



Matt: Hey everybody! This is Matt and Laura, and welcome to the Creatively Connected Classroom. We have yet another amazing host with us today, by the name of Scott Nunez, and his topic was about art options in student choice. And so we're really excited to have Scott, who is not an art educator -

Laura: Which is what we love about him.

Matt: In his bio, there are some things we'll talk about. All right, so welcome, Scott. We appreciate you being here, and glad you could join us on the podcast today.

Scott: Hey, thank you.

Laura: So excited to have you. Scott, can you tell us a little bit about your background and what your journey was in becoming an educator? And why you are into creativity in the classroom?

Scott: Yeah, I'd love to. So going into education, I'm fairly new - this is my third year in education - but I'm pretty familiar with it. I was homeschooled for a while, so felt like a teacher in that sense, and helped teach my brothers, being homeschooled alongside them. Being the oldest of the three kids, would help the younger ones out with their things. And so I had that, and what got me into teaching was coaching. And so parents would always come back and say, "Hey! Why don't you teach? Why don't you teach, you're really good at this coaching thing? You love coaching. Pretty much the same thing." When the economy tanked, I started looking at different things. I'm a former graphic designer, and I thought, "Hey. Okay."

Matt: I think we got something in common there, Scott.

Scott: Sorry.

Laura: Yep!

Scott: And then I thought, "Okay. I need to find something that I can actually support my family with. Let's see." And it came down to nursing and education. I started taking classes for both, fell in love with teaching, dropped all the nursing stuff. And I've been all in ever since.



Matt: Wow.

Laura: That's so cool. You're actually the second person on our podcast that we've spoken to that is a public school teacher that maybe grew up in a homeschooled setting, which I find very interesting.

Scott: Yeah.

Laura: Yeah, that's really interesting. And I have cousins that were homeschooled, and I do hear from them that they had to be teachers growing up, in a way. They had to find their own way through that.

Matt: That will either make or break you, I guess, as far as getting you to decide to be a teacher. Either you have a really bad experience with it, or you have a really good experience. And yeah, that inspires you.

Laura: [crosstalk 00:03:10].

Matt: No, absolutely.

Scott: Yeah. Yeah, for me, it was all good, doing the homeschool thing, and I didn't do it for all of my years in education growing up. So I started in 4th grade, and was homeschooled through 8th grade, so four solid years of schooling. And then I went back to public education in high school; I really wanted to do sports, and that was the only way at the time you could do sports, was to go to the public sector, I guess.

Matt: That's cool.

Scott: Yeah.

Matt: So where are you from, and where are you now?

Scott: So I didn't get too far. Born and raised in Modesto, California. And still in Modesto, California. I did go away for a short time - I did a short stint, for about a year and a half, on the coast here in California in a little town called San Luis Obispo.

Laura: We're very familiar with San Luis.

Matt: Actually, Laura and I lived in Fresno.



Scott: Oh, okay.

Matt: And we have really good friends that live in Clovis. But my brothers actually went to school at Cal Poly, in San Luis, so I know that area.

Laura: Yeah, we know that area of the country very well, actually. My first teaching job was in Clovis, California. So I'm curious, also, what you have coached. And are you still coaching?

Scott: Yeah, still coaching. I've only coached swim, and that's what I still coach.

Laura: Okay.

Scott: Been coaching a little over ten years, on and off, mostly on. I started coaching for a rec league, and then transitioned into high school swim. And now I'm the varsity boys' swim coach.

Matt: Awesome.

Laura: Very cool. That's always a juggle, though, having to juggle the coaching responsibilities and the teacher responsibilities.

Matt: And family.

Laura: And the late things, and the weekends at swim meets. And family, and all of those things, it's quite the juggle.

Scott: It's a lot right now, definitely overworked. In a good way, though.

Laura: Yeah.

Scott: I love it. It does energize me, so it doesn't take away. It kind of fills my tank, mentally and just as part of my own wellness. It definitely fills me. But in terms of energy, it's so draining and [inaudible 00:05:33] family. Family's huge for me, so I try and put them first, but now, they're actually kind of second right now with work.

Matt: Happens.

