



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. Learn more at teachingforartisticbehavior.org.

TALKING WITH YOUR ADMINISTRATOR ABOUT CHOICE-BASED ART

BY JULIE TOOLE

When I decided to transform my art program into a choice-based classroom, I knew that I would need the support of my principal in order for it to be a success.

His first reaction was “*Why?*” From his point of view, I had built a thriving art program beloved by students and parents alike, and the walls and halls were filled with beautiful student art. So why would I want to change?

We had a frank and open conversation where he challenged me to think deeply about this pedagogy.

Here is what we discussed: What was working and what were the limitations of my current program? Where was I headed? What could go wrong and how I would address these issues? What would be my indicators of success, and how could administration and staff help support me in this transition?

Through this conversation, I was able to share my thoughts and frustrations about my current program and my desire to shift to a choice-based art classroom.

This was not something I rushed into. I had been researching, planning and dreaming about this type of classroom for over a year. Energized by meeting many other like-minded art educators at the National Art Education Convention gave me the final push to make this dream a reality.

Here are six tips to consider when approaching your administration and preparing for that meeting.

1. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT. You want to have their full attention and give it the time and focus it deserves. Discussing when passing in the hallway or during a break at a meeting will not lead to the deep discussion this topic warrants. Allow an hour so there is ample time for discussion and questions. Have an agenda, define your goals and lead the conversation.

2. BE PREPARED. You need to come in as the expert that you are. Read everything you can about Choice-Based Art, join the various social media groups focused on this approach, and, if possible, go visit a choice-based classroom in action. Bring a copy of your resources and offer to share them. Talk about the developmental stages in art, differentiated learning, metacognition, and intrinsic motivation, all of which are deeply nurtured with this pedagogy. Have a specific plan for how you will structure your time with students and how you will organize your studio space so that your administration can visualize how it will look.

3. MAKE IT FIT WHERE YOU ARE. There is a wide continuum and many variations on how a choice-based classroom can be structured. You have to be mindful of your school community, space issues, personal teaching style, budgetary constraints and administrative demands. Look for natural connections to what your school is already doing. Does your school do Writer’s Workshop, Genius Hour, centers, project-based learning, or STEM/STEAM? There are many ways to explain the similarities between what your school is already doing and a choice-based classroom. This will provide a grounding context.

4. SPEAK WITH PASSION. Sharing your personal journey that led you to a choice-based pedagogy is a compelling story. Allow your enthusiasm and joy to come through. This will speak volumes. What administrator would not support someone who is willing to take risks, do in-depth personal reflection and grow in their field?

5. SHIFT THE PARADIGM. Remember that most administrators (and parents) have a very specific idea of what an art classroom should look like, and the type of products that will come out of it, based upon personal experiences. Clearly explain the differences between an adult’s and a child’s aesthetic of art. Describe what authentic student art might look like and how it will be displayed and shared. Highlight the importance of process over product, but reassure them that the creative process will be nurtured and refined so that the level of skill and craftsmanship will improve over time.

6. CONNECT THE ASSESSMENT DOTS. Be transparent about how you will measure student growth. In this age of hyper focus on accountability and testing, it is vital to be able to demonstrate student growth in a choice-based classroom. Whether you are connecting to State Goals, Student Learning Outcomes or Common Core, develop and share your formative and summative assessment strategies.

Even with my administration’s support, there still were many challenges during my transition to a choice-based classroom. Having their support and understanding gave me the confidence and time to figure things out and create the thriving artists’ studio I had envisioned. ■

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