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Impact of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Engagement and Mental Health

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ED590 Research and Complete Capstone

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Abstract

This paper reviewed ways art educators effectively incorporated choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health. It was essential to study engagement within art class because past models of art education needed more room for authentic student creativity and problem-solving. Additionally, a large population of students struggle with mental health issues, and art naturally supports mental health. This research reviewed fifteen studies, ranging from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. While examining the research, three main themes arose. First, choice-based art education had multiple benefits for student engagement. The next theme illustrated the positive impact of choice on student mental health. The final theme found in this research demonstrated many effective choice-based art education teaching strategies. This analysis discovered the importance of the artistic process, how choice-based art positively affected student behavior, and how choice-based art fostered a sense of community in the art room. These findings invite policymakers and school leadership to support choice-based art education through adequate supplies and teaching spaces, relevant professional development, and smaller class sizes.

Keywords: choice-based art education, discipline-based art education, engagement, mental health

Impact of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Engagement and Mental Health

Chapter One: Introduction

Art class is a place for students to create, express, and explore a variety of art mediums. Past models of art education encouraged students to do these things in an environment where the teacher is the ultimate decision maker, deciding the route in which students create artwork. For example, an assignment may ask students to create a landscape and use textured brushstrokes to imitate how artist Vincent Van Gogh solved a creative problem. This style of assignments limits students' ability to make choices and express themselves individually (Gates, 2016). In this scenario, students copy the teacher's artistic process for the project rather than go through it themselves. The pedagogical theory behind these assignments was Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE). DBAE emerged in the 1980s and focused on four broad categories: creating art, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (Heid et al., 2009). Teachers have noticed a need for more student engagement in recent years when teaching with the DBAE model, which has led to teachers pursuing other art education methods.

Due to low student interest, art education made recent strides focused on each student taking the role of decision-maker, which allowed students to be more independent in their learning. Teachers successfully differentiated instruction for students using choice-based art education methods such as focusing on process over product, projects centered on big ideas, and letting go of teacher control. Choices led to higher student engagement, increased student confidence, and meaning-making within the art created (Dravenstadt, 2018). This paper analyzed how art educators effectively incorporated choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health. When teachers used choice-based methods, students brought their ideas to the table and creatively solved their artistic problems. When students are the

decision makers, they can connect emotionally and express themselves in their artwork.

Teaching choice-based art education prepares learners to be independent and resilient in the classroom and the world.

Importance of Topic

Researching and incorporating choice-based art education methods is essential for three main reasons. First, many other school subjects and areas of life are interwoven into the field of visual arts. Art classes have positively affected writing achievement, especially among English language learners (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). This finding shows the arts are important to develop a well-rounded student. It is vital to include a wide variety of avenues, such as art classes, to support learning in a multi-disciplinary way.

In addition to supporting traditional school subjects, many schools have transitioned to add social-emotional learning (SEL) into their curriculum to strengthen students' mental health. Social and emotional learning teaches students how to manage emotions and develop their social skills with peers around them. SEL is a great proactive strategy, yet there are still one in seven children (ages 10-19) who have a mental health illness (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Self-expression has regularly been a part of creating artwork and relates to SEL. Art educators know how important the art studio is for creativity and self-expression. Students developed social, mental, and emotional health when completing art lessons (Demirel, 2011). Art class is more important than ever when looking at the large number of students with mental health illnesses. The art curriculum students engage in must be motivating and authentic to each student to fully support student mental health and learning.

Finally, it is crucial to examine the role of art education on student engagement and mental health because art is often viewed as a less critical subject matter. Due to this view, art

learning is often underfunded or eliminated from students' educational experiences. Over the past ten years, art teachers have reported decreased instructional time and resources (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). This paper explores the benefits of choice-based art education, the impact of choice on student mental health, and effective choice-based art teaching methods. Researching these topics will show art education must continue to be included in student curricula because art is essential to students' development.

Scope of Research

After reviewing the fifteen studies, three themes developed. The first recurring theme was the general benefits of choice-based art education on student engagement. This theme examined a variety of art educators who had transitioned to choice-based methods from prior teaching methodologies. The second recurring theme in this research was the impact of choice on student mental health. This theme investigated art students of multiple age levels and a mixture of social and emotional skills gained through choice-based art. Finally, the third recurring theme in this paper was effective teaching strategies with choice-based art education. This final theme connects all three themes because these successful pedagogical approaches support student engagement and mental health. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies were examined for this research. Some of the studies included took place in public schools, charter schools, and community art experiences. This review could benefit from conducting longitudinal studies on choice-based art education. Limited research was available about lower elementary-aged children's experience with choice-based art education. This analysis also did not include the lasting effects of choice-based art classes on student's lives. Nevertheless, the scope of this research will justify the importance of choice-based art education methods for student engagement and mental health.

Research Question

This paper asked the research question: In light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how shall art educators effectively incorporate choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health? What educational and personal outcomes will develop if students fully engage in their art learning? This research question aims to find out how to engage each student authentically. Mental health and visual arts naturally accompany one another. Examining both mental health and engagement in the context of the visual arts classroom will lead to strong positive outcomes for each student.

The Concordia University Masters of Differentiated Instruction program asks the essential question, in light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how shall professional educators effectively teach every student? This essential question and the research question acknowledge the importance of teaching to the diverse needs of all students. This research question broadens the program's essential question by analyzing the subject matter of art, focusing on student engagement and supporting student mental health.

Definition of Terms

Choice-Based Art Education encourages students to actively participate in their learning through art-making, planning, and reflections (Dravenstadt, 2018).

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) emerged in the 1980s and focused on creating art, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (Heid et al., 2009).

Student Engagement occurs when a student sustains interest and participation in an activity. Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation are critical components of student engagement (Morris, 2018).

Mental Health is a person's mental well-being and allows them to handle the stress of daily life and positively contribute to their personal, work, and community life (WHO, 2022).