Scott: Work's kind of taken priority. But we'll definitely get back to the proper order of things come summertime.



Laura: Oh, definitely.

Matt: So I guess leading into the topic of your chat, what inspired you, or what lead you into this idea of art options in student choice?

Scott: So I think that goes back to my time in public education as a student. I had a teacher that gave me a D+ in art.

Laura: Ouch.

Scott: I don't blame her. My stuff was not the greatest, but I tried exceptionally hard, and I showed up before class. Or before school, rather, not before class, came after school, got help, and I still got a D+. It wasn't for lack of effort that I got that D+, and that always stood out to me. And I really liked art, and that made it very negative for me, maybe up until my sophomore, junior year in college.

Scott: So for a while, about four or five years, I just didn't do art after that experience. I tried to stay away from it, and that's kind of when I got into graphic design. I had a web design business, and then had to do some graphic design for that, and that brought me out. And then some people saw my artwork ... they saw my little doodles, they were really sketch notes. So when we were in class, I would do associative drawings, and they saw those sketch notes and, "Hey! That's pretty cool, I can see what you're drawing there." And then after getting some positive affirmation, I got back into it a bit. And that makes me really passionate about using that as a choice, to connect my students to the material. And I've had great success with that.

Matt: That's awesome, that you turned that bad experience - which I'm blown away by, the fact that you were putting in that much effort and the teacher still gave you a D+. But anyway, that's for a later conversation, but I'm really glad and excited that you took that negative aspect and didn't just totally cut it out. I mean, you did for a little bit, but you came back to it and you found that as an extra connection to help kids. And I think that's awesome.

Laura: So tell us a little bit how you're using student choice in your classroom, and how you're giving kids artistic options to connect to material that you're teaching.

Scott: Yeah, so I'm really branching out, and still just continuing to offer more options for choice. But I've really narrowed it down to where, "Hey, if this is something where it's information based, and they can show me and tell me, and it doesn't



need to be an essay, then I want to have student choice. And I want to offer art options, I want to offer ed tech options, I want to offer physical options, manipulatives. I don't want to limit my students." And so I do push for the art options, and I offer several. I give them guidelines. But then there's usually some little caveat, some option that allows for a choice beyond the options. And they just need to get that approval from me, they need to come up with a business plan for that option, if you will.

Matt: So the students are still planning, in essence, before they just jump into it.

Scott: Right, right. And I become better and better; each time I do something, I offer more checks and balances. So by the time they get to the end of an assessment, they don't end up with a poor grade, per se, without any feedback. There's many checks for understanding along the way, many opportunities for feedback, and then as part of their grade, we'll go back and we'll look, "Did you take that feedback I offered you? And if you did, then that will improve upon your grade, but if you just keep turning in the same product, for example, then that grade will not advance any further. But if you make modifications to it, you're trying, there's a lot given for effort. And if you're able to convey the same thing ..."

Scott: For example, if we're reading a novel, one thing I want to start doing is rather than just writing essays on symbolism, "Hey, can you show me in an art piece? And then can you verbally, or either on paper, tell me how this fits with the novel?" So if we're talking about To Kill a Mockingbird, maybe some symbols that represent the character of Tom Robinson, or Atticus Finch, the lawyer maybe you could 3D print those. Maybe you could draw those, maybe you can build it out of Popsicle sticks, something like that. Maybe you construct the courthouse based upon the details given in the novel, and then you can detail where everyone is and what's going on verbally, or in a flip grid. There's so many options right now, I don't like to close those off. I like to give them just a few options, but then I have that option where they can choose their own adventure, if you will.

Laura: Yeah, I love that, I love that you're throwing the ed tech options in there as well. I've seen a lot of information lately about Spark Posts, and how you can use Spark Video or Spark Post to create really great tools. And the other thing I was just thinking about, when you were talking about this feedback, is I've been thinking a lot about the feedback loop.



Laura: And I had a really great conversation with an administrator that's also a former coach. And we were talking about how to fine arts and coaches, in particular, are exceptionally good at the formative assessment, because they give that ongoing feedback. Because when we're coaching - for you, it would be at the pool, or I was a volleyball coach - you're in the midst of having to make decisions. You have to correct something when you see it; if you see a kiddo, and they're going up to make a hit on a ball, and the way they take off on their foot is wrong, they're going to get injured. And so you immediately have to correct that, and you give feedback in that moment. So there's something about coaching, I think, that lends itself really well to the classroom in that feedback and formative assessment. Do you find yourself leaning on some of those skills?

