

THE USE OF CHOICE BOARDS IN DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPING STUDENT AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Students possess distinct characteristics brought by genetics and life and educational experiences, so teachers assume and recognize the students' individual differences having various interests and levels of preparation. Hence, students with diverse learning styles necessitate differentiated education. Self-determination theory states that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are needed for growth and integration. Several studies also show that when students have a choice in learning, there is positive student engagement and self-motivation. This qualitative study intended to describe and relay the perceptions of students on the use of choice boards as a tool for differentiating instruction and developing student agency. Its design is phenomenological, following ethical standards in data collection and focusing on the experiences of Grade 9 students from Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila. The study revealed the perceptions of students as they use choice boards in science manifesting three themes: a plethora of options and opportunities, choosing to win, one choice at a time, and students as managers of their own learning. The study also revealed that students can be overwhelmed due to the many options on the choice boards. Nevertheless, they become more responsible in planning for their learning. These imply the need for teachers and students to carefully plan the activities and tasks that will be included in the choice boards so they will be more effective in developing student agency and differentiating instruction.

Keywords: choice boards, differentiated instruction, student agency, learning styles

INTRODUCTION

Students possess distinct characteristics influenced by their genetics and life experiences. Their diverse learning needs correspond to these traits (Understanding Diverse Learning Needs, 2017). Teachers recognize these differences when students enter the classroom. Each student has a preferred learning method, unique interests, and varying levels of preparation. As a result, diverse learning styles necessitate differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction involves using various strategies tailored to students' interests, readiness, and learning profiles. It enhances self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and the overall learning process. Teachers can modify the curriculum by adjusting content, learning methods, environments, and expected outputs. Differentiation considers factors such as learning styles, grouping, and classroom environments (Wesely, 2021). Providing students with choices fosters trust, motivation, and self-confidence. Moreover, incorporating student voice promotes democracy and contributes to inclusive schools (Brennan, 2019).

Student agency refers to the ability to manage one's own learning by taking an active role (Danley & Williams, 2020). Rooted in Piaget's constructivist theory (Piaget, 1967), agency emphasizes learning through actions and the adaptation of knowledge structures. Bandura (2001) highlights that agency enables self-development, adaptability, and self-renewal. Student agency provides learners with control and authority over their education, shaping both their learning process and outcomes. Falk and Dierking (2002) explored free-choice learning, where students decide what, where, and with whom they learn. Meaningful choices significantly impact student engagement and motivation (Danley & Williams, 2020).

When students have choices, their self-motivation increases (Theesfeld, 2021). According to self-determination theory, three essential needs—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—drive growth and integration (Cherry, 2021). Research indicates that choice in learning enhances engagement and motivation when students associate these elements with autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Katz & Assor, 2007; Beymer & Thomson, 2015). Conversely, controlling environments negatively affect intrinsic motivation by undermining these needs (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009; Davis, 2018).

Teachers can offer choice in several ways, such as providing a selection of resources, using choice boards, or implementing learning menus. Choice boards allow students to select from a range of teacher-curated activities, promoting

moderate self-direction. More advanced students can be given additional autonomy, choosing the sequence of their tasks within a lesson or across multiple lessons. This approach allows students to engage in different projects simultaneously based on their chosen order.

The key to effective choice boards is ensuring all options lead to the same core understanding of a topic or skill. Parallel choices must be equally challenging and encourage high-level thinking to prevent students from selecting tasks based on ease. For classrooms with a wide range of abilities, multiple choice boards can be created to match different readiness levels while maintaining equivalent levels of choice. This ensures all students, regardless of ability, engage in meaningful learning. Thus, choice boards serve as a powerful tool for differentiating instruction and fostering student agency.

This qualitative study aims to describe the perceptions of Grade 9 students at Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila on using choice boards for differentiating instruction and developing student agency. The research question, "How effective are choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency?" will be addressed in this study.