Summary

In summary, Chapter One of this paper highlighted the importance of the topic of choice-based art education. Choice-based art education increased writing achievement scores and supported student mental health. This topic also reinforced the importance of keeping visual arts classes in student curricula. Students learned many valuable life skills in art class, such as problem-solving, self-expression, and observational skills. Even if a child does not choose to continue an art practice into their life, the time spent practicing these skills in art class is worthwhile. Choice-based art education methods allowed students to encounter and learn these skills. Chapter One also summarized the scope of the research completed, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies. It also identified the research question and essential question which guided this research. Finally, key terms were defined for mutual understanding. The next chapter will review fifteen studies about the benefits of choice-based art education methods concerning engagement, the impact of choice on mental health, and effective teaching strategies for choice-based art education. Further research will provide a more comprehensive overview of each subject.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review intended to discover how art educators could effectively incorporate choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health. Mixed method, qualitative, and quantitative research were analyzed for this literature review. Three main themes related to choice-based art emerged after reviewing related research. The three themes were the benefits of choice-based art education on student engagement, the

impact of choice on student mental health, and effective choice-based art education teaching strategies. These themes were found to be interwoven for visual art educators. The successful teaching approaches reviewed support student engagement and mental health. By learning about choice-based art education, art educators can engage and support a broader range of students than with previous DBAE methods.

The first recurring theme was the general benefits of choice-based art education on student engagement. This theme was explored by Gates (2016), Dravenstadt (2018), Hellman & Lind (2017), Rago (2018), and Robson & Rowe (2012). These research studies concluded students demonstrated higher levels of engagement when taught using choice-based methods. Higher engagement in their work led to intrinsic motivation and a new sense of ownership over their work. When participating in choice-based methods, students had more interest in the process of learning and creating the art, and they were less focused on the end product.

The second recurring theme in this research was the impact of choice on student mental health. This theme was explored by Martin et al. (2013), Morris (2018), Demirel (2011), and Bowen & Kisida (2023). These research studies concluded choices in art class positively impacted students' empathy, self-esteem, social abilities, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy. These positive impacts affect various areas of student social and emotional well-being, which are crucial to healthy child development.

Finally, the third recurring theme in this paper was effective teaching strategies with choice-based art education. This theme was explored by Arov & Jogi (2017), Bertling & Moore (2021), Heid et al. (2009), Kauffman (2016), McElhany (2017), and Pennisi (2013). These research studies concluded student-led practices were an effective teaching strategy. Educators who were open-minded toward student ideas or projects found higher levels of student

engagement. Creating more time for peer-to-peer dialogue and fewer teacher lectures were also successful teaching practices.

Benefits of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Engagement

Choice-based art classes allow students to decide the path best suited for learning and keeping them engaged. This differentiated approach encourages students to try something, make mistakes, and learn to persevere. Self-expression is supported best using choice-based methods. The following five literature reviews examine the impact of including choice in the art classroom on student engagement.

Gates (2016) found choice-based art education created higher levels of student engagement. Qualitative data was collected from a collaborative action research group from the National Art Education Foundation in 2013-2014. The research group consisted of elementary and middle school art teachers from across the United States. This qualitative research study interviewed teachers who moved away from DBAE curricula and shifted towards curricula focused on postmodern art practices, projects revolving around themes, and choice-based art education. Gates' (2016) research found students were empowered by independence in their learning within the choice-based curriculum. These students could choose materials, timeline, and options to work alone or with others. Teachers also reported higher student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and student pride in their artwork. Educators also reported a decline in negative behaviors. One limitation or consideration of incorporating a high level of choice in art lessons was the "detox" period for students to adjust to actively making decisions about what they were learning about and creating (Gates, 2016, p. 16). Most students were used to teacher-directed projects and needed scaffolding to gradually give them control over their work. Each

student's adjustment period differed in length depending on their comfort level with the subject matter and their confidence.

Similar to the study above, Dravenstadt (2018) conducted a three-week study of a 7th-grade art class in a Title I mid-Atlantic public school. The researcher-educator incorporated choice-based art education using a found object assemblage unit in this study. The purpose of the study was "to document, analyze, and describe how middle school students would respond to an exploratory choice-based art unit" (Dravenstadt, 2018, p.10). Qualitative data was collected through student artwork, interviews, and personal observations. Students were presented with a prompt to inspire their artmaking. The teacher provided various three-dimensional supplies. Students guided their own learning experience based on their ideas and motivation. This study found students had high levels of engagement during this choice-based unit compared to units with fewer choices (Dravenstadt, 2018). The found object sculpture engaged even typically unmotivated students. The research also showed students were willing to take risks in their projects without fear of failure. Choice empowered student voices through this unit because they could share their ideas and perspectives. These findings support the research question asked in this literature review. Students had higher levels of engagement when they were allowed more choices in their artwork. One limitation of this study was the short three-week timeframe of documentation (Dravenstadt, 2018). Nuance often leads to engagement in any case. A longer research timeframe could indicate different results as the new choice-based methods became normalized to students.

Both Gates (2016) and Dravenstadt (2018) found students took pride in the art they created in choice-based art classes. Students who are proud of their work are more likely to be confident in their skills and what they have learned. Students are more likely to be engaged in a

class where they feel confident. Strong student independence was another common finding amongst students in choice-based art education. Independence in a subject naturally leads students to self-determination because they are in charge of their learning. These findings positively support choice-based art education methods for higher student engagement levels.

In 2014, Hellman and Lind conducted a qualitative study with twenty-four high school students taking a film class in Stockholm, Sweden. The school's focus student population was "young people who are disengaging from school" (Hellman & Lind, 2017, p. 210). The research gave no other background or demographic information about the participants. Researchers observed these students twice weekly during class meetings for three months. The author noted only eight to fifteen students were present at a time at each observation. Visual ethnography was used to collect data through photographs and written observations. Initial classroom observations noted students were isolated from one another. Students only engaged with their computers or phones in non-academic means, such as texting, games, or social media. During the second observation, the educator displayed a variety of random objects. Students needed to choose five objects and create a storyboard with a beginning, middle, and end. Using an open-ended theme and introducing experimentation were choice-based methods which immediately engaged students. Students began interacting with each other more frequently during this observation. During the final observation, students were introduced to the option of Claymation to translate their storyboards into a final film project. Cameras, clay, paper cutouts, and other drawing materials were objects students experimented with during this class period. This research concluded students were most engaged in their classwork when it was student-centered. Student engagement was achieved through the nuance of new materials and experimentation with these materials. This method of presenting new information for students valued the process of creating

over the end product. This study emphasized the importance of educators who questioned traditions and were open to the unexpected. One limitation of this study resulted from questioning traditional education methods. The film project examined in this study utilized group work and favored the process of making the film over the film product. Group work and emphasizing the art process led to many students needing more time to complete their assignments, and they received warnings about failing the course. When considering future applications of choice-based art, grading practices must also reflect the nature of creating choice-based art by weighing formative assignments over summative assignments.

