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Utilization and Transferability of Technical Skills in a Choice Based Art Unit

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UTILIZATION AND TRANSFERABILITY OF TECHNICAL SKILLS IN A CHOICE BASED ART UNIT

An Arts Based Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts

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The Research Project of Sarah George

Entitled: *Utilization and Transferability of Technical Skills in a Choice Based Art Unit.*

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts in the School of Art and Design, Program of Art and Design

_____________________________________________________
Connie Stewart, Ph.D., Chair

_____________________________________________________
Donna Goodwin, Ph.D., Committee Member
Abstract


The study explores differences between a class who was taught technical skills prior to expressing their ideas and a class who expressed their ideas prior to learning technical skills in a TAB-Choice classroom. Two third grade art classes from a school in Ann Arbor, Michigan participated in the study where four students from each class were chosen to participate in a focus study. Students filled out pre and post surveys. The teacher as researcher used a rubric to evaluate each work of art, photographed the art for documentation, and then compared the rubrics, surveys, and responses. Collected data demonstrated how third grade students attained and choose to implement knowledge of technical skills if they practiced those skills first before utilizing them in their own unique manner. In addition, there were unexpected differences in the way boys and girls responded. The conclusion of the study showed that students benefit from the teaching and practice of technical skills and should also be allowed to explore their ideas with the mediums of their choice to create new emerging content.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My experience has been that my students are over-tested, bored, and displeased within a teacher centered learning environment. Many believe that a solution to help differentiate learning and meet the needs of all learning styles is to provide choice in a student-centered environment. Through my own experience as a student who went to traditional school art programs, I observed students develop skills and techniques, as well as learn about artists and art history, that are selected and presented by our art teacher. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) suggest passing control from teacher to student so that they may pursue independent work in a carefully planned learning environment because it is unlikely that they will become knowledgeable about their own artistry without self-directed work done during the year.

In addition, art educators Marjorie and Brent Wilson (2002) say that students benefit from guidance of their teacher. This arts based research project sets out to explore the effectiveness of choice in arts education, specifically the effectiveness of technical training combined with self-directed learning and exploration. The question I am exploring for this research is: How can age appropriate technical information about the properties of color enhance a student's ability to express a personal idea in a choice based classroom?
Choice Based Art Education (CBAE) refers to a type of pedagogy where students are regarded as the artists and make choices while creating their artwork. In comparison, many art classrooms offer no choice or limited choice where all students create homogeneous artwork that the teacher demonstrates to the whole class. Teaching for Artistic Behavior is a type of CBAE and is also referred to as TAB-Choice (TeachingforArtisticBehavior.org). Many teachers that I have observed believe that students should be taught technical skills first and practice them or reproduce artworks the teacher shows them. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) suggest that students should be taught technical skills to use as tools for their own creative expression as well as use them when they believe it makes the most sense.

**Rationale**

My personal teaching background began in a traditional Montessori classroom setting where students had the choice to do what type of schoolwork that they wanted to do at any given point, as long as they had been introduced to the activity. In a Montessori classroom the environment is student centered, and students have ownership of their learning as well as taking care of their classroom. This is something that is missing in most public school settings. American Montessori Society states that:

> You won’t find the customary rows of school desks; children work at tables or on the floor, rolling out mats on which to define their own work space. In addition the walls of the classroom will likely be lined with framed artworks created by the children themselves. (2016, para. 7)
Montessori Philosophy emphasizes in allowing students to have freedom in making choices to become more independent as they choose what they are interested in learning (2016, para 3). This mode creates an environment that develops students through the prolonged concentration of uninterrupted observation by the teachers, and results in a higher sense of self-esteem as the student progresses through their activities.

Art in Montessori schools is experimental, open ended, and playful. Instead of homogeneous projects, each piece is unique and each student fills a need with those materials to achieve what they desired in their creative process. Through my own observations as a Montessori art teacher I found that the student choice nurtures independence, prolonged concentration, and higher self-esteem. I believe these philosophical stances are essential in the creating process and they have fostered my own curiosities to implement choice based art in a public school setting.

When children can consistently direct their work in school, their ideas flow and develop over time. With practice, children are adept managers of their creativity and capable of far more than adults require of them. Schools can and should be welcoming places for students’ original ideas. (Jaquith and Hathaway, 2012, p. 1)

Today as a public school art teacher, I reflect upon my early teaching years in the Montessori classroom. I have continually asked how I can implement more student choice in a public school setting. My undergrad program taught me how to teach lessons where students would watch a demonstration by the teacher, then recreate a very similar artwork having little to no choice of what they could do or add in their picture. Irwin and de Cosson (2002) explain how
many educators desire to become artist-researcher-teachers as they question how they were taught and how traditional methods lack life and living.

In the book *Art for Life*, Anderson and Milbrant describe Efland’s analysis of school art, “Creativity in school is typically more apparent and superficial than real or profound; there is only an impression of creativity in what is actually a structured, somewhat non-creative environment” (Anderson & Milbrant, 2002, p. 65). In their book *Art for Life*, Anderson and Milbrant continue on the topic of Efland’s school art analysis. They state, “Although some school art programs do encourage students’ critical and creative thinking, many appear to be characteristically ‘school-oriented’; that is, students follow the rules, find the one right answer, and apply lower-level cognitive processes” (Anderson & Milbrant, 2002, p. 65).