Scott: Oh, definitely, and especially after the summer. I went to this conference called School of G-Next, down in San Diego. This year it's in Boca Raton, Florida, but I met Catlin Tucker, and she's all about blended learning. And one of her main things is giving that formative feedback throughout the process. So she doesn't do a lot of grading at the end, and what I've learned from her is that you're really grading in class, and so your grading time outside of class is easier. It's easier to give your student a grade, you're doing visible learning, which incorporates John Haddy's research here.

Laura: Oh, yeah. John Haddy's amazing.

Scott: [inaudible 00:13:07] clarity.

Laura: Yeah.

Scott: They know about what grade they're going to get before they're done, because they've gotten that feedback throughout.

Matt: And if what they choose to do - I'm thinking about those times I've been assistant coach with my dad, wrestling - and it's the same way. It's that immediate, at the moment, constant, immediate feedback.

Laura: Well, and I think that there's, going back to the choice component, and then even if you have a feedback link like that, it really gives students a voice. It gives them the ability to own their learning in a different way. I guess they find more value in it, and they seem to really take ownership of it.



Scott: Yeah, I agree. I've really seen that with some students ... it's not perfect by any means. But a definite improvement. So there was one, for example, we were in a meeting with the parents and some other teachers, and some add-in. The student showcased how much she liked the student options and how her grade turned around in my class once I started offering more options. And then we have the data, of course, to support that; once we gave her more options, she became more invested in the classroom. And she did better that semester, and ended up passing, where she wasn't passing any of her other classes. So that really made me feel good. Now that's not the case with everyone, but it's a growing trend in my classes, and I like that.

Matt: What would you say to somebody who's kind of considering the student choice, and leaving more choices? What are some obstacles, what are some snags, what are some flags that people could be aware of when going into that? Because it's not necessarily for everybody.

Laura: Well, it could be, but I think that it's scary. I think that especially, if you have a curriculum that is pretty boxed in, it's very scary to go outside the box, to do something different. There's this equity conversation around that too. Well I, as an admin, used to hear that from teachers all the time. "Well, if I give this student that choice, then I'd have to give everyone that choice. They all have to do the same thing." I don't know, I know I heard that frequently when I was an assistant principal.

Matt: You said you were teaching in year three now. What are some obstacles that you've come across?

Scott: Yeah, the most surprising one, for me, was admin and parent pushback. Like, "Where are the worksheets?" Really, you're asking me for worksheets? Really, you're not happy I'm doing this? I was blown away by that at first. So having a game plan for that, and just sticking by your data.

Scott: One thing that's really nice is that I use my LMS' mastery tracking. So School G has this mastery tracking - I think different LMS' have it as well - and I use that to showcase, "Hey. If you're doing the work, you're going to pass my class with a C or better. Those that do the in-class work and the small amount of homework I assign for the projects, if you just do those, you're just going to do so much better in my class. You will not fail." And I can show the admin that data, be like, "Hey, look at this. These kids did it. These kids didn't, that's why they're not



doing so well. And we have to find a way to engage them, or they're not doing all of the things." So that'd be number one, just prepare for some kind of pushback. You can't predict that, but just know it's not going to be perfect.

Scott: Second thing would be to start small. I wouldn't go in and do a full choice board for your first one, I would offer minor, or minimal, student choice. Like a this, or a that. And so it could be an art option, or a writing option. That's how I recommend starting, something like that, or offering certain tiers of options. Things like a tic tac toe board, something like that, where you have to have a writing element, have to have an art element, and you have to have a speaking/listening element. Something like that, something that aligns with whatever your standards are. I'm obviously coming from an ELA perspective, so always have to have a reading/writing component, a speaking/listening component. And then I kind of weave the art in there somewhere, I just tack it on as another layer. And students really buy into that.