In another study, Rago (2018) organized a study of first-grade students at a private school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school had 200 students in total, from preschool to eighth grade. Qualitative data was obtained through observation, formal interviews, informal interviews, and a collection of student artwork. Researchers collected the data throughout one unit titled "Painting Without Paintbrushes." The teacher encouraged students to explore non-traditional materials to paint using various methods in this unit. The timeframe of the unit was not specified. During the beginning lesson of this unit, the students explored stamps as a mark-making method in their sketchbooks (Rago, 2018). The teacher encouraged students to experiment with stamp materials and ideas. The teacher also purposefully did not demonstrate the process to avoid students copying the methods the teacher tried. In a later lesson, experimentation was emphasized again as students tested different non-traditional painting tools. There was no significance placed on making a final art project. This research found when students were given open-ended prompts, students participated in unique artmaking that was not teacher-prescribed. The researcher felt unique art-making was achieved by letting go of teacher control, focusing on process and experimentation, and reorganizing the layout of the art room.

Rago (2018) also found peer-to-peer conversation helped students learn from each other. These conversations also helped students develop social relationships, which supports student mental health, as discussed in the second theme of this literature. One limitation of this study was the small class size. The small class sizes in this study allowed for more student and teacher interaction. Many public schools do not have the advantage of such small class sizes and, therefore, have fewer opportunities for student-teacher interaction.

Similar to Hellman and Lind (2017), Rago (2018) emphasized the importance of focusing on the process of making art over the end product. A focus on the artistic process was supported by encouraging experimentation in both cases and avoiding traditional teacher demonstrations of art techniques or material usage. When teacher demonstrations were eliminated, students needed to test materials, observe, think critically, and solve problems independently. When students were the ones performing these tasks, they were more likely to engage and retain this knowledge.

A final analysis by Robson and Rowe (2012) highlighted the benefits of incorporating student choice into creative activities. This study examined three and four-year-olds' creative thinking through various activities. This research took place in an anonymous nursery school in London, England. Within the entire school population, 66% of the students come from an ethnically diverse background, with 25% of students' first language being a language other than English, and 20% of children had special needs or a disability. Approximately 30 of the 85 students at the school chose to participate in this case study. Researchers used the Analyzing Children's Creative Thinking (ACCT) Framework in this qualitative study to examine the students over five months. Video recordings were used to collect data, including observations and conversations. There were three main results from this study. The first finding was gardening and building stimulated just as much creative thinking as painting and music. The second finding

was children playing outside and participating in imaginary play were effective methods to engaging children in creative thinking. Finally, the researchers found child-initiated activities had the highest levels of engagement and persistence. "In child-initiated activities, children were over twice as likely to try out ideas and to display more flexibility and originality, imagining, and hypothesizing and also significantly more likely to analyze ideas and to involve others" (Robson & Rowe, 2012, p. 358). In adult-directed activities, an adult has already worked through and problem-solved possible issues before involving the child in the activity. In child-directed play, the child had to overcome naturally occurring challenges, which built persistence and sustained a high level of engagement.

Each research study summarized in this theme emphasized choice-based art education resulted in high levels of student engagement. Some of the benefits of student engagement were intrinsic motivation, a sense of ownership over their work, and higher interest in the process of creating the art compared to the end product. Art educators must pursue choice-based methods to encourage genuine student participation in the arts. Genuine participation in the arts allows for student self-expression, benefitting their mental health. The next theme will investigate the effects of choice-based art education methods on student mental health. It is critical to keep students participating and engaging in the arts at a time of high-level mental health issues.

Impact of Choice-Based Art Education on Student Mental Health

Mental health has become a priority for adults and children alike. As mentioned earlier, one in seven children (ages 10-19) have a mental health illness (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Creating art supports self-expression, which can help a child process their feelings or an event in their life in a way they may not be able to do with their words. Art educators need to create a space which allows children to make choices about their art to express

themselves fully. The following four literature reviews highlight the impact of choice-based art methods on student mental health.

In 2013, Martin et al. 's research aimed to examine the student participation in the art effect of it on student academics (e.g., motivation and engagement) and nonacademic (e.g., self-esteem and life satisfaction) lives. Art participation was defined as "activities related to art, dance, drama, film/media, and music" (Martin et al., 2013, p. 709). This research examined arts participation in three locations: school, home, and community. The participants consisted of 643 fifth- to twelfth-grade Australian students. Forty-five percent of participants were male, and fifty-five percent were female. Students were surveyed twice over two academic years. During the first survey, 643 students out of 1,172 were selected. Then, during the second survey, 643 students out of 1,162 were selected. Students were selected from four independent, nine government, and two Catholic schools. Each of these schools emphasized or specialized at least one art form. During the first survey, ages ranged from 10-18 years old, with a mean of 12.61 years old. At the time of the second survey, ages ranged from 11 to 19, with a mean age of 13.35. Two schools were non-urban, while 13 were in urban areas. When looking at student's primary languages, 21% were from non-English speaking backgrounds (Martin et al., 2013). Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. Two questionnaires were distributed over two academic years. The questionnaires were identical both times students were surveyed. This study used questions which were answered on a numbered scale. Data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. This study found students involved in the arts "positively predicts adaptive motivation, academic buoyancy, academic intentions, school enjoyment, class participation, self-esteem, meaning and purpose, and life satisfaction" (Martin et al., 2013, p. 719). It also found home-based art encouragement significantly predicted the fluctuation of arts

participation. This research used a self-reported questionnaire, which was one limitation of this study. The researchers acknowledged the need to collect data on students from adults in the student's lives, such as parents or teachers. The study also recognized a large gap between the ages of participants. Older students involved in the study may be more likely to have a higher engagement level than younger students due to more prolonged exposure to the arts.