In the article “Creating Meaning Through Art, Teacher as Choice Maker”, Olson states, “Whether one chooses to express personal insights, observations, and experiences with words, images, or a combination of both, choice of expression is important and should always be offered and encouraged as an option” (Olson, 1998, p. 179). If choice time is so important to a student’s artistic development, where should it fit in the art room? Questions like these started to help me form my own philosophy.

**Background**

I am an elementary art teacher at Evergreen Elementary School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I teach preschool through fifth grade with class sizes that average around 25 students. Choice based art is a popular philosophy of
teaching in my district at the elementary level. Although I had a Montessori teaching background, I was not completely sure how I would run a choice based art classroom without a prepared environment. Being able to observe many Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB-Choice) art classrooms in my district encouraged me to implement units where students had choices in their themes and materials. I have always allowed students time for free draw or free choice when they complete their task for the day. I observed that students are eager to have this time to explore ideas. Often, they get upset if they run out of time to draw at their leisure just as I wanted to explore my own ideas in art as a student. This observation is another reason why I believe providing choice in art education is essential to a student’s growth in artmaking. Free drawing or free choice drawing is an integral time for artistic development and is not recess. This is offered to all my students when their main technical skills project is completed. Allowing time for spontaneity and expression helps to create a meaningful experience for all students. In her article “Teaching and the Reasons for Making Art” Jo Alice Leeds draws upon some important issues concerning how art educators may spend too much time emphasizing technical skills without allowing students the freedom of expression - the heart of art making. She argues that too often educators, “In a well-meaning attempt to make art teaching more solid and sequential, have broken art making into separate component parts that fit neatly into lessons with clearly stated objectives and evaluation procedures” (Leeds, 1986, p.17).
I do believe that in order to teach art, students need to do more than reproduce a piece of work like the teacher’s sample model. While it is key to students’ growth to practice various art techniques, performing these techniques alone will not cover Michigan’s Visual Arts Standard 2: Create: Apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts. Dictionary.com’s definition of create is: “to evolve from one’s own thought or imagination, as in a work of art or invention.” Therefore if a student is to meet Standard 2 - Create, they must use new acquired skills with original thought, or use their own imagination. Through the teaching philosophies of TAB-Choice, students can make their own choices and use their own imagination to create original artworks. Therefore, this study examined students’ use of technical skills as well as creativity.

In addition to the opportunity for spontaneous creating and choice in artwork, students benefit from the teacher talking to them about their artwork, providing feedback, and asking questions (Wilson & Wilson, 2002). In this way students can develop their own unique style as well as build upon new ideas and techniques. In the chapter “Learning to Draw: Nurturing the Natural”, the Wilsons state that “Going beyond our strong disagreement with the common view that adult influence or interference will destroy the child’s spontaneity and creativity, we believe that adult assistance is actually necessary to evoke the child’s spontaneity and creativity” (Wilson & Wilson, 2002, p. 52). When we ask students questions about their art or when we provide scenarios for students to elaborate on we can help inspire them to add more detail in their drawings. For this choice based unit, I provided some parameters to help guide students through their
artmaking. They will not have total freedom in choice as their work must include use of color. The use of color is non negotiable as I will need to asses the technical skills addressed that involve the use of color. In this way we can discuss our art as a group.

Amy Giles states that not only should artmaking be meaningful but also that it should be authentic. She cautions art educators that they do not use easy to obtain and reproduce lessons for students because these types of lessons may devalue a student's experience in art. For student art to be authentic students must go through an artistic process where they must find an idea, make a plan to interpret the idea visually, use quality materials to create with, and evaluate the work. “A meaningful art experience is an experience for which a child has intensity, where intensity is ‘a disposition to lose oneself in an activity’ and purpose, where is defined to be a result or effect that is intended or desired” (Giles, 1990, p.39).

I thoroughly believe that choice based philosophies are essential for artistic learning. One concern I have about the TAB-Choice instructional method is the lack of opportunity to teach the many varied techniques that art students should know. If the choices are open-ended all the time, how can I be sure students will leave fifth grade with a well-rounded art education? I believe that there can be a balance of both TAB-Choice like units as well as structured technique lessons. Last year I began to implement some balance in my teaching practice.
Questions like the ones stated above have led me to this research project. Is beginning instruction with choice or first learning techniques more significant in a student’s creative process? In a Teaching for Artistic Behavior unit, should students have total choice or should I give them direction in their learning? What will happen if I teach one group of students techniques on color first and then have them create a choice based project versus letting the other group of students begin a choice based project on color and throughout the unit teach them techniques? Which group will apply their ideas more accurately?

**Definition of Terms**

**Teaching Artistic Behavior (TAB)**- “Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) is a nationally recognized choice-based art education approach to teaching art where students are regarded as artists. TAB offers students real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through the making of art. TAB supports multiple modes of learning and assessment for the diverse needs of students” (2016, para 1).

