SESSION #2
EMPOWERING STUDENTS
THROUGH VOICE, CHOICE &
CREATIVITY

Connectivity
TRANSCRIPT

PRESENTER:
DYAN BRANSTETTER

Hi, my name is Dyan Branstetter and I'm a teacher in Pennsylvania. I taught third grade for 14 years, and this year I'm moving to fifth grade humanities. The district where I teach is rather traditional, and arts integration is not necessarily the norm, unfortunately. Although there's finally a little push for integration this year, which is a good thing. I'm a writer for EducationCloset. I number of years ago I went to a presentation by Susan Riley and it changed the course of my teaching career.

I'm here today to share ideas for how you can use arts integration and STEAM to engage and empower your students in your classroom. Even if you're the only one you know that's doing it. Or if you teach with a really strict pacing guide, or if you teach in a pretty traditional school district, or if it's not a district initiative because it's probably initiative in a roundabout way. In order to truly empower students, we need to offer choice, and give them an opportunity to have a voice. We also need to provide a learning environment that fosters and encourages creativity.

We know this is best for our students, but with so much curriculum to teach and other individual barriers. Sometimes we wonder if it's even possible. Today, I hope you find some takeaways for effective ways to empower students by cultivating their voice, choice, and fostering that creativity within your classroom.

The handout that was provided can help you follow along with the presentation today. It gives you the three educational approaches that we'll be talking about that foster voice, choice, and creativity in students, as well as student voice ideas, and ideas for student choice. A lot of times people think that they are either creative type, or not a creative type, or they're an artist, or not an artist. I find that it's helpful to know that there are stages of creativity.

We've done a lot to combat the idea of being smart or not smart through the growth mindset movement, but I believe we need to start a creativity movement. How are we as teachers helping students develop their creativity? In order to help us step away from the creative or not creative mindset, AJ Giuliani and John Spencer, authors of the book Empower shared their ideas for stages of creativity. If you're not watching this live, you can scan the QR code on our next slide and see if you can put these stages in order on your own. If you're watching live, here's some of Spencer and Giuliani's stages of creativity.

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What do you think is the first stage? What would follow? Take a moment to think about it, and then we'll take a look at the answers. Here's the QR code to scan if you're not watching live, so that you can try putting the levels in order using the interactive. And here are the answers according to the authors. Spencer and Giuliani realized that even if a student is not creating something from scratch, he or she is on the way to doing that. Most people go through most or all of these stages prior to creating something new.

So now that we've talked about creativity, let's talk about how we can empower students to use that creativity. Empowerment is when we help students find what they love, and create learning experiences that encourage them to develop their strengths. I've found three things to be extremely effective when it comes to empowering students. First, promoting student choice. Next, promoting student voice, and teaching through innovative educational approaches. You'll notice that these are the headings on our handout if you'd like to use that as a reference.

First, let's talk about student choice. We're going to take a look at three different levels of student choice so that you can choose the one that works best for you. When it comes to student choice, I find it's best to start by asking myself these questions when planning. Many times as teachers, we try to control every part of an assignment or project. This is only necessary to a point. We need to make sure that our task is aligned to the standard we're teaching. However, we create some rules and guidelines simply to make sure students are following directions. And while that has its place, that's mostly not the standard. These questions can help make sure we offer as much student choice as possible.

There are so many benefits to providing student choice. The students are on task more often. They're engaging in deeper and richer learning while they're on task. The learning environment becomes more collaborative and students' social and emotional learning increases because of that collaboration. So let's take a look at a choice board, which is one way of providing student choice. This is an example that you've seen before. This is our handout, which is a teacher version of student choice, where you have multiple levels of activities that you can complete.

Here is a math choice board that I've used with my students in the past, where I give them a few topics and different levels of activities that they can complete within those

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topics. And this is an example of a choice board in a different format that I use in ELA, where students have main dishes to complete, which are their must-does during that week, side dishes where they can choose two to complete before moving onto desserts, which are optional. And the students can complete these in any order as long as they've completed their main dishes first. These are the lower level of choice boards because I chose the activities that I needed the students to complete, but they chose the order to do them.

A nice next step in student choice and giving students a bit more ownership is something I learned about in the book Empower as well. It's called the Geek Out Project. This quote is so true that, "Sometimes our small geeky interests become the vital skills we use forever." With the Geek Out Project, the students choose a topic that they're really passionate about, and then they spend a little bit of time each day, or a little bit of time each week learning as much as they can and sharing as much as they can about that topic. And this is an example of how we did this in my class where we have a blog through Seesaw, and the students post about what they're learning, so they can choose to do a vlog or to type it in a blog format, or simply take a picture and caption that with information that they've learned, so that they can learn from one another, but they also get some important research skills at the same time.

My top level of student choice would be the Genius Hour, which is based on Google's 20% time for their employees where they get to study something that they're interested in and then share out. This is a great sketch note to get you started with Genius Hour if you haven't heard of it before. There are many different ways that it can be formatted where sometimes students will have a period of time each day or each week to work on a Genius Hour project. Sometimes students are invited to participate in something called an Innovation Day where they spend an entire day building this project or an innovation week.