Specifically, it sought to answer the questions,

- How do students describe the use of choice boards as a form of addressing their readiness, interests, and learning styles?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness of the use of choice boards in developing their self-motivation and self-determination?
- How do students perceive the use of choice boards in managing their own learning?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The phenomenological design of the qualitative research approach was used to develop an understanding of the students' insights regarding the use of choice boards as a tool in differentiating instruction and developing student agency, focusing on the experiences of Grade 9 students from Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila. Phenomenology was chosen as the research method because, according to Creswell (2009, as referenced in Padilla-Diaz, 2015), phenomenology is employed when a study tries to fully comprehend subjective human experiences and perceptions that are shared by a group of people.

Along with this premise, the goal of this study was to describe and convey students' perspectives on the use of choice boards.

The role of the researchers in this qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the participants without personal bias, assumptions, and/or subjectivity. The researchers are full-time faculty members of the Junior High School Level of Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila. One of the researchers is the Science Coordinator of the Basic Education Department of the Colegio and has been teaching Science for 17 years in the said school. The other researchers have been teaching Science for more than ten years in the same institution.

Recognizing the need of being open to other ideas and viewpoints, as well as putting aside personal biases that can influence how they interpret the findings, the researchers used techniques including triangulation and focus-group discussions to ensure the study's objectivity (Krueger, 2009 as mentioned in Mangali and David, 2017).

Research Sampling

The participants were chosen since they are the students of the research's major proponent and have been exposed to tasks since elementary grades. The researchers identified students from different academic standing in the class. The participants were given a letter of consent to inform their parents about the study. The parent's signature on the letter of consent indicates that they are allowing their son or daughter to participate in the study, as well as a guarantee of the confidentiality of the information acquired. The consent letter also detailed the date, time, and location of the focus group sessions. Prior to the actual interview, the researchers required the participants to sign a consent form acknowledging their participation in the study.

There were eight (8) participants in this study, one session of focus group discussion was held via Google Meet on February 21, 2022. All of the participants were Grade 9 students of the Elementary and Junior High School Level of Colegio de San Juan de Letran, a private school in Manila. Since the COVID-19 pandemic caused the school to move to online/modular learning modalities, students attend lessons online (synchronous) and perform activities offline (asynchronous) through the Colegio's Let's Flex Program.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

The data gathering method used by the researchers was qualitative interviewing. In order to collect relevant data, this study created a two-part research instrument. The initial step is to collect baseline data on the participants' information, often known as "robotfoto." The semi-structured interview guide, which acts as the primary data source, is the second section. During the interview, an "aide memoire" was utilized as a guide for the participants. 2007 (de Guzman and Tan, 2007)

The parents of the intended participants were given a consent letter, which was later obtained to document that the parents consented to their children being included in the study. Students who had their parents' permission to participate in the study were interviewed as part of a focus group discussion. The researchers utilized open-ended questions and a non-directive interviewing method to provide participants the freedom to pace themselves and gain clarity on the topic matter at hand. In addition, to clarify some information from the participants, a more directive style of inquiry was used. During the interview, the researchers video- and audio-recorded the participants' responses, as well as took some handwritten notes (McLafferty, 2004). To elicit more information, more probing inquiries were utilized.

The acceptability of the questionnaire was established by consulting experts on how they felt about filling it out. The central question is, "How effective are choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency?". While the subquestions are: a. "How effective are choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency?" b. "How do students perceive the effectiveness of the use of choice boards in developing their self-motivation and self-determination?" c. How do students perceive the use of choice boards in managing their own learning?