In a 2018 study, Morris examined the relationship between students' out-of-school art experiences, their self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation in relation to visual art responding tasks. Art experiences were divided into two categories: consumption and production. In this quantitative study, 266 students, years ten through twelve, participated from 18 schools across metropolitan Western Australia. Students in the study were enrolled in visual arts classes. Of the 18 schools, six were public, seven were independent, and five were Catholic. Australia uses the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage system. The schools scored between 900 and 1100. A score of 1000 was considered to be an average socio-educational advantage. 22.9% of participants identified as male, while 77.1% identified as female. The majority of students were 16 years old at 56.3%. 4.3% of students were 14 years old, 29.1% were 15, and 10.2% were 17 (Morris, 2018). A survey was created from the cognitive and psychological scales of the Student Engagement Instrument. Students rated themselves on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Students completed five questions each on autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy, and four on metacognition. This research concluded "reading about art and attending exhibitions once every three-six months had a significant relationship with students' intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy" (Morris, 2018, p. 469). This finding was relevant to student mental health for two reasons. First, if students had intrinsic motivation towards the arts, they found pleasure in an activity essential for mental health. Secondly, students with self-

efficacy believe in themselves. Confidence is important when navigating life's challenges as a young person. This study also found art hobbies outside the classroom did not significantly influence intrinsic motivation or self-efficacy. One limitation of this study was the students' self-reports of arts participation. Students may have been biased when filling out the self-reflective questions (Morris, 2018). Alternative reports by teachers or parents could have strengthened this. This study focused on engagement outside the art classroom. Art educators cannot control what students do with their free time. Despite this, this study can inform educator practice to encourage engagement in these habits within the art room, hoping it will carry into students' personal lives.

Incorporating choice-based methods benefited students' self-esteem, confidence, and motivation toward school (Morris, 2018; Martin et al., 2013). Building up a student's mental health in art class supported their confidence and motivation in other subject areas and their lives outside of school. A strong sense of self is necessary as students become independent. Developing this set of emotional skills gives students a strong foundation as they grow up.

Demirel (2011) studied a sample of four art teachers connected to the Ministry of National Education in Trabzon province during the 2009-2010 school year. The study's objective was to discover how art lessons contribute to student's social, mental, and emotional development in the classroom. The researcher interviewed each teacher, descriptively analyzed the data, and placed this data into corresponding charts. The interviews were conducted one time. This qualitative research found art lessons help students acquire social abilities (e.g., communication and self-confidence), mental abilities (e.g. critical perspective, learning to think, noticing details), and an aesthetic perspective (Demirel, 2011). An educator who was interviewed highlighted how students acquired creativity and ingenuity due to the visual arts

lessons. They stated how students had the opportunity to express their opinions and interpret others' work, and the lessons "help them learn to think" (Demirel, 2011, p. 1974). These kinds of choice opportunities supported more robust student engagement. One limitation of this study was the sample. Only four participants were sampled. These participants gave speculative answers on each of the mentioned topics. This research could have been strengthened by sampling a more comprehensive range of teachers.

Bowen and Kisida (2023) conducted a quantitative study which examined the Arts Access Initiative in Houston, Texas. This initiative incorporated various art learning experiences for under-resourced elementary and middle schools. The researchers compared schools who could participate in this initiative with those who could not. The Arts Access Initiative was created with the Houston Independent School District, city government, and local art organizations. This program focused on equitably enriching students' access to the arts. There were two groups of participants in this study. The first participants were the schools and students who attended those schools. Sixty schools applied to participate, and forty-two schools were randomly accepted. Of these 42 schools, 36 were elementary schools, and six were middle schools. Fifteen thousand eight hundred eighty-six students took part in the study. Of these students, 86% qualified for free or reduced lunch. English Language Learners comprised 33% of these students. Demographically, 68% of students identified as Hispanic, 25% as Black, and 3% as white. The second group of participants was the art organizations. Fifty different art groups participated in various art fields: 54% theater, 18% music, visual arts 16%, and dance 12% (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). The study used survey methods to collect data. The survey used statements such as "School work is interesting," and students marked whether they strongly agreed with the statements or not (Bowen & Kisida, 2023, p. 52). The researchers distributed the

surveys once in the fall and once in the spring. This study found exposure to art classes and experiences positively impacted empathy, school engagement, student discipline, and writing achievement. Student emotional empathy increased by 7.2%. Students who participated in the Arts Access Initiative were 20.7% less likely to have a disciplinary infraction. Student engagement increased by 8%. Finally, student writing scores increased by 13%, and specifically, English Language Learners scores increased by 27% (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Researchers noted a limitation that the schools who participated supported the arts, and these results may not be reproducible if the administration at another school is unsupportive of the arts. The researchers also noted the schools selected for this study lacked arts education from the beginning (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). A school with an established art program might not see positive effects.

Demirel (2011) and Bowen & Kisida (2023) found giving choices supported students' social skills, such as empathy and communication. Empathy and communication are skills students will continue to need throughout their lives, so they must practice them during their schooling. Their research also found more choices in art classes led to positive outcomes in other academic areas. Choices positively impacted writing achievement scores (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Choice also positively impacted mental abilities related to learning, such as critical thinking and observation skills (Demirel, 2011). The positive impact on various academic areas exemplifies how art curriculum helps develop a well-rounded student and justifies why K-12 art education should continue to be funded.

Effective Choice-Based Art Education Teaching Strategies

A final theme which emerged from the literature was effective choice-based teaching methods in the art studio. Educators have a strong practice of reflecting on teaching strategies

and planning for changes as they continue to teach. Many teachers shared effective strategies and insights gained in interviews and observations on this research theme. The following six literature reviews analyze effective choice-based art teaching strategies.