**Choice Based Art Education (CBAE)**- Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) is often referred to as TAB-Choice. The Education Alliance states that “In an authentic choice–based environment, students have control over subject matter, materials, and approach” (2008, p. 6, para 1). CBAE allows for opportunities in scribbling, experimentation, and play. Choice in art education may be limited to full depending on the teacher’s preference.

**Montessori Method (Montessori Philosophy)**- The Montessori Method of education, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, is a child-centered educational
approach where the environment is thoughtfully prepared for whole student learning (2016, para 1).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Just as there is no single definition of art that all educators and scholars agree on, the change we each need in our own classrooms, communities, and research agendas will invariably differ” (Haywood Rolling, Jr., 2017, p. 4). It would seem that many art educators argue on how to teach art. One frequent question asked has been, “What is more important: to teach technical skills, or to teach self-expression?” The purpose of this arts based research project is to show the effectiveness of choice in arts education, specifically the effectiveness of technical training combined with self-directed learning and exploration as evidenced in one elementary school. Many art educators are finding the answer to this question through the use of Teaching for Artistic Behavior in the classroom and are leaving behind teacher centered instruction with no choice or very limited choice for the student. This Literature Review will share insight to the many benefits of Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB-Choice) such as independence, self-esteem, perseverance, and self-expression through narrative and spontaneity.

Teaching through a TAB-Choice curriculum allows a teacher to present technical skills in a way that students will be able to use those skills to their own liking. In this way, they will have more tools to express themselves. “Young
artists need to be given the freedom to follow their ideas and learn to take risks. Choice-based art teachers regard students as artists, giving them full ownership of their artwork” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 5).

Furthermore, choice in art allows students to be intrinsically motivated resulting in responses to problems in original and innovative ways. Students may create in a reoccurring theme over weeks, months, or even years (Teaching For Artistic Behavior, 2016). Many of my students have a theme that they want to explore. This is evident as they continue to draw these themes in their sketchbooks. Students may work individually or work together in a group on a particular theme. This type of environment also allows for collaborative work on projects. Many of my students get into groups where they work on similar drawings or mediums.

Some educators have asked how students express themselves without development of technical skills. Yet many agree with Douglas and Jaquith (2009) who caution art educators that while teaching techniques is essential for learning, students must be able to have choice in their artmaking practices. How will we truly know what a student has learned if we only expect them to repeat what we have shown?

Mimicry does not ensure understanding. Nor does it respect students’ abilities to develop and pursue their own ideas through planning, collaboration, innovation, and reflection. The teacher who is always in control of every aspect of teaching and learning may never see what is truly important in the lives of children. (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p.91)
Spontaneity and Exploration of Ideas

Another benefit students gain from choice based art is the allowance for exploration of ideas and spontaneous drawing. Spontaneous drawing is a natural human expression that comes from within a person and can be found in all cultures. Children who desire to create something have an excitement about their artwork. This energy can be seen within a work of art and is sometimes called an \textit{aesthetic energy} (Steele, 2012). I have observed this aesthetic energy in the process of their creation, as well as in their finished pieces. Students in my classroom have an excited energy to share their work and story with others. Based on my years of experience teaching art this aesthetic energy would be rarely observed if students were not given the opportunity to explore their own ideas. Allowing students time to share their work and speak openly about it empowers them. From my observation, additional benefits for students include relaxation, freedom of choice, and narrative without writing restrictions.

Providing time for spontaneous creating is essential to the art room because humans have a biological desire to create in spontaneous or voluntary ways. In her book \textit{What is Art for?}, Ellen Dissanayake (1998) states that we as humans have an innate desire to create art, seek out things that are special, and to create things to be special while attaching meaning to it. We enjoy making things special and seeking out beauty in our lives. She states that \textit{making special} “is most prominent in premodern societies, where artmaking is practiced by everyone” (Dissanayake, p. 40). She also discusses how artmaking in many
cultures and in earlier societies was a part of daily living. Similar to the writings of Dissanayake, Maria Montessori wrote:

Every man has his share of artistic imagination, he has the instinct to create the beautiful with his mind; and from this instinct duly developed come all the vast treasures of art, scattered almost like crumbs of gold wherever there was an intensity of civil life, wherever the intelligence had time to mature in peace. In every province which has preserved traces of ancient peoples we find local artistic types of work, of furniture, of poetic songs and popular music. This multiform creation of the inner man, then, enfolds him and protects his spirit in its intellectual needs, just as the iridescent shell encloses the mollusk. (Montessori, 1965, p. 245)

In her book *Spontaneous Activity in Education*, Maria Montessori suggests that humans cannot create something out of nothing because we use what we know, or have experienced to create and imagine with. From her writings I believe she would agree that students should be provided some direction to guide them through their creative problem solving, and that in order to create they will need inspiration and to be taught artistic techniques.

**Narrative as Expression**

Anyone can see how excited a child becomes to tell their story through their art. Providing time in the classroom for sharing is an empowering tool especially for students who cannot read or write yet. From my observation as a teacher, spontaneous drawing will lead to personal narrative in a student’s art making. Children are inspired to draw their own stories about their environment and culture through the visual media they observe. In a TAB-Choice environment students have the opportunity to draw and share their stories.

