



Choice-Based Art Edited by Nan Hathaway

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. Learn more at teachingforartisticbehavior.org.

LET THE STUDENT BE THE ARTIST

BY IAN SANDS

Did you ever see an art project and immediately fall in love with it? Perhaps you found the application of color fascinating or you were intrigued by the technique. Maybe the particular use of media struck your fancy or the subject matter just happened to be your favorite. Your reaction was immediate and your response was the same as would be expected from most any art teacher: *“I have got to do this lesson with my class!”*

ART TEACHERS ARE EASILY INSPIRED. We see projects on Pinterest, works by artists, or even every day real life objects that make us want to create art. Our desire is to share our enthusiasm by having our students emulate what has inspired us. We recreate lesson plans, or write entirely new ones, in order for our students to create an artwork based on the work that we found so intriguing. From the position of an art teacher, this makes absolute sense. However, it often does not generate the results we anticipate.

While we are interested in our selected subject, this does not always equate to our students sharing our enthusiasm. After we eagerly present the project, our students often plod along at a level that might be described as only one step higher than total apathy.

Once the project is completed, we are quick to express our disappointment when a student wants to trash a project. While we may be discouraged that our students didn't share our zeal for our selected project, the stakes are even higher for the students. Their disinterest and lack of commitment to the project often results in not only poor work, but low grades as well.

THE TEACHER IS NOT THE ARTIST. If we consider how artists think and work, then we will come to the realization that using the teacher's inspiration to kick off a project is inherently backwards.

When beginning a work of art, an artist will make three decisions: They will decide the subject, the technique and the media. Many artists—from old masters such as Rubens to today's contemporaries such as Jeff Koons—first made these decisions, but then had other people execute their directives. These artists selected the subject, the technique

and media, and then incorporated assistants to execute their vision.

Their assistants, however, were not the artists. They were *assistants*. When we as art teachers make the decisions about the subject, the techniques, or the medium, we run the risk of becoming the artist. Our students in turn become the assistants. Our students should never be the assistants. They should always be the artists.

THE STUDENT IS THE ARTIST. As teachers, we do not need to provide students with a subject, technique or required medium. Instead, we should allow them to become the artists and to make those decisions. Many students already have something if their life they are passionate about. These interests make excellent starting subjects for making art.

For other students who do not have an immediate passion to draw from, it may be more challenging to think of a subject. Nonetheless, everyone has something that they find interesting. It is the work of the artist to seek out the subject matter that they will use as inspiration. Our students need to take on this role and become the artists.

Once the student becomes the artist, the teacher is free to take on the role of facilitator. Our responsibility changes from that of one who imposes a technique or medium, to one who demonstrates technique and use of media as needed throughout the development of the project.

As teacher-facilitator, teachers allow students the freedom to seek out and discover their own inspiration. We can still encourage our students to explore artists that match their interests. We can also support their learning when it comes to new techniques. We can help them discover ways to turn their newly found inspiration into project ideas.

WHEN THE STUDENT FINDS THE INSPIRATION, engagement will increase and learning and growth will result. Students will then share their enthusiasm with us. They will express excitement for the subject, the technique, or chosen medium through the art making process. After all, this is the job of the artist; to visually explore and express inspiration. The teacher's job is not to be concerned with students making art, but rather with students becoming artists. ■

Previously from Apex High School, Ian Sands currently works as the visual arts instructor at South Brunswick High School in Southport, N.C. He has authored articles and has presented at national and state art-education conferences on the topics of choice-based art education, social media, and technology.