Strategies in Analyzing and Validating the Findings

The focus group discussion's recorded interview was transcribed. From the transcripts, noteworthy statements and phrases that clearly characterize students' experiences in using choice boards were extracted. The identified statements and phrases were interpreted in a variety of meanings. The meanings were grouped and categorized into themes, which evolved into theme clusters and

then theme categories. To do a preliminary analysis, a color-coded method was employed to identify specific themes/categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000)

Ethical Considerations

Guidelines on ethical standards for qualitative research are followed to ensure that the study met ethical standards. The Basic Education Department of Colegio de San Juan de Letran received ethics approval for the study. The nature of the research study and the procedures for acquiring data were explained to the study participants. To preserve confidentiality, any personal information was not asked of the participants. The following principles of ethical behavior, as indicated by American Counselling Association (2014), were practiced throughout the study: autonomy (freedom of the participants), fidelity commitment and trust, nonmaleficence (causing no harm), and veracity (truthfulness). These principles were applied to protect the rights of the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe and convey the perceptions of grade 9 students at Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila on the use of choice boards as a strategy for differentiating instruction and developing student agency. The responses of the participants gave this study focus and bearing, resulting in a profound understanding of this phenomenological study. Each participant in this study expressed their ideas attributed to the use of choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency. The research question, "How effective are choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency?", as well as the sub questions, were addressed in this study.

After a thorough coding and analysis, codes were identified, and three (3) themes emerged from the focus group discussion.

Theme 1: A Plethora of Options and Opportunities

Since there are different ways of using and creating choice boards, it offers a huge number of options that students can choose from. In the study, the teacher created choice boards as a teaching strategy and for assessment, in which students are allowed to choose learning activities and tasks that cover multiple intelligences and learning styles of students, without compromising the learning competencies in the topics. Hence, choice boards gave students the option of learning a subject or concept "how" they desire. As a result of this liberty, students became more responsible, accountable, and independent in their studies. It also allowed the students to work on the activities at their own pace.

As LA shares, "Choice boards are effective in differentiating instructions and developing student agency. It's effective in differentiating instructions because with the choices available, we can best choose the one we are most interested in. On the other hand, it's effective in developing student agency because we are given the upper hand to choose what task we want to do. Therefore, we get the chance to choose what we're mostly good at. We get to express and enhance how we want to do a certain task. Choice boards do not make it feel like we're stuck with a project we're not good at/or a project we don't know how to do."

RB adds, "Choice boards are effective in a way that we can be independent, responsible, and self-aware while learning. It will also avoid the pressure since we can work at our own pace which determines our capacity to set a goal and act responsibly."

Cassie mentions, "Choice boards are effective because it provides us with the power to choose how to learn a particular subject or a particular concept. It gives us the freedom to be more responsible, and most especially independent in our learning. It also...it also allows us to work on our activities on our own way"

Anjhe says, "The use of choice boards are effective when it comes to differentiating instruction and developing student agency. This is because it tailors tasks to fit what a certain students can do. It presents different options and requires different skill sets, which offers an even wider selection. Choice boards also develop a sense of responsibility to a student, as they do get to choose and are in control on how they want to act upon it. They set goals that fit their standards, while also making sure that their grades can remain in good numbers. Sometimes, students

even decide on challenging themselves and their limits to see what new thing they can acquire from a task that they don't....they would normally not choose."

Marie quips, "Ahh..I think choice boards are one of the more effective ahhh..methods to uhhmm let the students uhhmm..gain their own pace. And ah..it's a more refreshing refreshing take a take on science in general, it allows the student to get more freedom and creativity and honestly that's I think that's what most people need nowadays. It's creativity and innovation. Ahhh...ahhhh...It ah again, as my previous colleagues, classmates mentioned ah, it really does help the student ah set their own standards. And yeah, that's that's pretty much it. You know, freedom.. creativity. That's like the two main things a student and an adult..ahh..a student needs in their future."

Choice boards can also be used to detect and then use student interests and preferences to encourage active learning and involvement. The possibilities for what to include are endless and adjustable, regardless of what grade level or subject a teacher teaches.

Cassie tells, "I would describe it as a simple strategy of teachers that they can use to provide their students choices in the kind of activities they're going to complete. The teacher would specify which activities students are going to choose from, then their student gets to choose anything from the several sets of options given by the teacher."

