

The Choice Studio



Julie Toole and Katherine Douglas

Choice studio practice holds that students are artists and the artroom is their studio. There is a shift from teacher-chosen projects, media, or themes, to a learner-directed classroom where students are given voice and choice over what they create. They are responsible for developing their own ideas, subject matter, materials, and techniques; setting up their workspace; and working to completion. There is a strong emphasis on personal reflection, and artist statements and critique are important elements of the studio community.

Supporting Independent Work

Supporting this pedagogy requires a redesign of the classroom to support independent work. In a choice studio:

- space supports the use of multiple media at one time.
- visual resources are available throughout the space.
- you do not need enough of anything for the entire class to use at once.
- students choose where to work and whether to stand or sit.
- centers begin with “entry level” materials needing little direction. More complex tools, materials, and techniques are introduced as students are ready.

Rearranging Your Space

So, how can you prepare your artroom for student choice? First, rethink the general arrangement of your space.

The room will be set up into centers organized by media. Consider which centers you will have and what are the needs of that center. A painting and printmaking center should be near a water source, a fiber center may need to be near outlets for a sewing machine, and a 3-D center should have ample storage. Inventory your furniture.

You may need less table space and fewer seats since students work standing, on the floor, or in close proximity on a collaborative project. Many choice studios forgo a teacher's desk to create more space and instead establish a rug or meeting area for mini-lessons and critique. Consider the wall space near each center; you will be displaying resources, menus of technique, and exemplars from students and art history to inspire and support student independence.

Once the general layout is designed, inventory your supplies. Lib-

erate those materials in your closets and cabinets. Remember, this is the students' studio and they should have access to supplies and tools. Because they are choosing where they work, you only need a few of each item—the rest can stay in storage. Find containers and systems to organize supplies and label everything. Create and teach organization that supports autonomy and independence during set-up and

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clean-up so you can focus on working with students rather than answering questions about where the glue sticks are! Don't underestimate the importance of storage. Students may work on their art over time, so you need to create secure spaces and systems to safely store their work.

When creating a choice workspace, it is easy to get carried away and fill every inch with supplies and signage. Leave some breathing space within the studio. Think about leaving some spaces empty so there's room for students to display their work, add their own touches, and for the program to evolve as you respond to student needs

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POINT OF VIEW
The Choice Studio

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and interests. Your carefully considered room alterations will support the growth that you and your students will experience.

Julie Toole is a National Board Certified Choice-Based art teacher. She teaches 1st–8th grade in an independent school in Wilmette, Illinois, and is a member of the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) leadership team. choosingchoice.blogspot.com

Katherine Douglas is co-author, with Diane Jaquith, of Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom (Teachers College Press, 2009).

WEB LINK

teachingforartisticbehavior.org

PRINTING the Neighborhood

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- Use layering techniques and collage skills to create detail in a collagraphic plate.
- Ink a finished plate and pull a series of inked prints from it.
- Combine prints to create one large mural with building imagery.
- Assess their work and the work of others.

Materials

- 9 x 12" (23 x 30 cm) oak tag or bristol board (1 sheet per student)
- water-soluble printing ink in a variety of colors
- 20 x 13" (6 x 4 m) of primed canvas
- acrylic paint
- 4" (10 cm) soft rubber brayers
- paintbrushes
- found objects for stamping
- scissors
- Styrofoam trays or other surfaces for mixing and rolling inks
- newspaper and newsprint
- plastic tablecloths
- pencils
- 8 x 10" (20 x 25 cm) sketch paper
- hole punches
- white glue
- smocks or old t-shirts
- gel medium
- clipboards
- baby wipes
- printing paper

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

WEB LINK

www.pinterest.com/EllenJayeBenson/collagraph