Susan: Hey there, it's Susan from Education Closet. Did you hear the big news, my friend? The arts integration certification program is open for enrollment. This is only open once per year, and only until March 15. If you've ever thought about expanding your skills in arts integration, or maybe even a career change, be sure to check out this program. And this year, we have something new; you can choose to either take the program with a cohort of others online, or totally independently, at your own time and pace. For all the details, and to apply, head on over to educationcloset.com/certification. Now, let's get back to the conversation.

Scott: I mean, I'm thinking about our current middle school curriculum. We have a lot of self-evaluation, but there's a lot of questioning that's involved there, where kids are having to give their rationale to why they chose a particular thing. If we were talking about elements or principles, what elements do they use, and where they do see it? And how does it work throughout their piece? So they're really having to think and be able to explain past just the immediate one word answer, or the give the why of what they did to choose that.

Laura: Yeah, whenever you offer choices - this is just my humble opinion - I think that there has to be a why. I think that Scott said brilliantly, you have to go back to your standards, you have to look at those standards. You have to unpack the standards, and the teacher has to have a why, but the students have to have a why. And then they have to be able to justify and explain their why. I think that



that's really where you see the mastery of the learning. It's one of those funny things that we hear as art teachers all the time. "I didn't think that there was writing in art class." Oh yes, oh yes there is.

Matt: "Well that's really easy, anybody can just splatter paint everywhere." Well, no, there's actual thought that was involved in that splattering the paint. It wasn't just, "Throw it on and call it good."

Laura: Scott, you mentioned the LMS, and you mentioned Schoology. For some of our listeners, they might not know what an LMS is, I know some school districts still haven't adopted them. And I'm also very curious, and you said that Schoology has a mastery tracker. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Scott: Yeah, so an LMS, it stands for "Learning Management System." So with that, you can house all of your content on there digitally. You can also track your grading. It works as a grade book as well. So my site, my district rather, we have a separate grade book that links up through LTI technology. That acronym, I don't remember, I just know [inaudible 00:21:16].

Laura: You can only remember so many acronyms.

Scott: There's so many acronyms.

Laura: Yeah.

Scott: And that one links up with a lot of other technologies and tools. So I really like that, like Nearpod, or Edpuzzle, or Wake Lit, some of those ed tech tools that can help you curate your information and showcase what you're doing. Now, with the mastery grade tracking, that's really nice, so when I assign an assignment, I can link it to common core state standards. And then a lot of what I'm doing this year too is also grading on a rubric, and I've learned share that rubric right away, not at the end, because then the student can self assess, to their benefit, not to their detriment, to see them. You can put it in student friendly language, but maybe also show them the textbook definition of what you're doing.

Scott: For example, I teach 9th and 10th grade English, so common core state standard, writing for ELA. Number 1, or 10.1, has to do with having a clear thesis. So whenever we're working on our essays, or coming up with a thesis, I can use that. Or it also has something about evidence in there, and so whenever



we're doing any writing, or showing evidence for something, like in a project, I can link that standard to the assignment, and also link it to a particular checkbox, or area, of my rubric.

Scott: So when I go back through and check, I could look and say, "Oh, hey, Jimmy is doing really at doing his topic sentences and his thesis. His background information is great. However, he's really weak at citing evidence, and this is evidence in the last five assignments." So it's really neat, so our district isn't making us do that. I've just put it on myself, but it's been like micro teaching for me. I can go back. "Oh, I messed up on that assignment. They did not do so well. Something wrong there in my teaching." Reflect on that.

Laura: Yeah, the reflective piece of that, being able to look at that. Holy cow.

Scott: As an educator, yeah. As a teacher, you're hoping, at least, to be able to reflect on it and say, "Okay, what didn't work? What did work?" And that sounds like you got the data right there, to see it.

Laura: To identify it. That's amazing. I'm jealous.

Matt: I'll look into that.

Scott: I really like it. Yeah. And they have a free basic version. Now I don't know if the mastery tracking portion is included in the basic, I'd have to follow up on that. But you could always try it out and see if you like it, and then if so, pop for a little bit more and get the mastery tracking, if that's not included.

Laura: We'll have to talk to our ed tech people in our district. Shout out to Schoology.

Scott: Yeah.