The first literature review on this theme will identify standard art education methods taught in the United States. Identifying the most common methods will lay the foundation for examining the remaining literature. Bertling & Moore (2021) examined the overall approaches teachers were using in the K-12 art education field in the U.S. There were ten standard methods identified: choice-based art education/teaching for artistic behavior (TAB), community-based education, discipline-based art education (DBAE), design education, ecological/environmental education, interdisciplinary education, multicultural education, social justice, Science Technology Engineering Art Mathematics (STEAM), and visual/material culture (Bertling & Moore, 2021). Researchers used mixed methods through a questionnaire distributed to 3,000 National Art Education Association members. The surveys were equally distributed to elementary, middle, and high school art teachers. Of the 3,000 surveys distributed, 742 were returned and qualified to participate. Overall, each grade level was depicted almost equally, with 27% elementary, 23% middle, 27% high school, and 22% mixed levels. Regarding the participants' demographics, 47% lived in urban areas, and 24% lived in rural areas. The majority of teachers who responded to the survey taught at public schools. The survey consisted of twenty-five closed-ended questions and five open-ended questions. This research found visual/material culture was the most strongly emphasized curricular approach, followed by multicultural education (Bertling & Moore, 2021). This type of teaching may be a response to the disengagement found in teaching DBAE methods, which did not always focus on current topics or current artists. Visual culture and multicultural education gave students multiple entry

points to engage in the arts rather than a single teacher-directed viewpoint. The study acknowledged choice-based art education was one of the more recent movements and was moderately emphasized by educators. Social and emotional learning (SEL) was a non-art education approach cited by art teachers' multiple times. One limitation of this research was a sample which only partially represented part of the population. Another limitation was the ambiguity of the teaching methods each teacher self-selected with no follow-up questions to verify their self-selection of this method was congruent with the researcher's definition of each method.

Arov & Jogi (2017) studied ten middle school art teachers in Estonia and their one hundred and forty-eighth students. Of the ten teachers, seven were from urban areas, and three were from rural areas. Seven teachers were female, and three were male, with an average of 18 years of teaching. Two focal points directed this research. First, this study focused on how art teachers support student's learning skills. Learning skills were defined as "the skills needed in the learning process" (Arov & Jogi, 2017, p. 147). Secondly, researchers examined how various teaching practices affected student ambition in visual arts. This study used mixed methods. The researchers interviewed the teachers and observed one class per teacher. The average class size was approximately 14.8 children. Students completed surveys about their motivations, interests, and achievement goals within the arts. These students were in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade (Arov & Jogi, 2017). Cognitive learning strategies were used the most often when examining how visual arts teachers supported students' knowledge of learning skills needed to process knowledge. More specifically, organizational and practicing skills were the cognitive learning strategies used. The cognitive learning strategies taught by art teachers build off a student's prior knowledge and help them organize and identify what skills can help them with each specific

learning need. Cognitive learning approaches were essential in the choice-based studio because the learning is differentiated for each student. Students needed cognitive learning skills to move throughout the studio autonomously. Another finding from this research was students lacking learning skills may exhibit negative behavior or disinterest in the topic (Arov & Jogi, 2017). This conclusion was essential for teachers to note when examining student engagement levels. If a student did not have a robust set of learning skills, they appeared to be disengaged, when in reality, it was a fear of failure or high anxiety behind the behavior. After completing interviews with the teachers involved in the study, researchers concluded student engagement levels were highest when they were offered choices, completed assignments with a feeling of success, and when teachers were open-minded (Arov & Jogi, 2017). One limitation was how only one lesson per teacher was observed. Researchers also acknowledged it would have been beneficial to extend the study over a longer period.

In addition to the teaching methods studied above, Pennisi (2013) directed a year-long study to shift the art classroom from teacher-directed to student-directed by implementing various pedagogical strategies. This research was completed in a K-12 charter school located in a large urban area. The specific curriculum implemented was a negotiated curriculum with 24 eighth-grade students. The negotiated curriculum asked students to be decision-makers about the class makeup and class content, which involved many student-let choices in the art room. The data was collected from observation, audio recordings of class conversations, student work, and discussions among the two team-teaching teachers (Pennisi, 2013). The student's lack of engagement needed to be understood before teachers created the corresponding lessons. Three main reasons for the lack of engagement were identified: lack of connection to school and teachers, lack of competence in school, and the need for more independence within school

lessons and classes (Pennisi, 2013). The teachers began creating negotiable and non-negotiable parts of their curriculum. The non-negotiables parts of the curriculum where students would complete work in three ways: visually, verbally, and in writing. Then, when it came time for students to complete each artwork, students were presented with a big idea, and it was negotiable for them to decide on subject matter, materials, and time. One conclusion the researchers had from this negotiable curriculum was students were in charge of their learning in ways they had not before, leading to high engagement levels. Another finding from this study was the negative impact of teacher lectures, with many students stating this was the "most boring part of school" (Pennisi, 2013, p. 133). After this feedback, the teacher implemented a few successful re-engagement strategies, such as Post-it note critiques, signs with daily directions, and individual conferencing. Students gained autonomy through these student-focused teaching methods and re-engaged with the visual art class. One noticed bias was a belief that girls displaying leadership characteristics may be labeled contentious, whereas boys in the same situation are not. This female researcher admitted this might be a bias they share and consciously tried to listen to and encourage female voices.

A positive outcome emerged when examining Arov and Jogi's (2017) and Pennisi's (2013) findings collectively. Pennisi (2013) found teacher talk led to low student engagement. The educator in this study chose to display key directions for students to read independently as they came in, removing the teacher talk. This teaching strategy can help engage students exhibiting negative behaviors. Arov and Jogi (2017) concluded some students exhibit negative behavior because they lack the learning skills necessary to complete coursework. Eliminating teacher talk will allow students lacking skills to meet with the teacher to differentiate the skills they need.