Anjhe communicates, "I would say choice boards are very efficient in maintaining my readiness, interest and learning styles and gives me the chance to take control on how I want to approach the activity and presents me other options when I cannot do a certain activity because of some lacking abilities."

As Marie remarks, "Ahhh.. choice boards make me feel more independent and free. Unlike ah.. in a normal task where you just feel like you're in an enclosed space, I don't really have much to say about the enclosed space, but in choice boards, I get to have more ahhh..I get, I get to do it on my own terms. It keeps me interested, like my other classmates said."

Above all, choice boards provided options that addressed the students' diverse intelligence. Rather than assigning the same tasks for each topic, choice boards were designed to tap into students' intelligence and even uncover hidden abilities and interests. The choice boards gave the students the opportunities to explore and discover more about themselves.

Just like what RB mentions, "Choice board gives us the opportunity to explore and discover more of themselves."

Cassie adds, "The choice boards give me an opportunity to express my knowledge, especially my talent."

And Anjhe tells, "The choice board actually gives me the opportunity to further express my interest, talents and knowledge. This is because if a certain task in the choice board sparks my interest, I am motivated to do my best and usually makes me think of ways I can incorporate something new to what I already know to do. For example, our science lesson in inheritance in which one of the options were to write a story. I first intended to write just one page. But in the end i i wrote on three pages other other quick pace at that"

When students are given the option to choose tasks, they choose activities or assessments that reflect their learning styles, knowledge, interests, expertise, capabilities, and those which they have experienced doing given the limited time and resources they have.

As what RB cites, "I select the activities I will do from the choice board by choosing which among the choices is my expertise or which I can apply/use my best skills." I consider these factors when choosing activities from the choice board:

- Amount of time that I will spend doing the activity
- Easiness of the task; and
- Where I can apply my creativity without using too many materials"

Marie reveals, "There are only two questions when it comes to picking ahhh.. what tasks I should do. It's.. am I more knowledgeable on this aspect? And am I more interested in this subject in this aspect?" Ahm, is this more easier? Is this. Is this my ah favorite more favorite part of the lesson? And is this ah.. Can this be a part of my ah, can this be time manageable"

Anjhe expresses, "Most of the time I consider the level of difficulty and how fast I can do a task without sacrificing the quality of the output, especially since tasks pile up quickly by that day of the week."

Letting the students do what they desire instead of what has been decided for them is more inspiring (Yarborough, C. B., & Fedesco, H. N., 2020). Furthermore, if the activity is interesting or enjoyable for the students and is connected to the actual world, they are more likely to assimilate the knowledge (Briggs, 2014). However, teachers should be wary and monitor how students choose the tasks so they will not end up choosing the easier tasks repeatedly or submitting mediocre work. As Finley (2017) states in his article, "Challenging students to dig in and achieve their potential during instructional hours confronts a mighty obstacle: the principle of least effort, the idea that people apply nominal effort to achieve a basically acceptable result instead of pushing themselves in pursuit of greatness".

The students' responses reveal their suggestions as to how frequently choice boards should be used in the classroom.

RB conveys, "Use it sometimes but not often because I think the students will not be challenged if the teachers won't give them a different task anymore. So from time to time, they can use choice board so they can still express their selves, be self-aware and enjoy."

Cassie shares, "I can suggest using choice boards every near the end of every quarter. It can help the students regain the lessons, remember ever...Remember every single detail about it."

Anjhe adds, "I do suggest only doing them a few times per quarter and not all of the performance tasks. Me Like choice boards as to--- as to teach students to still try and form their work into, and help us follow what a certain instruction says."

Theme 2: Choosing to Win, One Choice at a Time

The relevance of tasks as well as their value to students is critical to increasing engagement and ownership. According to Thibodeaux, Harapnuik, and Cummings (2019), students' perceived ownership over their learning environment is an indicator of their involvement with it, especially when it is considered authentic learning. In their study, they found out that giving choice boards stimulates students' interest in learning, and that the students express their gratitude for having a choice.