Laura: Speaking of ed tech, Scott, you sound like a little bit of an ed tech nerd.

Scott: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

Laura: I'm not judging, I think it's awesome. But you're throwing out terms right and left that I'm like, "What puzzle? That sounds awesome."

Matt: The fact that it's a puzzle in the name.

Laura: Yeah. I like puzzles. So I mean, why? What makes you an ed tech nerd?



Scott: What makes me an ed tech nerd kind of goes back with the graphic design. So I had my own web design company; when I was 12 years old, I taught myself how to code HTML, and then learned a little bit of Java Script. Went along the way, and think I was just ahead of my time. It was during the .com boom, and teachers just didn't know what was going on, and I didn't know how to market myself and be successful.

Matt: Because you were 12, you said.

Scott: Yeah, yeah. Quite a while. Even into my early adulthood. So I did that from about '96 until 2008-ish. So I did that for a while. Actually a little longer. 2010, I did freelancing for a while. Unsuccessfully. It's a tough, tough business. You have to be really talented in something that's happened.

Matt: And have lots of connection. And lots of experience.

Laura: Well, yeah. I think that's a huge part of it, but I will say, you said unsuccessfully. But here's what I would say to that - I think it was very successful, because you brought all of that knowledge into the classroom to share with your students.

Scott: That is the success.

Matt: It was quite successful.

Laura: I think that you tried. Just being able to show kids that perseverance, and you know what? You tried something.

Scott: And it made me better because of it.

Laura: And it wasn't a failure, just because I decided to do something different. I think kids need to see that, I think they need to know that all of our experiences bring us to the point that we are now, and make us this great teacher.

Scott: Yeah, I think that's huge. I think owning your failures, or fail forward, if you will, failing with intent to do better and to get up and try again, and not get down with what I had shared about the art experience, getting that D+. It got me down for a while, but then eventually, I realized, "Hey, that's one person's opinion. And they had a certain set of criteria that they were looking for, and I didn't fit that. But that was only one person, that's not everybody. There's people out there that like my art."



Laura: Yeah, I know for Matt and I, it's devastating to hear that. Oh, it's just hard to hear, that an art teacher. That's just so against our core beliefs as art educators, and as educators period. The idea is to see growth, we're not creating Michelangelos. We're not out there looking for da Vinci, we're out there trying to grow understanding, and one of the things we talk to teachers a lot about is these enduring understandings.

Laura: As an art teacher, I taught 9th and 10th grade mostly, and I was very aware that my students, a lot of them, were there just to get the credit so they could move on. But what I thought of all the time is, "What are they going to take away from this class that's going to stick with them?" What's that one thing? Is it going to be that when they go to a museum and they're 45, and they have their kids in tow, that they'll be able to say, "My art teacher taught me a little bit about composition. And when I look at this, I can kind of break down the pieces, and I understand it a little better." That's really what it's supposed to be about. You know? Yes, you will have the exceptional kids that are the real artys, and they're going to make art their entire life. And that's super awesome and fun, but the majority of the kids, you have to think about, "What are their big takeaways going to be? What is going to be the thing that sticks with them throughout their life?" I always try to think about that.

Scott: Yeah, that's huge, and I think art and English, even though there's a big push for STEM - we have the STEAM movement now - there's a huge push for these art and English and humanities right now, in terms of just marketing. Just from a business standpoint, how do you sell your story, your product? It all comes from that person to person connection. And that comes through a visual aspect, that comes through the written aspect, or the audio aspect.

Scott: And so those things shouldn't be overlooked, and they should be encouraged, and we have so many underachievers. Not a lack of talent, but people that are not applying themselves, or selling themselves short. Maybe they had a teacher like myself, who put them down. I think that's becoming more and more rare, but maybe they haven't felt highlighted, and so when I see those talents, or maybe those talents are budding, I really try and jump on it right away. "Hey, this is good." Just like with coaching. "Oh, what you're doing right now is really good. Right now, keep doing that. You're not quite there yet, but you're going to get better. That purposeful practice will help generate a more perfect product down the line."