In a qualitative study, Heid et al. (2009) examined a multi-age classroom at an inquiry-based charter school in central South Carolina. Students applied to the school and then were chosen by a lottery for final enrollment. The school is located in a historically African-American community. The classroom studied for this research was a combined second and third-grade arts classroom with 18 or fewer students. Before this research study, no funding was allocated for the visual arts curriculum at the charter school. The researchers' university gave a grant to the school to support one year of art supplies and the hiring of two graduate students. The following questions guided this research:

Within an inquiry-based setting, what might an art lesson look like? How does creating a dialogical/democratic art classroom support inquiry-based learning? How can an inquiry-based art classroom support and extend creativity and imagination? How might an inquiry-based elementary art curriculum incorporate visual culture? (Heid et al., 2009, p. 4)

Data from this study was collected through researcher observations, videos, photos, and audio recordings. The timeframe of this study needed to be clarified. Students attended art class once per week for 50-minute class periods. The researcher refers explicitly to four different class periods in the study. During these class periods, students studied the artist Kandinsky, the connection between music and creating art, and how these things could translate kinesthetically into dancing. The culmination of the unit was a student-led art, music, and dance performance for the school titled "Dancing with Line." The researchers concluded inquiry-based learning allowed students to grow and take responsibility for learning. The study found teachers must deliberately set aside time for students to have these conversations to have an authentic dialogical/democratic art classroom. Giving students the time to have thoughtful conversations

was a successful way to support student choice. When a teacher supported democratic activities within the class, they differentiated student choices. Mental imagery was found to support student imagination and creativity. Finally, this study concluded the "Dancing with Line" performance contested traditional art education methods (Heid et al., 2009). It allowed the students to engage with art which was purposeful and meaningful to them because they were in the driver's seat of the project. A limitation to consider was the difficulty of letting go of teacher control. Democratic practices take practice for both teachers and students. The researchers cited by the end of the school year of this study, students and teachers were more comfortable with this process.

Student exploration was at the forefront of Kauffman's 2016 qualitative study. This research was inspired by Reggio Emilia's preschool art studio/classrooms which deliver visual arts instruction that mimics the artistic process and encourages student exploration. Kauffman conducted a visual arts research program called "Blank Canvases." This Toronto-based program administered half-day art lessons to public school students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The lessons began with an introduction to a local artist and time for students to ask questions and engage with the artwork. Then, students were encouraged to create their work using materials, processes, or themes based on the local artist (Kauffman, 2016). This practice mimics the artistic process by presenting the students with a problem or idea. The following work time was student-led and allowed students time to explore materials, ideas, and processes to find solutions to the presented problem. Some teaching strategies utilized were creating student sketchbook time, the importance of exploration, valuing process over product, encouraging students to learn with their whole body, and ending classes with a self-reflection or group critique. Student engagement increased with choice-based and student-led teaching

strategies (Kauffman, 2016). For example, one student who had experienced significant trauma struggled to connect with any school learnings. The Blank Canvases project gave each student a sketchbook. This student brought his sketchbook everywhere, drawing planets, his passion. One of the principals of a school noted how important authentic expression was to English Language Learners (ELL). Art is a universal language anyone can participate in, no matter what language they speak. Blank Canvases used choice-based teaching methods to support both students struggling with mental illness and ELL students. A limitation to consider is the location of this study. Toronto has a large urban population which has more access to artists and art experiences. A rural location may not have the same accessibility to collaborate with local artists and art vendors.

McElhany (2017) also examined effective teaching methods using choice-based art education. One eighth-grade class was studied at an urban middle school in Pennsylvania. This qualitative research analyzed the effect of shifting "from discipline-based to student-centered and the resulting effects on student's attitudes towards artmaking" throughout a mask unit (McElhany, 2017, p. 30). Interviews held on three separate days were the primary source of data collection. One teaching strategy utilized was focusing the mask unit on a theme or big idea. Another teaching method used was to guide students by allowing them to be active participants in their learning. A final teaching strategy was offering students more choices and encouraging them to explore through their artmaking. The study found high excitement levels and more student autonomy when using these choice-based teaching methods. Some challenges accompanied these positive results. Students needed help with the independence given to them using choice-based teaching strategies. Researchers found peer critiques and "what if" questions helped to foster autonomous thinking (McElhany, 2017, p. 34). Another challenge was the

extended time students needed to complete work in a choice-based environment. Many students needed studio time during lunches or before or after school hours.

McElhany (2017) and Kauffman (2016) highlight impactful choice-based teaching methods such as presenting a problem or big idea as an assignment, experimenting, and finally, offering choices in materials, timelines, and processes. Choice-based teaching methods encourage students to follow the artistic process and create work which is highly meaningful to who they are. McElhany (2017) states, "Students chose, explored, and experimented with their materials, tools, and techniques. This freedom unlocked the artist within and gave my students permission to be an authentic artist" (p. 35). It is essential to allow students to explore their ideas in a world where individuality is highly valued.

The final theme of this literature review shared many successful teaching approaches that engaged students in the choice-based art studio. Student-led practices were an effective teaching strategy. Planning for student collaboration and conversation was also crucial to choice-based teaching. Incorporating opportunities for students to use social skills also supports student mental health, which is the second theme of this literature review. Student engagement was at its highest, with open-minded art teachers willing to support student differentiation and decision-making.

Review of the Proposed Problem

This research was initiated due to the lack of student engagement and motivation when using older art education models, such as Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE). DBAE and similar art education methods were teacher-directed, leaving little room for genuine student creativity (Hellman & Lind, 2017). Choice-based art education guides students through choice-based experiences rather than requiring structured and limited projects. Additionally, genuinely

creating artwork allows for student expression. Creative expression is beneficial for students' mental health. Choice-based visual arts support students' mental health by allowing them to express themselves (Demirel, 2011). This paper aimed to find research supporting student-centered practices and ways to re-engage students in the art studio process.

Review of the Importance of Topic

Transitioning to choice-based art classes is important because art supports student success in other subjects. Secondly, students can express themselves when making choices in their art projects. Embedding this practice in the art room allows students to develop themselves socially and emotionally. Students in a choice-based classroom felt confident, expressed their emotions, shared personal stories, and made art with personal meaning (McElhany, 2017). Finally, it is vital to study choice-based art to highlight the importance of keeping it in the student curriculum despite budget constraints and minimal funding.