As LA puts it, "My determination and motivation on tasks increase when I get to choose."

RJ adds, "Well, I perceive the effectiveness of choice boards to be as much effective because I can exert more effort without having a hard time due to the fact that I am supposed to pick what activity I'm better at and at the same time, I can learn more faster and will develop my motivation and determination to do tasks and this will carry on in the future."

RB declares, "Knowing oneself or knowing your strong points and weakness will help us develop our self-motivation and self-determination because we will know what we are good at and not."

The most important benefit is that voice and choice create a good atmosphere in the classroom that encourages students to use their knowledge in new ways and to feel respected as individuals. Students expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to choose (Coppens, 2021). As Marie divulges, "I think it's (choice boards) very effective, and it helps me become more knowledgeable." Like Marie, Cassie says, "I have a better way to express what I know and ideas I brainstorm in my mind."

Teachers may increase "student buy-in" by giving them a voice in their learning. This means that students take more ownership of themselves—in, selected assignments and are more engaged, more likely to finish activities, and have fewer opportunities to behave badly (Cantwell et al., 2017, p. 90). The study by Birdsell, et al. (2009) revealed that offering students a choice increased student motivation to some extent. They found out that rewarding

middle school students need for freedom by providing them with options resulted in more positive actions and increased self-motivation. The same realizations from students were obtained in this study.

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RB adds, "the activities give me enthusiasm to enjoy and learn at the same time". And "it makes us (students) active especially that the activities are our choices"

Anjhe states, "With the use of choice boards, I see that it develops more responsibilities to store students, as they have the right to choose which activity to do. choice boards also promote their interest, like writing, drawing and graphing that further motivates how they how determined they are to create their best outputs and comply within the given time."

Thessfeld (2021) underpins Alfie Kohn's Student-Directed Learning Theory in her action research on student choice and classroom atmosphere. Students should learn at their own pace, be organically driven rather than extrinsically motivated, and focus on the learning process itself, according to Kohn (2006). Students are taking control of their education and motivating themselves through their own interests, passions, and involvement. Choice has also been connected to increased student effort, task performance, and subsequent learning in the classroom. Students when given the choice of what tasks to do will look forward to doing them.

As Cassie mentions, "I always look forward to doing them."

Anjhe speaks, "I actually do look forward to doing the activities. Since I pick options that are available for me. I feel more confident in doing such tasks and feel a lot more in control and how I want to proceed."

And Marie adds, "I look forward to doing choice boards unless I'm stuck with the ah large amount of work to do."

Students, aside from looking forward to doing the tasks, feel energized, plan, and design the tasks ahead.

Anjhe comments, "the activities I choose makes me feel energized. Like creating a poster where I can try and something new like adding a video to it makes me think of what routes I can possibly take with activity."

Marie shares, "it makes me feel really energized and inspired."

And Cassie tells, "it makes me feel good and makes me think to do it again and again."

Current educational trends call for more student autonomy, or choice, in learning. Traditional teaching methods such as differentiated instruction and learning styles are being replaced with activities that encourage students to choose activities based on their interests and backgrounds. These activities tap into students' natural motivation and desires, which has a positive impact on their academic performance. When autonomous learning is examined more closely, it is discovered that there is a link between student choice and higher subject learning achievement. Instead of providing direct instruction, the teacher's duty shifts to one of support. Students' willingness to learn is completely supported in this way.

Many researchers have discovered good consequences in student achievement and motivation when giving students with autonomous learning options, whether as a classroom activity, homework, or evaluation. Smith and Geil (2016), for example, investigated how student choice influenced language arts class participation. When students were given options, the researchers discovered that they were more interested in their assignments, finished more of them, and scored higher on the unit test. Finally, Pretorius, van Mourik, and Barratt (2017) looked at how allowing students to choose their own evaluation methods improves learning results. The research was conducted to give accounting students two

compulsory assessments and two optional assessments. However, in Larsen's study in 2019, he found out that there is no significant difference in achievement between students who learned by choosing their own activities and those who studied using standard teaching techniques. Students' opinions toward learning science either shifted toward positivity or remained neutral.