Matt: I like that, purposeful practice. As an educator, I think about it all the time. I'll see a kid - and it will frustrate them - but I'll be like, "Okay, that's a good start." And they're like, "But I'm done." I'm like, "No, that's a good start." And so then they go back, and they got to rework it a little bit more, and then they come back. And they're like, "Oh, hey. This actually is a lot better now."

Scott: Right.

Laura: I like that purposeful practice as well. You should coin that.

Scott: I may have taken that. I know I definitely absorbed that from ... I'm trying to think of the piece. I teach it. It's called "Outliers." I don't know what the full [crosstalk 00:31:04]

Laura: I have it on the shelf right here.

Matt: We're very, very emersed in that.

Laura: Is it Malcolm Gladwell?

Scott: Yes, there you go, there you go. The ten thousand hours.

Laura: Yes!

Scott: To become a master at something. So I talk to them about that, like, "Hey, very few of us have this natural talent where we're just going to skyrocket. Most of it comes from purposeful practice, or practicing intentionally to get better. And if you do that, then that's when you can do anything you want." That's where you can fulfill that Walt Disney quote where he says, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

Laura: Right.

Matt: Absolutely. You had mentioned before about your podcast, and I guess you're getting ready to kick off a podcast. Can you tell us a little bit about that, and we'll help promote that a little bit as well?

Scott: Hey, good looking out! Yeah, so I'm starting a podcast later on this week here with my buddy Matt Ketchum, and he's ATOSA - so a teacher on special assignment. He's our district's ed tech coach, and so he's well versed in ed tech. And then I'm interested in ed tech too, as you pointed out and noticed, I'm an



ed tech nerd, if you will. And so our podcast is the TNT ed tech podcast. And so I don't think we have anything on our website right now, but it's tnt -

Laura: I'm sorry.

Matt: All I think about is AC/DC.

Laura: It's the song. I was like, "AC/DC popped in my head right away." That's exactly what it was. Our son loves that song.

Scott: It's a good song. So yeah, imagine that, but with ed tech, right?

Laura: Nice.

Scott: We're blowing up your speakers.

Matt: All right.

Laura: Sounds like a lot of fun. Well, as we come to the close of our little interview here, we always like to ask, "What are your parting words of wisdom that you would like to share with the listeners?" Either about student choice or just your professional practice, what is something that you have found you just feel the need to share as words of wisdom?

Scott: I would say two takeaways. One, don't be afraid and start small with student choice. A this or that option, or maybe three options. Keep it really small, try it out a few times. Once you got it figured out, then expand and offer more and more options, and link those options to standards so you're good. Fit it in your curriculum, do what you're already doing, and just make little tweaks. And then secondarily, because you might be at outlier where you're at, go ahead and find like-minded people. And for me, the best place to do that has been on Twitter, developing a PLN, which is a professional learning network. So connecting with educators like you guys, and getting feedback, seeing what other people are doing, that's the best professional development I've ever had, even though I go to these big conferences across the nation. Twitter and social media is where it's at, in terms of connecting with educators and getting ideas, and being better.

Matt: Yeah.

Laura: Fully agree, 100%.



Matt: Yeah, I can't argue. No, that's our philosophy, and that's what we have -

Laura: That's why we're creatively connected.

Matt: That's right, yeah. All right, well Scott, we certainly appreciate it, and we look forward to talking with you and chatting with you some more via Twitter. And hopefully, eventually, we'll get to meet face to face.

Scott: Oh yeah, I look forward to that.

Laura: Yeah, thank you Scott.

Matt: Thank you, Scott. I appreciate it.

Scott: All right, thanks guys.

Matt: We'll let you know when this airs.

Scott: Okay.

Matt: Thanks!

Laura: Thanks. Bye.

Scott: All right. See you guys.

Susan: Heads up, 7 up, friends. If you've been enjoying these episodes, be sure to subscribe to the creatively connected classroom podcast. You'll get a notification every time we release a new episode each and every week. And take a screenshot and put it on your favorite social media - Twitter, Insta, Facebook, you name it. Tag Education Closet and K-12 Art Chat so we can reach out and say thanks. And if you really love us with all the feels, give us a review and/or a rating over on iTunes. It helps others find the show and connect with our incredible community. Thanks for all your support.