workshops is the number of parent volunteers I now have. One parent started a recycling center for the 3-D center, while another photographs and documents students’ work for digital portfolios. Parents who are artists come in to demonstrate and mentor and a whole crew of parents helped to curate and install our spring art show.

I want to go beyond the typical modes of parent communication (welcome letters, open house and curriculum brochures). My goal is to empower and enlighten parents so that they understand and become advocates for our choice-based art program and provide tools to support their child’s artistic growth in and out of school.

**Find Out More**

- teachingforartisticbehavior.org
- groups.yahoo.com/group/TAB-ChoiceArtEd

**Choice-Based Art**

Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making. Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice. This concept supports multiple modes of learning to meet the diverse needs of our students.

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