One of the primary functions of expression is narrating (Wilson & Wilson, 2009). In most children’s artwork expression is used to tell stories. In the chapter
“And What Happens Next? Telling Stories through Drawing,” the Wilsons state that through extensive studies on children’s spontaneous drawings “…It has become increasingly evident that children use these drawings for the primary purpose of narrating” (Wilson & Wilson, 2009, p. 110). Visual story telling and use of symbols is the child’s way of communicating without writing. Often times, young children can become frustrated when they are unable to explain what they would like to say. Drawings are not limited to correct pretenses, punctualities, or formalities of a written language. Drawing is a way children, or those who have difficulty with written communication, can tell their story more easily to others. Children might also include more than one tense in their drawing at a time or focus on a specific event to draw. In her article, “Harvey Shows the Way: Narrative in Children’s Art”, Julia Kellman states, “Art making and its narrative description of the here and now allows children to share the day-to-day details of their lives with others. Images of homes, families, pets, and friends enable children to illustrate the specifics of their lives and the particulars of time and place” (Kellman, 1995, p.19).

Visual narrative is used by children and adults alike as a method of thinking, sharing experiences and ideas, problem solving, and inventing stories. Not only should we examine children’s art but that we must listen carefully to what they say about their art to understand the importance of their stories. When we listen to, examine, and recite these stories we show care (Kellman, 1995).

Clearly, giving students the opportunity to share their work is an important process in artmaking. In many TAB-Choice classrooms the opportunity to share
work is encouraged. During the last 5 minutes of class for one or two students to share something about what they did in their artwork that day or something that they worked on previously. They can then call on one or two students who would like to ask a question about or compliment their work. "Everything is held together with stories... That is all that is holding us together, stories and compassion. This is true for people of all ages in all places, in their art and in their lives" (Kellman, 1995, p. 62). Olson states:

I believe that the most important purpose of art is to tell a story- to share one’s interests and concerns, one’s personal view of the world, one’s joys and sorrows, to touch the life of another. I argue that the vast majority of art either relates to story in and of itself or relates in some way to the individual artist’s life and is therefore a part of the artist’s personal narrative. (Olson 1998, p. 168)

For this research students will be able to have choices to draw or paint what they desire. It is powerful for students to take ownership of their ideas and also for the students and for myself to learn about each student’s life. “The arts provide a unique opportunity for teachers to relate to students on a personal level to learn about many aspects of their lives” (Olson, 1998, p. 182).
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH STRATEGIES, METHODS, PROCEDURES

Plan of Action

This study uses the arts-based, qualitative research method of A/r/tography. The question I explored is: How can age appropriate technical information about the properties of color enhance a student's ability to express a personal idea in a Choice Based Classroom? This research took place in an elementary, third grade art classroom setting, where the principle investigator acted as teacher researcher. The purpose of this project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of choice in arts education, specifically the effectiveness of technical training combined with self-directed learning and exploration. “Research is the enhancement of meaning revealed through ongoing interpretations of complex relationships that are continually created, recreated, and transformed” (Irwin & de Cosson, 2002, p.31). The data collected in this research helped determine how teachers can best guide their students as they explore ideas and create in a choice based classroom.

Elliot Eisner states, “Among the most important kinds of research needed in the field are studies of teaching and learning” (Eisner, 2002, p. 215).

The data collected consists primarily of qualitative sources of photos of artwork and open-ended surveys. Qualitative researchers use open-ended
approaches to data collection and analysis (Conrad, Neumann, Haworth, & Scott, 1993, p. xi).

This study aligns with Michigan’s Visual Arts Standard 2: *Create* and benchmark that states students will “*Create artwork that aesthetically and creatively conveys and idea*”. The intent of the research is to gain insight on whether students attain and choose to implement knowledge of technical skills if they practiced those skills first before utilizing them in their own unique manner. Photos of artwork will show how students use original ideas - if those techniques are more successful aesthetically when or if they use techniques taught by the teacher. Candace Stout explains, “Fostering new research expands our conception of what research can be, what it can mean, and what it might do. Our research is in a space of hybridity between social science and the arts” (Stout, 2013, p. 23).

Another purpose of this arts based research is to advocate for TAB-Choice where teachers can help implement and draw the best out of their student’s art where students have choice in their ideas and how they want to create. Many TAB-Choice art educators would agree with Julie Wilcox’s (2015) suggestion that a WOW piece is a artwork that has creative and original ideas, where the student spent a couple days or more on it, paid attention to details and craftsmanship, show growth, and has an artist statement.

The data collected from this research helped me determine the best course of action to take in lesson planning and implementation in a choice based art room. The results helped determine how much choice to allow my students in
their artmaking and whether I should require “have to” projects with students. For example, when giving a skills based lesson the first question that students ask is usually “Do I have to?” My answer is most often yes to this with the allowance of student modification. Some TAB-Choice teachers implement small have-to projects in their curriculum while others do not, although teachers are constantly demonstrating how to use materials and what you can do with them. Eisner asks, “What proportion of the teacher’s discourse focuses on aesthetic matters, what proportion on technical matters, and what proportion on matters of classroom management?” He states, “Questions like these are important, for if we know little about the processes teachers employ in the classrooms, we will be in a poor position to improve teaching” (Eisner, 2002, p.215-16).