It is also good to note that a teacher may assume that by giving students a choice in their learning, he/she is varying education to accommodate all students' learning styles. While auditory, visual, and kinesthetic are generally agreed upon, Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, and Bjork (2008), contend that the "sheer number of different schemes or models of learning styles that have been proposed over the years" should give the teachers a pause to consider why a definitive approach to learning style doesn't exist. The incapacity to refute the idea that students have a single learning style that best suits them. It also eliminates the option of learning about what they are interested in. Riener and Willingham (2010) argue that students are based on the fact that they are students. Rather than labeling this student as "visual" or "auditory," it's important to remember that the student simply chooses how to learn based on his or her current interest in the subject. Hence, when designing or making choice boards, teachers should always bear in mind to cover a variety of learning styles as well as the difficulty of tasks. As Marie mentions, "I would suggest giving it (use of choice boards) a little more freedom... to the uh...choice boards because as uh... I am someone who really appreciates these choice boards because it gives me a lot of freedom. But I feel.... like there's something missing."

Theme 3: Students as Managers of Their Own Learning

Metacognition can occur before, during, and after teaching, according to Costa (2008). Before beginning to learn, the student determines what needs to be accomplished, what possibilities and options are accessible, and how to go about learning and accomplishing the work at hand. The learner devises a strategy for achieving the learning goal. During learning, the learner self-monitors (or self-regulates) his or her thoughts and activities in order to stay focused on the objectives and the optimal path to achieving them. During learning, the student assesses his or her progress and, if necessary, changes course. After learning, the learner determines what went well, what went wrong, and how things could be done better in the future. Student agency and choice give learners a way to self-regulate as well as to make decisions. In this study, the students were able to share their thoughts as to how they manage their own learning, from planning, organizing, and implementing the tasks on the choice boards.

As Cassie points out, "I will check if ever I choose this type of activity, will I be able to discuss it properly? And also, so that I could be sure." She adds, "Factors I usually consider when choosing activities is to know my objective and to set their goals to ensure that I can understand a topic. I also consider anticipating challenges like if I...if I will choose this specific activity from the choice board, I'd ask myself if I can...if I can really do it. Then from there, I know that I can continue doing the activity."

Anjhe shares, "The way I select which activities I do from the choice board usually depends, but I do tend to lean on what I have more experience in the degree of how I understand this instruction, and which I already know some of the answers to and how I can also discuss it properly in order to maintain the structure of the lesson."

Allowing students to participate in activities that match their preferred learning style is one way to promote their metacognition. Dosch and Zidon (2014) believe that educators should allow students to learn and engage in course materials that are appropriate for their learning style. Students feel empowered when they have a say in materials, activities, and assessments, which boosts their interest in the course (Turner & Solis, 2017). Teachers can differentiate their instruction in a variety of ways to interest students in learning and satisfy individual learning preferences, for as by using alternative content, processes, or products (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

As LA puts it, "Choice boards are a good way to manage my learning because I can analyze different tasks, which means understanding and deciding how I can participate most effectively."

RJ tells, "They (students) perceive the use of choice boards in managing their own learning as effective and easy."

As RB points out, "It gives students the freedom to express their selves."

Marie divulges, "It expands my knowledge.... on the lessons."

And Anjhe concludes, "Managing my own learning.... I see that choice boards challenge the limits to what I can do. I figure out ways to incorporate the lessons and topics we just discussed into the tasks, but for a fact I have to get a clear understanding. Leading me to do more research and to take a lot more deep to what I can add more to my knowledge."

The opportunity to choose tasks and choose topics, as well as the ability to build skills depending on their own comprehension and preferred direction, has been critical to students' progress. Learning is personalized, and this method provides students with more assurance in their abilities. It also allows the teacher to address individual concerns that the teacher might not have been able to discuss with students otherwise.

