



Choice-Based Art Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making. Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice. This concept supports multiple modes of learning to meet the diverse needs of our students. Learn more at teachingforartisticbehavior.org.

THE FIVE-MINUTE DEMO

BY ANNE BEDRICK

What do you hear when your students arrive? Before I became a choice teacher I often heard, “What are we doing today?” This frequent question made me realize that my students were expecting me to tell them what to create and how. Every day was a surprise. I got to do all the exciting, creative thinking, not them. Their job was to follow my lead. Was I teaching students to comply and follow step-by-step instructions more than I was teaching them to be creative thinkers?

AS AN ART TEACHER I WANT TO HELP BUILD INNOVATORS who ask questions and see possibilities, ones who are self-directed, organized, and can manage their time; ones who have learned to trust in their own judgment and are able to persevere through difficulties. I wondered how I could better meet those goals. Now that I am a choice teacher and have given more responsibility to my students, I am better able to meet those goals.

I start class with a brief five-minute demonstration. During this time, students are not only inspired to explore new concepts or try media that they might not have otherwise considered but they also learn new skills.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU FIT INTO FIVE MINUTES? You probably already keep your demonstrations short, to give your students as much time to work as possible. The five-minute demo will be many of the same lessons that you currently do, only pared down to the essentials. As a choice teacher you are still teaching; the difference is that choice students do not have to do what you show.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, THE FIVE-MINUTE DEMO teaches students where to find materials, possible ways to use them, and important things to know in order to care for them. Once the students can work independently and responsibly, the opening demonstration changes. I might show the difference between using charcoal wet and dry; or, how to do one point perspective or how to make a pinch pot, followed by a discussion about what it could become. Sometimes we use the demonstration time to look at work by master artists, to wonder about and discuss the ideas that inspired them.

When I design demonstrations, I am always trying to leave

my students curious to find out what they can do. I don’t want them thinking, “How can I copy the teacher’s product?” but rather, “What can I do with that idea or technique?”

FIVE MINUTES IS VERY SHORT. Some demonstrations do take longer so I ask myself, “What do I need to tell them? What can I leave out for students to discover for themselves?”

The response to demonstrations will vary. When a demonstration is particularly interesting, students will put their own ideas on hold to try the new activity. And, sometimes, only a handful of students will try it. Some will store the information for when they have finished their current work and some will decide that they are not interested in that medium or technique. Even when students don’t choose to try what you show, they still have absorbed and learned a good deal from the five-minute demonstration and/or discussion.

STUDENTS IN A CHOICE-BASED SETTING are responsible for planning their own work. They look for inspiration in the world around them, from their peers, from their classroom studies, from the materials themselves, and from the teacher’s five-minute demonstration.

Like any other skill, learning to think for yourself takes time, so for students who are not yet able to generate ideas of their own, art class continues to be much as it always was; the teacher shows an idea and they do it. As these students grow more comfortable, they too will select only techniques that they need for their own work.

WHEN NO ONE IS INTERESTED in trying the demonstrated activity, it is time to retire it. That said, consider whether the idea had no relevance to your students or if your timing was just off. If everyone was involved with projects that they couldn’t wait to get back to, then no matter how exciting your demonstration is, no one will try it.

No matter which path your students follow after a demonstration, when they get to choose their work, they will be more enthusiastic about art making and work harder than ever before. Students who think and plan their own projects learn to see inspiration and possibilities in the world around them and are well on their way to becoming creative innovators. ■

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