Participants

This research used data from two third grade classes. The third grade classes consist of 25 and 24 students. I chose this grade because students are building upon prior knowledge of color because of a comprehensive unit on color theory studied the previous year. Students in both classes love free draw time and will especially love learning how artists get their ideas and how to create like an artist in a choice based class. Students are always expanding upon ideas, even working in groups to create whenever possible. Students have not yet had an entire unit devoted to choice making in art.

Background/Context

Evergreen Elementary School is one of twenty elementary schools in the city of Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor Public Schools are known for their love of the arts.
In 2006 they were named to the “Best 100 Communities for Music Education in America” list by AMC music. Evergreen Elementary is unique in that it has many different traditions as well as its own woods. The woods consist of 34 acres and are used regularly by elementary classes to observe the changing of the seasons, and other delights that nature brings. Evergreen Elementary also has many different traditions such as Woodchip Day, the Decade Dance, and traditional songs sung on Opening and Closing Day. The student population consists of about 76% Caucasian, 8% two or more races, 8% Hispanic, 5% African American, and 2% Asian. The majority of students come from lower-middle class to middle class families with many parents working for the University of Michigan as professors or at the U of M hospital. Some of the parents come from a privileged background and have money to send their children to summer camps and pricey preschools. From my observation I can tell that the students’ art is much more developed that have parents with a higher educational degree and come from a privileged background. About 25% of students come from lower class families.

**Procedures**

Students worked in a normal fashion within the art studio, but data was collected via observation notes, student surveys, and photos of student work. “Art practice introduces ambiguity, complexity, emotion, intuition, lived experience, and the celebration of personal interpretation or subjectivity into a realm that often strives for clarity and objectivity” (D’Adamo & Marshall, 2011, p.
12). Data was collected during one 12 week unit on color during the 2016-17 school year.

After addressing both classes regarding what the research would be about and what it would involve, students from were asked to participate in the research based on their own interest to do so. Students were notified that their participation in the research would not affect their grade. Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was attained (see Appendix D). Students that were interested in participating, were asked to take the consent and assent forms home to discuss with their parents or guardians. All students participated in the regular class lesson as well as in the collection of data. However, only four students from each class were chosen for case studies. Only students who returned signed consent and assent forms were considered for the population from which I randomly selected four boys and four girls for a total of eight participants (four from both classes). Random selection was conducted by drawing names out of a hat. Eisner states “We need to select randomly from a larger population a sample of classes and then randomly assign students from those classes to the experimental and control conditions” (Eisner, 2002, p. 221).

Class A began their unit with learning techniques on color with various materials such as drawing materials, water colors, and tempera paints before they were allowed to chose what they wanted to use during their work days. Students in class A were required to watch the demonstrations as well as practice the techniques in their sketchbook. Students in class B were encouraged to work through their ideas first and had the choice of drawing materials and
watercolors right away as students were familiar with using those materials.

Throughout the unit the researcher wrote observation notes on both classes and took photos of the artworks to compare in the data analysis. At the end of the unit students took a post survey, and choose a one artwork to write about in depth.

**Time Line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Class</th>
<th>Student/Teacher Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. W3/1-23-17 class A</td>
<td>Teacher presentation- Intro to How Artists get their ideas Student- What do I want to draw? WEB with 3 ideas or more in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. H3/1-25-17 class B</td>
<td>Teacher- Presented Intro to How Artists get their ideas Student- Took pre-survey, What do I want to draw? WEB with 3 ideas or more in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. W3/ 1-30-17 Class A</td>
<td>Students took pre-survey, Choose a portfolio to keep work in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. H3/ 2/1/17 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher gave PPT review on color wheel, intro to paper types, Students- Choose a portfolio to keep work in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. W3/ 2/6/17 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher gave Drawing Center Menu + paper types demonstration Students- create drawing menu in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. H3/ 2/8/17 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher gave Drawing Center Menu demonstration Students worked, some went to demo to practice in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. W3/ 2/13/17 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher gave water color menu demo Students- created watercolor menu in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. H3 2/15 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher gave Power Point on colors Student- work day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. H3 2/22 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher- took observation notes Students- Work Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. W3 2/27 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher gave demo on tempera Paint menu Students- created tempera paint menu in sketchbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. H3 3/1 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher gave demo on tempera Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. W3 3/6 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher gave Colors &amp; feelings PowerPoint Student work day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. W3/ 3-13 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher- took observation notes Students- Work Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. H3 3-15 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher- took observation notes Students- Work Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. W3 3/20 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher- took observation notes Students- Work Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. H3 3/22 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher- took observation notes Students- Work Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. W3 4/10 Class A</td>
<td>Teacher- gave matte demo and how to choose best work demo Students took Post Survey and matted artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. H3 4/12 Class B</td>
<td>Teacher- gave matte demo and how to choose best work demo Students took Post Survey and matted artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. W3 4/17 Class A</td>
<td>Students wrote Artist Statement and Took art home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. H3 4-19 Class B</td>
<td>Students wrote Artist Statement and took art home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Time Line.

