



## 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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### THE HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION

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BY JULIE TOOLE

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**S**aturday 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 decided early on that they were not "artistic." I soon realized

that for these parents to truly understand the deep level of engagement, intrinsic motivation and connection to art my students have, they would need to experience the art studio for themselves.

I end each workshop with an exit slip to get feedback and suggestions. Comments range from enlightened, "The difference between art class and Art Studio is inspiring to me," to practical, "I will start to introduce more materials and use the language she hears in art studio." After the first workshop, the most frequent suggestion was that they want to make art with their child in the studio. This was perfect because that was exactly where I was headed.

The workshops are structure so parents experience the art studio the way their child does. We start with a mini-lesson and introduction of materials. Parents then choose where they want to work and what their subject will be. The majority of the class is spent MAKING art. We clean up and end with sharing and reflection, just as their children do.

#### EACH FAMILY HAS A DIFFERENT WAY OF CREATING ART.

Some work on a project together, others work side-by-side. One boy drew a super hero and his mom sewed a stuffed pillow of his creation. One mom posed in a chair while her daughter drew her portrait. One child created a robot while directing his dad to collect supplies and hot-glue pieces together.

At sharing time, as students spoke about their process, their inspiration, their struggles and solutions, I could see that the parents were really getting it. They were understanding the true value of the art-making process and the level of engagement, thinking and metacognition that happens in our studio.

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. ■

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#### FIND OUT MORE

- [teachingforartisticbehavior.org](http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org)
- [groups.yahoo.com/group/TAB-ChoiceArtEd](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TAB-ChoiceArtEd)

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