

Owning the Learning: Intentional Student Choice

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Time Frame 50-75 session(s)

Essential Question(s)

How can teachers bridge content and student interest?

Summary

Participants engage in activities to explore strategies that can increase the intentional use of student choice by bridging content and student interest. These strategies provide opportunities for students to feel they have some control or ownership in their learning environment, which can make learning more meaningful. Participants will focus on their content area and identify specific strategies that they can implement in a variety of ways, whether student choice is small or large. Teachers can use the strategies that they believe are best suited for their classroom environments.

Learning Goals

- Participants will identify the benefits of intentional student choice to promote authentic teaching and learning.
- Participants will explore strategies within the context of content, learning process, social conditions, and assessment.
- Participants will identify strategies in their content area that promote student ownership in both academic and socio-emotional classroom activities.

Attachments

- Agenda—Owning the Learning.docx
- Agenda—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Authentic Learning and Teaching—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Instructional Strategy Note Sheet—Owning the Learning.docx
- Instructional Strategy Note Sheet—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Paint Chip Strips—Owning the Learning.docx
- Paint Chip Strips—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Professional Learning Slides—Owning the Learning.pptx
- SCORE Reflection—Owning the Learning.docx
- SCORE Reflection—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Student Choice Card Sort Place Mat—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Student Choice Card Sort Strips 4in x 1in—Owning the Learning.pdf
- Student Choice Card Sort Strips—Owning the Learning.docx
- Student Choice Card Sort Strips—Owning the Learning.pdf

Materials

- Professional Learning Slides (attached)
- Agenda (attached)
- Instructional Strategy Note Sheet handout (attached)
- Authentic Learning and Teaching handout (attached)
- Student Choice Card Sort Strips (attached; printed and cut; one set per individual or small group)
- Student Choice Card Sort Place Mats (attached; one per individual or small group)
- Paint Chips (or attached Paint Chip Strips handout, color printed and cut to size; four colors per person)
- Hole punches (enough to share among participants)
- Metal brads, small binder rings, or yarn (one per person)
- No-smudge markers (enough to share among participants)
- Sticky notes

Engage

Presenter's Note

Have handouts and materials available on the table for participants. All participants should receive a copy of the attached **Agenda**, **Instructional Strategy Note Sheet**, **Authentic Learning and Teaching** handout, and four paint chips (either real or printed from the attached **Paint Chip Strips**). Before the professional learning, make sure to create and label your own Student Choice Paint Chips sample. **Student Choice Card Sort Strips**, **Student Choice Card Sort Place Mats**, and paint chips should be handed out during the session. Do not let participants have access to these items until it is time to use them for the session. Brads/binder rings/yarn and hole punches need to be on the tables or set aside and easily accessible, ready for participants to use during the paint chip activity located in the Extend portion of this session.

Click to **slide two** (one minute) and welcome participants to the session. Briefly highlight the Agenda, specifically noting how it is in the 5E format. Also, direct participants' attention to the "Instructional Strategy Note Sheet" on the reverse side of the Agenda. Here, participants will reflect how each strategy throughout the session is used and might be used in their own classroom.

Change to **slide three** (four minutes). Ask participants if they use a particular search engine or another method or app (i.e., YouTube, Pinterest, etc.) when searching for something online. Refer to their terms (or Google as a default) and the 3-2-1 instructional strategy, inviting participants to think about *three* topics they would be interested in searching right now. After some participants share out, click the slide and ask them to think about *two* topics their students might search. Allow participants to share out their thoughts.

Transition to **slide four** (one minute) and read the quote from Manny Scott (2017). Expanding on the slide say, "Who knows what students are interested in better than the students themselves, and who knows your content better than you? Giving students choice promotes student interest, and student interest should be incorporated into options for student choice."

With the aforementioned idea in mind, move to slide five (four minutes). Discuss participant ideas regarding “bridges” between student interest and content. After participants share, mention how a student-interest inventory might be a resource to use during planning and teaching lessons. One idea might even be something similar to the activity they just did.

Switch slides. The main idea for **slide five** is, "If you know what students’ interests are you can use those as ideas to provide choices during lessons. Choice can and should be based on their interests and strengths."

Instructional Strategy Note Sheet: 3-2-1

Stop and ask participants how they saw this strategy being used during the session. Then, ask them to reflect on how they might use it with students in their own classrooms.