Summary of Findings

In this research, the first recurring theme was the general benefits of choice-based art education on student engagement, and was explored by Gates (2016), Dravenstadt (2018), Hellman & Lind (2017), Rago (2018), and Robson & Rowe (2012). After reviewing the literature, choice-based art positively impacted student engagement. Students who participated in choice-based art lessons had intrinsic motivation, focused on the process of learning, and had ownership over their artwork. These abilities reinforce student self-sufficiency, innovation, and problem-solving.

In addition, the second recurring theme in this inquiry was the impact of choice on student mental health, explored by Martin et al. (2013), Morris (2018), Demirel (2011), and Bowen & Kisida (2023). Favorable results were demonstrated in the connection between choice-

based art and social and emotional skills. Students gained self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empathy through the choice-based art studio. These skills helped students become well-rounded both in and out of the classroom.

The final recurring theme in this paper was effective teaching strategies with choice-based art education, explored by Arov & Jogi (2017), Bertling & Moore (2021), Heid et al. (2009), Kauffman (2016), McElhany (2017), and Pennisi (2013). From the teacher's perspective, student-centered practices such as focusing on big ideas or themes, time for experimentation, and integrating time for peer-to-peer dialogue were found to be effective teaching strategies. Eliminating teacher-led projects and teacher lectures was also a successful teaching approach. The teaching approaches these researchers introduced to support student engagement and well-being.

Conclusion

The research question proposed in this literature review was, in light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how shall art educators effectively incorporate choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health? Chapter Two of this literature review examined fifteen different studies which conducted research relating to this topic. The conclusions of these resources analyzed in this paper suggest choice-based art education methods keep students highly engaged and support students' mental well-being. Students will carry these skills acquired in art class into the world around them as they grow. The closing theme highlighted many effective teaching strategies demonstrated by teachers in various positions. Chapter Three of this literature review will discuss the insights gained from Chapter Two and how educators and educational leadership can apply these insights to the art classroom. Finally, this paper will end with suggestions for future studies.

Chapter Three: Discussion and Application

Choice-based art was studied in various settings in the literature review completed in Chapter Two. This paper has explored how art educators could effectively include choice-based methods to improve learner engagement and support learners' mental health. Choice-based art is significant to the field of art education because it fully supports student creativity, problem-solving, and independence. The final portion of this paper will examine the insights gained from the three themes which emerged throughout this research. Next, these insights will then be applied to the art studio with practical application for art educators. Then, three ideas for future studies will be proposed. The final section will conclude with reasons why it is vital to use choice-based art education methods to differentiate art learning for all students.

Insights Gained from the Research

The literature reviewed frequently displayed high student engagement and positive mental health benefits for students when using choice-based art methods. Three insights were repeatedly highlighted throughout multiple research findings. The first insight gained from the research is how beneficial it is to emphasize the creative process when teaching art rather than focus on the final product. Hellman and Lind (2017) discussed how an effective teaching strategy was to focus on the artistic process. Focusing on the process required teachers to shift how they teach their classes and their grading policies and help students shift their own priorities in art class. Making the creative process the focal point of class helps take the pressure off students to create something "perfect." Concentrating on the artistic process will continue to foster intrinsic motivation rather than looking outward for validation from others (Kauffman, 2016). This intrinsic motivation will lead students to create artwork for the sake of enjoyment and will give them a better sense of well-being.

In addition, choice-based art positively affects student behavior was the second insight gained from the research. Some positive effects included higher levels of engagement, collaboration, and confidence (Dravenstadt, 2018). Giving students options on the content, process, or product increased their engagement and left little room for off-task behaviors. Offering more choice also eliminated behaviors which stem from a fear of failure. Many students and adults alike express a belief they are not able to do art or are not "good" at the subject. These statements are often interpreted as a lack of interest in art or someone who needs more exposure to the subject matter. Arov & Jogi (2017) surveyed students' goals and found some students had performance-avoidance goals, often displayed as disinterest. Researchers found this apathy could be due to a fear of failure. This study also found those fearing failure often compare themselves to others. Choice-based art differentiates student work, making it more difficult for students to compare themselves to others. Eliminating this opportunity for comparison has beneficial behavioral outcomes.

Finally, the third insight gained from the research is how transitioning to choice-based art learning fosters community and collaboration among students. Students are more engaged in the art studio when they can communicate with peers and learn from each other (Robson & Rowe, 2012). Conversation encourages students to practice social skills freely and naturally. In peer-to-peer interactions, students must deal with challenges and solve problems amongst themselves without having an adult solve the problem for the child. In addition, choice-based art fostered independence among students, which led to students becoming "peer experts" in certain areas. For example, one student became the "peer expert" in painting, and this student would guide other students who had questions about painting (Pennisi, 2013, p. 135). These students built up

their confidence and became student leaders. Peer learning allowed more students the opportunity to grasp new skills because the teacher was not the single source of information.

Applications

The insights gained from the research studied have established the groundwork for the actions educators and educational leadership must take to implement choice-based art education methods successfully. In order to successfully implement choice-based art, teachers need support from the administration in three different ways. The support is needed through materials and adequate art studios, professional development relevant to choice-based art, and smaller class sizes.

The first application of this research relates to the insight gained regarding a focus on the artistic process rather than the product, which was highlighted as this first insight gained from research. In order to support the creative process, students need access to authentic art materials. Access to these resources requires administrators to be advocates of the arts and emphasize the arts' importance to stakeholders who support funding. Additionally, students need an art studio space equipped to support art education. Art should not be on a cart brought into a homeroom classroom or taught out of any extra space available. It is vital to have a dedicated space for students to attend art classes with student workspace, sinks, drying racks, a kiln, applicable technology, and tangible artwork. Ensuring a dedicated space for art class allows the educator to arrange the classroom so students can be autonomous when navigating the studio to find art supplies and the tools they need.

