



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.

THE CONTINUUM OF CHOICE: Finding the Right Fit for Teaching and Learning

BY DIANE B. JAQUITH

In his book, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (HarperOne; 1993), Parker J. Palmer writes that the teacher is a mediator between the knower and the known, between the learner and the subject to be learned. A teacher, not some theory, is the living link in the epistemological chain.

Art teachers are educators, mediators, facilitators, resources and confidants for the hundreds of children who enter their classrooms each year. Our roles shift according to need, flexing with each situation in response to the myriad circumstances.

Learning and teaching are not static entities. Flexibility in choice is essential for both students and teachers, as found in the Continuum of Choice model, where the teacher becomes, in the words of Palmer, a “mediator of relationship between the knower and the known” (Palmer, p. 30). As such, the educator continually finds herself in different places along the continuum according to objectives and agendas for the class and for individuals.

The continuum of choice from a teacher-directed focus on product (left), to a learner-directed focus (right) on process in art-making activities. Emergent curricular opportunities increase with greater student autonomy.

| | < LESS CHOICE | MORE CHOICE > | |
|---|------------------|---------------------|---|
| < | Teacher Directed | Learner Directed | > |
| < | Teacher Control | Learner Control | > |
| < | Product Focus | Process Focus | > |
| < | Set Curriculum | Emergent Curriculum | > |

THE CONTINUUM OF CHOICE describes the relative degree of teacher versus learner control, of focus on product versus process, and whether content is emergent or set by the teacher, school or district.) Teacher-direction sits at one endpoint of the continuum, where the educator determines the entire art activity and instruction focuses on a product. Learner-direction is the other endpoint, where instruction focuses on process. Here, students have full autonomy and access to all media.

In a choice-based learning environment, many lessons range in-between these endpoints, in the area known as Modified Choice. Modified choice balances the teacher’s agenda with the student’s agenda. In this middle ground, control transfers incrementally from teacher to student. Moving toward autonomy, learners change a set curricular course to an emergent curriculum, where student discoveries and questions drive lesson planning. Learning holds its greatest potential when teachers are responsive to emergent topics.

AGENDAS If you want to increase choice in your curriculum, look within to identify your agenda. Your agenda may differ from your objectives—it is what guides decision-making for each lesson. Perhaps you need to meet a skill benchmark, or complete work

for an exhibit. Your agenda may be for a specific student to take greater risks. Your agenda may be due to logistics, such as a challenging schedule. Your students likely have a different agenda. They want to connect with their interests, feel personal challenge, try new experiences, and have fun. They want to be heard and feel safe in taking risks. A choice curriculum adapts in response to both teacher and student agendas.

TEACHER AND LEARNER ROLES Along the Continuum of Choice, roles shift constantly. Teachers become learners; learners become teachers. Students teach each other and model for their teacher. This experience builds confidence, solidifies skills and enhances teacher-student relationships. With many teachers in the classroom, it is easier to open more choices. Experienced students help beginners while their teacher instructs small groups and individuals.

This shift in roles is built on trust between teacher and students. Trust enables teachers to assume the mediator role described by Parker, making decisions based on what students need to know, as artists, to best do their work. ■

Diane B. Jaquith is an elementary art teacher in Newton, Mass., and directs the Teaching for Artistic Behavior Summer Institute. She is co-author of “Engaging Learners” and co-editor of “The Learner-Directed Classroom.”

TYPICAL ACTIVITIES ALONG THE CONTINUUM OF CHOICE

Teacher-Directed

1. Teacher assigns a specific product, with pre-determined expectations for concept, media, and size. Teacher also determines assessment.
2. Learner has minimal input.

Skill Builders

1. Teacher chooses media with clear expectations for finished work.
2. Learner has limited choices, such as size and color.

Theme or Media Focus

1. Teacher chooses a broad theme to tie into a multi-disciplinary study, core values or current events OR teacher offers a range of specific media.
2. Teacher/Learner negotiation:
 - Media
 - Content
 - Collaboration or individual
 - Size, format
 - Duration
 - Assessment

Full Autonomy

1. Teacher facilitates for learner access to all resources for learner self-challenge.
2. Learners follow a course of inquiry, choosing:
 - Media
 - Content
 - Collaboration or individual
 - Size, format
 - Duration
 - Self-assessment
 - Conversations with peers and teacher
 - Reflective writing

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