**Data collection**

The data collection began with both groups completing a pre-survey that addressed their thoughts about the way they learned best, how they thought of themselves as an artist, and how they thought about color. I took observation
notes in a sketchbook daily, and then took photos of student artwork when they finished their work. A post survey was administered that assessed student experience throughout the research. The survey asked students how they learned best, how they thought of themselves as an artist, and to interpret color that they used within a piece of art created by themselves.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Similarities and differences in responses were examined for each subject across all interviews to identify themes, trends, growth of ideas, changes in thinking or behavior, and unexpected findings. The research question was addressed primarily by assessing students’ artwork, answers from pre and post questions, and student’s artist statements from their final work. The teacher as researcher used a rubric to assess students’ Wonderful Work of Art (WOW) piece. This analysis will provide the basis for drawing conclusions from the research.

The plan for analyzing data was to use a rubric for student artwork. Students filled out an artist statement, which I used to inform the assessment (see Appendix A). The rubric was used to assess the use of technical skills, content, and effectiveness to express ideas using color. I also compared and contrasted observations/notes taken during the class time.

Overall, it is my hypothesis that participants purposefully chose a technique to accurately depict their choice of subjects in their artwork. In addition, I hypothesized that students who practice their techniques before addressing their ideas will show those techniques more accurately in their artwork. While
many students will use the techniques I will demonstrate, some may choose to create in their own way without evidence of the techniques demonstrated.

One potential benefit that I hope this study can provide to students is that they learn to understand the effects of their actions and be more conscious of the decisions they make in their artwork.

The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. In addition, the arts also teach us that judgment rather than rules prevail and that small differences can have large effects. (Eisner, 2002, p. 85)

**Limitations**

The sample size of the study is small; it is limited to a small number of one grade level at one particular school which makes broad generalizations difficult. The setting of the school is of predominantly Caucasian, middle to upper middle class students, which may impact the reliability of the study should it be performed in a lower income school setting. The artwork will be evaluated by the teacher/researcher therefore, there may be risk of personal bias.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

For this study I provided demonstrations about color usage to two groups of students who then completed artwork of their choice. I believe in the importance of teaching technical skills but also understand the benefits of giving my students choice time. I wanted to see how my students use their creative thinking skills during choice time. To review, the question I am exploring for this research is: How can age appropriate technical information about the properties of color enhance a student's ability to express a personal idea in a choice based classroom? Would they apply the technical skills they learned earlier to individual projects? Is understanding of art forms and technical skills necessary in the development of their creative process?

This research could help determine what might be the best way for students to problem solve with their artwork. The findings of this survey may help affirm what is the ideal balance of technical skills versus idea-based projects taught to art students. Lastly, data collected from this research will also determine which group will be more effective in their communication of stories, emotions, new ideas, or interests. The data will show that students enjoyed creating with their own ideas and having the choice in which type of material to use.
Student Surveys

Students took a pre survey at the start of the unit and a post survey at the end of the unit (see Appendix B). Questions 1 and 2 asked students to circle the answer that fits them best. Question 1 asked them which type of art project students preferred more; free draw/studio art, or a project the teacher gives the class. Boys preferred free draw (see Figure 1). Their numbers did not change much from the pre to post survey. Prior to the start of the unit, more girls preferred a project the teacher gave the students. After the unit ended more girls preferred free draw/studio art over a project the teacher gave.

![Art Project Preferences](image)

**Figure 1.** Art project preferences by gender.

Question 2 asked students how they enjoyed learning best (see Figure 2). The majority of boys and girls preferred to figure out their art ideas on their own in both the pre and post surveys. In addition a larger number of students
preferred working in a group after the unit was over then at the start of the unit. This is an interesting finding. Students did not have the choice to work collaboratively on a project prior to this TAB-Choice unit. Thus, when taking the pre survey they might not have been able to imagine how working within a group might be like in their art making.

Figure 2. Learning preferences by gender.

Sketchbooks

Most art educators know that the use of sketchbooks is a great way to provide free drawing time and exploration of ideas.

Art educators understand the magic of the sketchbook as a space for ideas to take shape, imagination to wander, and drawing skills to be practiced. Sketchbooks can become liberatory tools for “widening the learning circle” to include often marginalized learners. (Sanders-Bustle, 2008, p.9)
Keeping a sketchbook to document growth and develop ideas is one way students can examine how an artist turns ideas into solutions. In the art room, third grade students received sketchbooks at the beginning of the year and used them for their TAB-Choice unit. At the beginning of the unit students created a web to gather ideas (see Figure 3). Sometimes they choose to sketch out ideas for the whole class. They also took notes and created mini menus to reference technical skills (see Figure 4). Students and parents alike have noticed a positive change in their spontaneous drawings. The special sketchbooks seem to attract their interest in drawing more carefully and in depth. Students have been very excited to have time to draw in their sketchbooks after they complete an assignment for the hour.

*Figure 3. "What do I want to paint?" Web (left)*
Figure 4. Three examples of menus that students practiced in their sketchbooks. Drawing Menu (top left), Watercolor menu (top right), and Tempera Paint Menu (bottom left).
Rubric Graded by Teacher

I evaluated the students on their use of technical skills, content of work, and use of color to convey meaning (see Appendix A). The scoring signified that technical skills were more evident however, color use was more predictably used in Class A. The artwork from Class A seemed neater and more complete. Colors were used more effectively and contrast utilize more than the artwork in Class B. Class B had much more original ideas however their technical skills were not as developed or as evident in their artwork.