RB states, "We (students) realize that we are capable of many things." She adds, "Knowing oneself or knowing our strong points and weakness will help us develop our self-motivation and self-determination because we will know what we are good at and not."

Cassie shares, "My insight is that doing activities using choice board made me an open-minded student."

Choice boards have helped students learn more by allowing them to gain confidence based on their own needs and preferences. Bedford (2019) felt that when students are actively engaged in the learning and are aware of the intended outcomes, they are more reflective and capable of self-evaluation.

Marie shares, "After completing the choice boards it made me feel more inspired to look into the lesson that we had not just from a classroom perspective but beyond that."

RB adds, "seeing the output of my work makes me satisfied"

Cassie reveals, "It helps me promote growth and good mindset. And it inspires me to know more about some certain things."

Anjhe reflects, "After completing the activity, I usually think of other works I could I have done or went on. How I could have further improve what I had submitted so it could be tailored even further to fit future performance tasks."

For various reasons, developing, promoting, and maintaining a culture of student agency is critical. According to the International Baccalaureate (IB) (2017), student agency will foster a culture of mutual respect by acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of students, schools, and the larger learning community, allowing students to take ownership of their learning and teachers to take ownership of their teaching. In this context, the teacher is no longer only a content provider. The instructor now actively engages with all pupils in order to encourage their growth as capable learners and global citizens. "Increasingly in the twenty-first century, what you know is considerably less essential than what you can accomplish with what you know," according to the book *Creating Innovators* (Wagner, 2015). When teachers encourage student agency in the classroom, they are allowing students to take charge of their own learning and to participate actively in their studies.

Because the learning process has been given a sense of purpose, positive energy in both teachers and students is related to student ownership of learning. This is evident in the students' responses during the focus group discussion.

RB mentions, "(Choice boards allow us) Freedom of expression, creativity and self-awareness"

Cassie states, "It made me open my mind in making the activity. My imagination expands too."

As Anjhe shares her insight, "Getting overwhelmed can be counter acted upon the skills of.... of goal making we learn from the choice boards. If we do not have the option to do what we excel in like drawing, there is a bigger chance we get to explore something new like making graphs. Another benefit of choice boards are how they actually get us to research on the lesson we learned about and know how to imply them into the outputs."

Marie shares how choice boards made her become more interested in Science, "I am far more interested and uh far more interested in the subject and the lesson and special.... And more.... more than that I am more interested in the field of Science itself."

The use of choice boards also developed not only the planning and organizing skills of students as they manage their own learning. It also gave them the opportunity to develop their decision-making skills, independence, creativity, resourcefulness, their research skills, and have expanded and applied what they have learned even in other subjects.

Anjhe reveals, "The use of choice boards help me manage my own learning. Like I said earlier, some tasks require more research than usual and most of the time, I end up choosing this. So, to get a grasp of what I want to do with the activity, I look at parts of the lesson to get a better understanding and think of ways to apply my knowledge into the output while making sure it stays crystal clear to what the lesson still is."

As RB notes, "we (students) can decide on which way we think we will learn best"

Cassie says, "it helps me manage my own learning and it made me more independent and resourceful."

Marie shares, "helps me become more creative and innovative. Not just in science but also in other subjects."

By allowing students to express their opinions through routine revisions, conversations, learning opportunities, and evaluation, students can build a sense of empowerment by being actively involved in decision-making. Kallick and Zmuda (2017) discuss the student as a "co-creator" in their book *Students at the Center: Personalized Learning with Habits of Mind*. Students are recognized as sharing responsibility in the production of learning experiences and assessments that are tailored to their unique learning processes and travels through this lens. Students can discover, pursue, document, and reflect on their own interests. They can start to figure out how they learn best and what motivates them to attain personal success.