I've found this difficult to incorporate into my classroom simply because I have so much curriculum. We've never been able to devote enough time to it. So I've topped out at our Geek Out blog. Although I love this idea and someday I will find a way to implement it with my students. Now let's take some time to talk about student voice. This would be the difference between a student writing a paper and turning it into the teacher, or students writing something and sharing it with the world. When students

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know that their work will be public or that other peers will see their work, they tend to exceed your expectations instead of just meet them. There's more of an audience.

One of the best ways to do this is by weaving authentic assessments into projects. If you're just starting out with this idea of student voice, it is great to begin by having students publish their work for their parents or each other. This can be in your class newsletter or through an online learning community such as the app Seesaw. The next level of student voice would be extending past your classroom walls and into publishing or performing for the school, such as a school wide publication or even connecting with other classes in and outside of your school through Seesaw's connected blogs.

The highest level of student voice would be sharing in the community, where student work is actually a part of the real world. This might be publishing something on a public blog or on YouTube or networking with local museums or businesses, so that student work can be integrated naturally into something that's displayed or published for the world to see. So all of this sounds great, but then we come back to the reality of the pacing guide that some of us have. How can we accomplish adding creativity and student choice and student voice while still meeting the requirements of our pacing guide in our curriculum?

This is where the innovative educational approaches come in. This is where we need to be creative. We need to step away from our curriculum guide just a bit at a time, and buyback time through creatively integrating standards. We need to design authentic projects that weave multiple standards together. Project based learning, especially arts integration and STEAM paired with that perfect tools to have this happen. In general, integration is when you take two standards and teach and assess them together. So you want to find content neutral standards that allow students to choose the topic if you're doing a Genius Hour project, or a Geek Out blog.

This year, as I was working on curriculum for our science and for social studies, I noticed that there were a lot of overlapping standards. So for science, the students were to look at how the earth changed over time, and for social studies, they were to do the same thing both for slightly different purposes, of course. So we combined these and had students look at a time lapse on Google Earth so that they could see how the Earth was changing, and they came to their own conclusions.

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We were able to teach two standards in one lesson. It was more meaningful for the students because they made the connection, and it freed up some time for our Geek Out blogs or for projects that we were working on. Speaking of projects, project based learning is a fantastic innovative educational approach that will promote student choice, voice, and creativity. Project based learning is a wonderful structure for students to work through these real world problems, and communicate and collaborate and use their voice, have choice, and promote creativity.

Education Closet has lots of resources. If you search project based learning on the website, this is just one of them, and I think it's a fantastic resource because it really clarifies the difference between a project and project based learning. Our next innovative educational approach is my personal favorite, arts integration, which is a researched based curricular strategy in which both the content area, and the fine art standards are taught and assessed simultaneously.

So you need to find naturally aligning standards between that content area and the fine arts area, and you teach the content through the arts and the arts through the content. Here's a sample arts integration project that I worked on with my third graders. I found the anchor standard number six, convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work and paired that with an ELA standard of explaining how specific aspects of a text illustration contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.

We read the story How Many Days to America, and all of the artwork is done in pastels, so the students learned about pastel arts, and how to shade and blend with pastels from a guest artists that we had. And then they created their own picture and writing that went along with that to explain it as an artist statement. And it all talked about the theme and the mood of the literature and how that was interpreted through the artwork. Here's an example of one of my third graders reading part of her artist's statement, and the work that she did with that.

Emmaline:
Do you see the smoke and sale? The smoke represents that the engine broke down, and the sale represents how the passengers fixed the problem by knotting the extra shirts together to get to America.

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Emmaline:
Do you see the sky? I used to pastels. I chose the colors purple, red, and yellow. The red represents anger. The yellow represents hope. And the purple represents frustration. So I blended the colors together to make a sky that almost represents teamwork.

Can you see how without the ELA standard or without the art standard, that understanding would not have been as deep for Emmaline? Our third innovative educational approach is STEAM? While STEAM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, it's really the inquiry based and design process that define it. Students are engaged through inquiry and are actively involved in discovering or creating in response to a question posed, iterating as needed until the result is successful. This STEAM approach and mindset allows students to work through the four Cs and it's impossible to avoid engagement. If the STEAM project is designed with an authentic question, it can quickly shift to student empowerment.

The goal of our time together today was to expose you to the different ways that you're able to increase student voice, choice, and creativity, and those innovative educational approaches that can help with that. We really just saw the surface level of what there is that's out there, so take some time and decide which one you want to dive into a bit further. Here again is your resource guide for everything we talked about today. If you're interested in more learning than these links have to offer, check out some of Education Closet's courses, especially the project based learning, and the arts bundle, for four online learning experiences that will lead you from lesson design and delivery, classroom management, assessment, and current best practices.

Taking a look at the second page of our handout, gives you those different platforms for sharing with an authentic audience, so we can all see what learning about. You could choose Twitter, a blog post, a picture, an infographic, maybe create a sketch note, or design a plan for how you might implement something or of course we have our free choice, and make sure that you're using our Hashtag so that we can all connect.

Been fantastic learning and growing with everyone at our conference today. I love hearing about all of these wonderful things that are happening in your classroom. So if you do decide to do anything on that choice board, make sure to tag me in it. I'll be

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watching for the hashtag. I'll make sure that I share another copy of that on Twitter, so that you can download a PDF with clickable links, and everything is hyperlinked, so you should be able to access everything. But if you have any questions, reach out through email, Twitter, Instagram. My contact information's on the next slide. Have a great day.