Figure 5. Comparison of technical skills in both classes.

An observation of technical skills is that students from the Class A case study used stippling, fill in the shape, and overlapping. Blending was used in all four of the artworks by the students in Class B’s case study. For example,
Student 2A used stippling primarily in his work for a few days (see Figure 6, left). He enjoyed creating colors of dots together then moved on to create a dragon when he decided to move onto a new idea. This student did not use the dots in a new unique way. Student 1A used stippling in his final work to display titled *Dotted World* (see Figure 6, right). He showed ability to use the technique in a controlled manner, which varied in size and color. He was also able to use the technique in a new unique way.

![Figure 6. Two examples of stippling by students. Student 2A’s stippling experiments (left). Student 1A’s stippling in a final piece (right).](image)

Student 2B used watercolor crayons to blend colors together (see Figure 7). She titled her artwork *The Swirl of Blending Colors*. The content of this piece was not uniquely new to the student, as we had practiced this type of blending
together in class. Student 2B enjoyed creating with this technique and shows her ability to use blending in her artwork. In general this student’s art was basic however in each piece she created she displayed her love for color and repetition.

Figure 7. Student 2B’s artwork with blending.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students in Case Study</th>
<th>Content is basic 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Content is Original 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Comparison of unique content in both groups.
Student 4B's and 1B's drawings consisted mainly from their imagination. The content is unique to most other artwork done by other elementary students. Student 4B drew a piece titled *Nature Temple* (see Figure 9). Although lightly drawn, the piece is very detailed. He showed some blending however it is subtle. He showed progression from his ideas from his first basic dragon drawings (see Figure 10) to this very detailed piece (see Figure 9).

*Figure 9. Student 4B's artwork shows blending and unique content.*
Figure 10. 3 examples of student 4B's progression of ideas and work.
Student 1B choose to draw primarily with a number 2 pencil. I encouraged him to create with color however pencil is his medium of choice and he choose to work with that. He drew dragons (see Figure 12, left) and magical creatures (see Figure 12, right). His ideas came from his imagination and his content was exceptionally unique to other artwork done by elementary students.

![Figure 11. Student 1B’s "What do I want to draw?" web.](image-url)
Figure 12. Two examples of student 1B's pencil drawings.

Figure 13. Comparison on use of color to effectively express ideas in both classes.
Both student 3A and 4A worked on a similar subject manner which was night sky’s in the city. Student 4A worked with a friend in class to create this final piece. She blended colors to create the sky, used stippling to make snow, and filled in the shapes to create the city with oil pastel. This piece (see Figure 14) is titled *The Snowy Night*. She did not want to add lights in the towers of the city to give it a quiet feel and so that the viewer could focus on the snow. She did an exceptional job with color to create this piece.

![Figure 14. The Snowy Night by student 4A.](image)

Student 3A showed persistence as she worked on her city at night over many class periods. This student was inspired by the work that student 4A had done. She kept changing her mind and rethought her work, fixing mistakes until she ended with the piece below (see Figure 15). Her end result is a more basic version of Figure 14 however she was proud of herself and pleased with the results she accomplished.
Figure 15. City at Night by student 3A.

Student 3B created many landscapes and choose to work primarily with watercolors. While one of her final pieces titled The Pattern Field, (see Figure 16) lacks some technical skills and looks slightly messy, her idea was original and she did a wonderful job of overlapping and blending colors in her field. She wrote in her artist statement that her piece “Is about imagination!”

Figure 16. Student 3B's The Pattern Field
Observations

One unexpected outcome I noticed was that students did not ask me if their artwork was right, or if they were finished. I would usually ask them to think about what else they could add next if I thought their piece had too much open space. Students are mostly willing to go back and take a second look or ask a friend what they could add to their picture. Another unexpected outcome was that almost all boys prefer free draw/open studio work while many girls enjoy repeating the same art that the teacher demonstrates. I wonder if boys prefer free draw more because they can draw out ideas that pertain to them? I also wonder if they might prefer choice art more because they tend to lack fine hand motor skills and generally have a harder time with producing technical art skills? Students from Class A tended to use the various techniques in their art that they practiced in their sketchbooks more. Class B tended to use a preferred material as they explored one specific topic of their choice. Class B tended to have more creative original ideas than class A.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

In conclusion, there are many benefits of implementing TAB-Choice in an art room. TAB-Choice allows for all types of learners to enjoy creating whereas traditional teacher centered classrooms cater to only one type of learner. It was evident that most male students prefer TAB-Choice over traditional lessons in art as evidenced in Figure 1. Students also had the opportunity to work within a group if they preferred. In addition, TAB-Choice has allowed for more creative collaboration with groups of two or three students, independence in selecting materials and care of the art room, exploration and development of ideas over a longer period of time, choice in ideas, and sharing of artwork with the class.