Furthermore, school leadership can also support the application of choice-based art education by providing related professional development. There is often only one art teacher per school building. Offering art-focused professional development gives art teachers a chance to

collaborate and connect with others in the same position, which happens rarely. The professional development must be related to current choice-based art education methods, with opportunities for teachers to incorporate these methods into their teaching practices. When the administration supports the visual arts in these ways, it validates the importance of art education.

A final application of this research relates to the second and third insights gained. Smaller class sizes are one way to support the implementation of choice-based art education. Many of the studies conducted in this literature review had small class sizes and found choice-based art was successful in these smaller groups. Smaller classes mean fewer peers for children to socialize with and foster a sense of community. Smaller class sizes also mean there are more opportunities for student-teacher interactions. These interactions help students build a relationship with their teacher, establish respect for one another and trust, and help eliminate attention-seeking behaviors.

To sum up, the applications mentioned acknowledge multiple stakeholders are involved in successfully implementing choice-based learning in the art studio. The favorable benefits of choice-based art education are undeniable, and educational leaders should be urged to support this pedagogy. The findings from this paper stress the positive effects of choice-based art lessons on intrinsic motivation, independence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empathy. These qualities are essential for students as they navigate as learners and into the world as citizens.

Future Research

After analyzing the literature, some gaps in current research were noted to get a comprehensive assessment of the effect of choice-based art education. Three future studies will be proposed to close the gaps in the literature. Examining effective choice-based teaching methods for lower elementary grade levels would be one future study which would benefit this

research. A majority of the research in the literature review studied secondary teachers and the successful methods they found for their students. Young learners, such as kindergarteners and first graders, require more teacher direction and interaction than their more independent upper elementary and secondary counterparts. Studies with kindergarten and first-grade students may find specific scaffolding strategies supporting choice-based art while providing the foundations they need to succeed.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to study the effects of choice-based education over more extended periods. Choice-based art education is relatively new, so many studies were conducted a year at maximum. Studying the result of choice-based art education over students' entire K-12 careers would be highly advantageous. Do students who have taken choice-based art classes have higher levels of innovation and unique creative ideas? Does student confidence in a choice-based art class affect other areas of learning? Similarly, it would be interesting to see what findings might emerge if the outcomes of choice-based art education at elementary, middle, and high school levels are compared.

A final proposal for a future study would be to examine how choice-based art education affected students' choices in eventual college studies or work experiences. Incorporating more choices will give students more confidence in the arts than previous art education methods. If a student has more confidence in their artistic abilities, they may be more likely to choose a job or field of study in a creative field. Choice-based art education supports student individuality and creative thinking, both highly sought-after skills in the workforce. Are students participating in choice-based art more likely to choose creative fields? Are these students more likely to be independent and have higher problem-solving skills? These questions could be answered by studying the long-term effects of choice-based art education.

Conclusion

Ultimately, choice-based art education must be a foundation in which students build their sense of self, learn to make mistakes, preserve, and find joy in creating something. Even if a student does not pursue a creative field in their personal or professional practice, art still impacts many areas of life. One finding emphasized the advantages of focusing on the process of making instead of concentrating on the final product. Placing energy into the process of any activity or event reinforces the focus on the journey rather than the end goal. Another finding demonstrated choice-based art positively affected student behavior, such as higher task engagement, collaboration with others, and confidence in oneself. Positive behavioral traits such as these can also transfer outside of the art room and into other areas of a student's life and beyond their classroom life. A final discovery was established when teachers transitioned to choice-based art learning; a sense of community and collaboration among students was generated. Relationships with others and cooperation are also skills which will serve students daily. These findings exemplify the need for choice-based art education to grow multifaceted and versatile students.

It is essential to include choice specifically in art education because of the interdisciplinary nature of visual arts within academia and life in general. Creating art is often a venue for completing assignments in other subject matters. Art is also a means of self-expression. Self-expression connects to the recent focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) in school. A push for SEL is one solution educational leadership is pursuing to address the large number of students with mental health illnesses. The high number of students experiencing mental health illness, means the art curriculum is vital and must authentically engage students to advocate for student mental health. Looking forward, educators must acknowledge their responsibility to foster student decision-making skills and student independence. By using

choice-based methods, teachers can achieve differentiation for each student. Differentiated choice-based instruction was found to have positive effects on intrinsic motivation, independence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empathy. These positive qualities will have strong positive outcomes for students as they grow into adulthood.

This research aimed to answer the question, in light of what is known about differentiated instruction, how shall art educators effectively incorporate choice-based methods to increase student engagement and support students' mental health? The 21st century offers many choices to individualize life for each person. The choices made along the journey make it meaningful to each individual. Teachers want their students to have an engaging learning experience and can do so when incorporating choices. The importance of choice was highlighted in each literature review. Students who could make choices in their work were immersed in their work. Correspondingly, choice-based teaching sustained positive results related to student mental health. Art is integrated into everyday life. The choice-based art studio helps prepare students for the choices they will make as they grow older in the educational system and citizens of the world.

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Appendix

Article Tracking Matrix

Articles: Author(s) name and year of publication	Method: Qualitative/ Quantitative/ Meta-Analysis/ Mixed-Methods	Benefits of Choice-Based Art Ed. on Engagement	Impact of Choice on Mental Health	Effective Teaching Strategies with Choice- Based Art Ed.
Arov & Jogi (2017)	Mixed-Methods	X	X	X
Bertling & Moore (2021)	Mixed-Methods			X
Bowen & Kisida (2023)	Quantitative		X	
Demirel (2011)	Qualitative		X	
Dravenstadt (2018)	Qualitative	X		X
Gates (2016)	Qualitative	X		X
Heid et al. (2009)	Qualitative	X		X
Hellman & Lind (2017)	Qualitative	X		X
Kauffman (2016)	Qualitative	X		X
Martin et al. (2013)	Quantitative	X	X	
McElhany (2017)	Qualitative	X	X	
Morris (2018)	Quantitative		X	
Pennisi (2013)	Qualitative	X		X

Rago (2018)	Qualitative	X		X
Robson & Rowe (2012)	Qualitative	X		X