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LAUNCHPAD ACTIVITY
Providing Student Choice

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Students feel more empowered and engaged when they are able to make choices about what and how they learn, and what they create. It helps them develop a sense of independence as a learner. You might be providing choice to your students in a variety of ways already. They may be able to choose books to read, learning station activities, or research report topics. Student choice can enhance any learning experience, and it's a key element of successful project-based learning.

It's important to note that too much choice can be paralyzing for students. You will have to determine what choices to provide and what choices to limit. In the real world, choices are often limited by constraints, such as cost, time, and feasibility. So consider giving students a menu of choices, especially if they are younger or not experienced with project-based learning.

You should also coach students in how to make good choices. Older or more experienced students may only need a brief discussion about what criteria they should use to make choices. Younger students will need more support. One criteria they should consider is the needs of their audience or the end-user of a product students are creating. When students are making a presentation, for example, they could decide what type of media will be most effective for their purpose and audience.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Choose Your Medium
GRADES: 4-12
TIME: 20-40 minutes

PURPOSE: To help students make meaningful choices about how to demonstrate their understanding and skills and communicate to a particular audience.

OVERVIEW

This is a step-by-step process teachers can use to support students in choosing an appropriate medium to demonstrate their learning and communicate to a particular audience. When students choose the medium, they transfer their understanding of what tools are *for* and how they are used to communicate a message.

This activity is best used for only certain types of assignments or projects–those where the medium is not predetermined. For example, if students are doing a project in which they are proposing new ideas for the design of an outdoor space to their school or district, the product may have to be a set of plans and drawings on paper or on a computer. However, if the project is about reducing litter on the school campus, students may want to address the problem in a variety of ways, using different mediums: creating signs or other written products, making presentations, doing skits, writing songs, or producing videos.

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Or consider a simpler assignment, such as a math activity about collecting and displaying data. Students could choose the best way to communicate the results of their survey of classmates' favorite ice cream flavors: a graph on a poster, a Google slide, or a video presentation. For a creative writing assignment, you could ask students to choose whether to share their work on a blog, in a printed book, or at a dramatic reading event.

STEPS

1. **Discuss the assignment or project with the class.** Let students know they will be making their own choices about how to demonstrate their learning and communicate to or share their work with a particular audience. Discuss their purpose: are you trying to persuade, to entertain, to teach, to make someone think or take action?

2. **In a whole-class activity, create a list of tools/mediums and what they are used for.** You could begin by having students meet in small groups first to jumpstart their thinking. Ask students to think of tools/mediums they know, but also consider providing some new ones they may not already know but could find out about and consider. You could create the list on a four-column chart. For example:

Tool/Medium:	What it does:	What it's good for:	When it's not as good for:
Prezi slides	Shows pictures and words Connects ideas Uses movement to make it interesting	Communicating information Could be presented live or put online for people to see on their own	Creating an emotional response/making someone feel a certain way
Skits	Demonstrates something physically	Making a point in an entertaining way	Sharing a lot of facts/information

3. **Consider adding a fifth column and/or discussing any constraints, too.** For example, producing a video might take more time than a few Google slides. Doing a skit requires rehearsal time, some dramatic skill, and arranging for its presentation. Creating and placing signs in a physical space requires the right materials (and perhaps permission to post them).

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4. **Ask students to select a tool/medium and write an explanation.** Depending on the assignment or project, this could be done as a whole class, individually, or in small groups. Ask students to defend their selection with evidence and reasoning. For example, they might say Tool X is better than Tool Y because it has Z, which is better for their purpose/audience. For older students, consider demonstrating the use of a choice strategy, such as an Evaluation Matrix, to help them make a thoughtful selection.

NOTES

- Choosing a medium is a part of most state standards for communication or media/technology. For example, most grade level ELA standards ask students to make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations at some point in the school year. This can be done in an ELA lesson, but it can also be done to apply ELA standards across disciplines, another important component of most state standards.
- Depending on the time of year, the age of the students, or the students' general readiness, the teacher may need to provide additional support or greater open-endedness to meet students' needs.

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