Authentic Art Making

Spontaneity and choice in art is a meaningful and essential piece to authentic art making. Choice making allows students the freedom to tell their stories and share their experiences visually with others. Providing choice in art allows for the possibilities of exploration, and learning about themselves as an artist. Throughout this unit students were excited to share their work and their ideas with the class. In the past, students were not as eager to share their art if everyone else created something similar. In general, the boys in both third grade classes seemed happy to be able to express male related topics and themes in
their art. Prior to this unit they would rush through the lesson so that they could draw what they really wanted to express. Today it is important more than ever to provide time for choices for drawing and expression as children are loosing connections with the world around them and with others. By sharing their artwork and experiences, students become empowered and connected with others. Third grade students reflected on their own art practices and how they used color effectively in their art project. It was also evident that their writing skills improved in their post survey as they thought about their use of color.

**Benefits of Balancing Choice and Technical Skills**

The results of this arts-based action research show that students benefit from the teaching and practice of technical skills and should also be allowed to explore their ideas with the mediums of their choice to create new emerging content. It is evidenced through the 3rd graders work that by allowing them to make their own artistic decisions, students have become more involved and engaged in their creations. Giving students technical skills to practice is like giving them tools to use as they decide when and how to use those tools. “The goal of creating a great work of art, for any artist at any age, is to find a balance between (using technical skills and invention)” (Roth, 2017, p. 12).

As an educator, I noticed that my time was freed up to observe my students and assist those who needed some guidance. I found more meaningful opportunities to jump in and discus with students about their work and processes. This lead to new discoveries about my students I would not have learned had I not offered choice in their artmaking. Finding the right balance of allowing for
choice and teaching technical skills will continue to be a focus of my teaching practice as I continue with my arts based research. Looking ahead to next year I plan to teach a few teacher led projects in each grade with a focus on TAB-Choice throughout the year. I found the technical skills menus to be very helpful for students to practice with and will continue to implement them in my lessons.

**Suggestions for Further Study**

Giving students enough time to explore their ideas and themes something to consider moving forward. If I were to do this study again I would make it a year long study. I believe that future research may be necessary to understand the implications of teaching technical skills in a TAB-Choice art room. Studies with a larger sample size and in a more diverse setting would be beneficial when studying the transferability of technical skills. Studies would also be needed to determine if male students of all ages prefer studio art over a project the teacher gives the class. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to study what type of behavioral implications TAB-Choice has over male and female students of all ages.
REFERENCES


### Appendix A: Evaluation rubric

<table>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Technical skills</strong></td>
<td>Technical skills are used in a very basic way.</td>
<td>Technical skills are used in a predictable, common way.</td>
<td>Student took a unique approach to technical skills.</td>
<td>Technical skills are used in a successful, unique, and interesting way.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates exceptional understanding of technical skills displayed in artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unique content</strong></td>
<td>Content is basic or simple.</td>
<td>Content is predictable, similar to many elementary projects.</td>
<td>Content is new to the child and different from other projects.</td>
<td>Content in the art is unique to most projects.</td>
<td>Content of the work is original and rarely seen in elementary art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use Color to effectively express and enhance ideas in artwork</strong></td>
<td>Student does not use color effectively to express an idea.</td>
<td>Student makes an attempt to use color to express ideas, but is very basic or simple.</td>
<td>The intended meaning is evident in the art. Color is used with meaning.</td>
<td>Student successfully uses color to express ideas and enhance artwork.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates exceptional use of color to express ideas and enhance artwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Student Surveys

Name:

Class Code:

Date:

Pre Unit Survey Questions

Directions: For questions 1 & 2 circle the answer that fits you best.

1. Which do you prefer more?
   a.) free draw
   b.) a project the teacher gives the class

2. How do you enjoy learning best?
   a) by watching demonstrations and then doing a project
   b) by working in a group to solve a problem
   c) by figuring your art ideas out on your own?

Directions: For questions 3-5 answer each of the following questions in a short response.

3. Explain why you consider yourself to be an artist.
4. Next to each color below write a *feeling word* that seems to you to go with that color.

a. Red-

b. Orange-

c. Yellow-

d. Green-

e. Blue-

f. Violet –

5. What is your favorite color(s)?
Post Unit Survey Questions

Directions: For questions 1 & 2 circle the answer that fits you best.

6. Which do you prefer more?
   c) free draw (studio art)
   d) a project the teacher gives the class

7. How do you enjoy learning best?
   d) by watching demonstrations and then doing a project
   e) by working in a group to solve a problem
   f) by figuring your art ideas out on your own?

Directions: For questions 3-8 answer each of the following questions in a short response.

8. Explain why you consider yourself to be an artist.
9. a) How can different colors make you feel different ways?

b) Name a color that gives you a feeling. What feeling does it give you?

The color _________ makes me feel ________________.

10. Explain how color affects the mood or message of an artwork.
11. Describe a recent artwork you created. What colors did you use?

12. How would your artwork be different if you used a different color?

13. Would you like your picture better if you used a different color? Explain.
Appendix C

Circle the media you used.

Marker  Pencil  Crayon  Paint  Colored Pencil  Oil Pastel  Chalk

Name/Class
Code __________________________________________________________

Title: ________________________________________________________

Is your artwork your own original idea?

What techniques did you use to create your artwork?

What colors did you use?

What is your artwork about?
Appendix D

Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 3, 2017
TO: Sarah George
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE: [990131-2] Utilization and transferability of technical skills in a choice based art unit.
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 3, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: January 3, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 3, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.