Transition to the objectives on **slide six** (one minute). Highlight the main goals and do not read this slide. Know what the objectives are and mention them to the participants. Inform participants that “we will explore research-based strategies to promote student choice within the context of content, learning process, social conditions, and assessment.

Explore

Slide Note

Participants do not begin writing until slide eight.

Change to **slide seven** (one minute) and preview the categories hung around the room. Mention that these categories were selected based on research and experience but are not exhaustive. Thus, the inclusion of the "other" category is to honor anything teachers already do that doesn't fit within the other four categories. For example, a teacher might accommodate a student by letting the student stand while taking notes or listening to a lecture. Make it clear that throughout this session we are not to imply that ALL categories must be used every time when trying to incorporate student choice in the classroom. *(NOTE: This topic will be addressed again because participants often assume that the suggestion is to use all four categories in every lesson, every time.)*

Change to **slide eight** (five minutes). Think about some things that you do in your classroom already to promote student choice. Use the next three minutes to write each of these things on a sticky note. Then, take two minutes to post your notes on one or more of the five posters around the room. *(NOTE: Each example gets its own sticky note.)* Participants should include their name and content area on the sticky note. When it looks like everyone who wants to participate has done so, quickly summarize or share out a few ideas from each category. Mention to participants that these ideas can be used in the next activity as additions to the provided ideas.

Click to **slide nine** (one to two minutes). Instruct participants to draw a major concept or topic on a sticky note. Examples are listed on the slide.

Click again to show step two (one minute). Participants choose to work individually, in pairs, or in a small group. Participants can group by content area if desired. Each place mat gets one concept or topic, so groups will select one topic to place in the center of their place mat.

After groups have decided on one topic to explore, change to **slide 10** (one minute). Use this slide to show how participants might create their own Card Sort place mat. Strategy examples for social and process should be selected from the card sort. Strategy examples for content and assessment are topic-specific, so the blank strips in the card sort should be used. There are no "right" answers for this place mat. This is an opportunity to consider possible ideas, strategies, and options that participants are not currently using to promote student choice.

Additional Information For Creating City Of Circles

"Create a city of circles" could be similar to the common math assignment "Parallel City" where students can create a city made of circles that meets specific guidelines outlined in a rubric. For example, the main store may have a radius that is 2 times the diameter of the bank. Students would also be expected to determine and label the radius, diameter, circumference and area of each circle. This type of project would demonstrate a student's understanding of circles while allowing for individual creativity and ownership.

Transition to **slide 11** (one minute), and say, "As you explore, think about how these strategies might fit within your classroom to create an authentic, student-centered learning environment." Mention to participants that not all categories have to be used nor all of the strips. Also, mention that there are blank strips for them to create their own student choice options that best fit their topic. While participants work, they can get up and look at the individual ideas placed on posters in the previous activity.

Slide 12 lists the categories for participants to refer to while they sort cards (eight minutes). Walk around and help participants as needed. Remind them there is no "right" answer for this Card Sort. They will place cards where they feel they best belong. Also, it is not required to use a card if they don't feel it would work in their classroom for that topic.

Instructional Strategy Note Sheet: Card Sort

Stop and ask participants how they saw this strategy being used during the session. Then, ask them to reflect on how they might use it with students in their own classrooms.

Explain

After the participants have time to explore the Card Sort, change to **slide 13** (three minutes). Instruct participants to select one strategy from the place mat and determine how it supports student-centered learning. Click the slide to show and explain the given example, "Creating a city of circles supports student-centered learning by giving students shared control."

Explain that the first blank of the Synectics statement is selected from a statement that participants placed on the place mat. The second statement is selected from the Student-Centered Learning column on the "Authentic Learning and Teaching Rubric" provided on the tables.

Participants may share out a few Synectics statements.

Change to **slide 14** (one minute). Read the research by Jensen from the slide, "The feeling of having some control is at least as important as actually having control. High-performing teachers engage students with ownership, purpose and collaboration."

Expanding On The Slide

"If we want students to be critical thinkers, we have to let them be critical decision makers. Allowing choice can empower students to own their learning and construct their own understanding. Give choice within your own comfort level. Your comfort level may only start with giving students choice in working groups."

Instructional Strategy Note Sheet: Synectics

Stop and ask participants how they saw this strategy being used during the session. Then, ask them to reflect on how they might use it with students in their own classrooms.

Extend

Change to **slide 15** (one minute). Quickly click through this slide sharing a few main ideas that teachers should keep in mind to prepare for successful implementation of student choice.