Anjhe shares, "I do feel accomplished after completing the activities. And any activity really I usually feel accomplished after finishing them. But what doubles the feeling of accomplishment here is that the other fact that I can visualize how I want my activity to appear. And know in the end I did what my abilities can manage, makes the outputs the best possible outcome it could be."

As Marie adds, "I feel very accomplished with it. And with that accomplishment, it gives me a confidence boost to give more I mean to finish other tasks I couldn't do."

With the benefits of using choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency, students have also expressed some of the challenges they faced when they do it. Some of the respondents stated that they are overwhelmed by the numerous options and do not know how to effectively manage their time.

As RB points out, "It will become overwhelming if the choices are too many which results to the indecisiveness of the students."

Anjhe shares, "Getting overwhelmed with which activity to do from the many given, not having what you prefer doing in the options, and taking a little too much time into working the activity since we wanted to turn out to be the best, are what I think are some of the challenges in using choice boards."

Marie on time management says, "In a nutshell.... time management. I have a hard time uh.... managing choice boards, managing the task of doing my choice boards."

However, as the students reflect and learn on the process, they themselves have discovered how not to be overwhelmed by the options on the choice boards. As Anjhe reveals, "Getting overwhelmed can be counteracted upon the skills of.... of goal making we learn from the choice boards. If we do not have the option to do what we excel in like drawing, there is a bigger chance we get to explore something new like making graphs. Another benefit of choice boards are how

they actually get us to research on the lesson we learned about and know how to imply them into the outputs.” And as Cassie adds, “Challenges happen when we sometimes think that you. that if you will do this specific activity from the choice board, it can get hard. That you cannot finish a specific activity you choose. But honestly, you can do it”.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Heutagogy is a buzzword in education nowadays. It is a pedagogical belief where students are given the opportunity to direct their own learning. As students take ownership of their own learning, they become more interested and engaged. One simple way of developing student agency or managing one's learning is using choice boards. These boards contain various tasks and activities that students can choose to demonstrate proficiency or to learn a lesson/topic. With the choice boards, teachers can tap students' multiple intelligences and address their varied learning styles. This phenomenological study provided an opportunity to determine how choice boards can differentiate instruction and develop student agency. The study describes how the learners perceived the use of choice boards as a tool for differentiating instruction and developing student agency of the grade 9 students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila. The research question, “How effective are choice boards in differentiating instruction and developing student agency?” will be addressed in this study.

The findings provided essential insights that teachers and students alike have to consider on the use of choice boards in developing student agency and differentiating instruction. Likewise, the study gives an overview of what challenges the students and teachers can expect in using the tool. Hence, it gives suggestions to both teachers and students as to how to effectively use choice boards in their classes. This research implies that choice boards can be an effective tool in differentiating instruction as well as developing student agency as perceived by the students. Teachers and students should identify and find ways to minimize the impact of these challenges by carefully planning the activities and tasks that will be included in the choice boards, as well as guiding students in the accomplishment of tasks and managing their time. The frequency of the use of choice boards should also be considered. Addressing the said challenges will result in choice boards being more effective in developing student agency and differentiating instruction. The study also pinpoints that students be given more opportunities to choose by letting them do tasks that are not included in the choice board.

The study showed the perceptions of students as they use choice boards in science. Three themes emerged based on the perceptions of students namely: (1) A Plethora of Options and Opportunities, (2) Choosing to Win, One Choice at a Time, and (3) Students as Managers of Their Own Learning. This study also revealed that students were able to hone their independence in learning, their creativity and resourcefulness, their research skills, and their decision-making capabilities. The study also revealed that due to the many options on the choice boards, students can be overwhelmed. In addition, since choosing the tasks made them become more responsible and accountable, they tend to allot more time and eventually mismanage it. In response to these challenges, learners have adjusted by planning more carefully how they will do the tasks and how much time they have to spend doing them. Students' actual experiences with choice boards have helped them become more independent, resourceful, and creative, as well as improve their research abilities. It also increased their interest and motivation in their studies, resulting in more engaged and empowered students.

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