1. Content: Know your content well enough to offer your students choices that will still ultimately lead to the big ideas and goals of your objectives/standards.
2. Social: Students need opportunities to scaffold social experiences that prepare them to engage constructively with their peers.
3. Process: Be knowledgeable in a variety of instructional tools that fit well with the content.
4. Assessment: Consider how your students' interests can facilitate demonstration of their knowledge.

For all of these categories, keep your knowledge of your students in mind to inform the opportunities allowed during a lesson or unit.

Transition to **slide 16** (six minutes). Direct participants' attention to the assortment of colorful paint chips on their tables. Each participant selects four paint chips that are varied in color.

Participants individually do the following:

1. Record the four category labels, Content, Social, Process, and Assessment, from the Card Sort activity on the "top" color band as shown on the slide.
2. Select three strategies within the four categories they want to remember.
3. Record one strategy per color band on each paint chip in the respective category.
4. Select a corner (i.e. lower, left-hand corner) to punch a hole in each of the paint chips.
5. Use a metal brad, binder ring, or yarn to hold the paint chips together.

After participants have finished, change to **slide 17** and ask participants to think about which student-choice strategy they will implement in the next few weeks. During the follow-up reflection session, participants will be asked to share about the successes and obstacles of that student-choice strategy.

Evaluate

Depending on the evaluation tool available, change to **slide 18** or **19**.

Note For Slide 18

TREK evaluations will be used in place of the evaluation activity when available. If you don't have access to a TREK evaluation, continue with the activity on slide 19 that is detailed below.

Ask participants to think about the most significant point of the session. You can do this by starting with a review of the topic and then posing a question, like, “What point made during today’s session helped you understand the importance of promoting student choice?”Have participants either share this point out loud or write it down. Collect participants' responses.Analyze responses and use them as necessary during the follow-up reflection session.

Follow-up Activities

Presenter's Note

Anywhere from a week to a month after the session, host a scheduled, informal reflection with small groups of participants who attended the formal professional development session. (This can be one session with all participants or multiple sessions with different participants each time.) These follow-up sessions can be held during a PLC or teacher planning period, as they are to be short and informal. Use slide 21 and the attached "SCORE Reflection Note Sheet" for the follow-up sessions.

Begin the follow-up session with **slide 20** displayed. Once the session begins, display **slide 21** and ask participants to use the "SCORE Reflection Note Sheet" to jot down notes from their experience of using one of the strategies in a lesson. The questions on slide 21 will help guide discussion. Ask each question and allow each attendee a moment to share about their strategy and experience.

Encourage attendees to use another strategy and continue to follow up with each participant if you are able because doing so will create a safe environment of accountability.

Research Rationale

Who better than a teacher to know content and standards that are to be taught throughout the year? Who better than the students themselves to know where their interests lie and what topics, projects, or processes will pique those interests? Scott (2017) says that bridging content and student interest is the act of a master teacher. Teachers need to recognize and learn what their students are interested in and how best they might learn the content taught throughout the year. A research report by Mitchell et al. (2005) emphasizes that school leaders and teachers should allow and encourage students to be involved in making decisions about what and how they learn. Through that process, students will better demonstrate mastery (Mitchell et al., 2005). Teachers should intentionally provide opportunities for students to actively participate in the creation of their learning experiences. By providing appropriate student choice within the constructs of content, social conditions, learning process or assessment (Jensen, 2013), students own their learning experiences, thus creating meaningful and relevant experiences. Jensen (1995) notes that when teachers make school meaningful, relevant, and fun, they don't need to "bribe" students to do their work. When students feel they have some control, they are more likely to demonstrate quality work, and intrinsic motivation will increase. Providing a variety of choices is important, but all choices must be relevant to the student AND intentional to the learning of the content. Teachers should provide purposeful options that aid and bridge connections between student interest and the required content knowledge (Dugas, 2017; Jensen, 2013).

Resources

- Dugas, D. (2016). Group dynamics and individual roles: A differentiated approach to social-emotional learning. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 90(2), 41-47. doi:10.1080/00098655.2016.1256156
- Jensen, E. (1995). Brain-based learning & teaching. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.
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- Mitchell, K., Shkolnik, J., Song, M., Uekawa, K., Murphy, R., & Garet, M. (2005). Rigor, relevance, and results: The quality of teacher assignments and student work in new and conventional high schools (evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's high school grants). Washington, D. C.: American Institutes for Research.
- Scott, M. (2017). Even on your worst day, you can be a student's best hope. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.