

## Methods of studio pedagogy

**"The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting"**

Plutarch, Ad 46 - Ad 120

In an earlier article which I had presented in FIAE seminar on art education which happened in Kochi, I was looking at the system of regulating art schools through agencies akin to Council of Architecture and various other issues that can bring shift in the department system of Indian art education. In today's presentation I would like to largely explore issues about teaching practices, process, approaches / strategies. It is also about, in an ideal scheme of things what exactly can we teach students and compare that with what is happening now. Some of the issues mentioned below may not apply to some of the premier institutions like Baroda or Santiniketan. In the larger picture of art education in India they are an anomaly. But a large number of institutions, like the seventy or so art schools we have in Karnataka face a different set of issues. Since the students are learn and completing their courses in these schools as well we have to include them in the discussion.

The first part of my focus is on - at a metaphorical / philosophical level - what exactly are we giving the students. Are we giving the students the Fruit or the Seed!

'Fruit' would be : skills, rules and regulations and expected outcomes, tangible or measurable. This I can say is teacher centric process.

There is a professed tradition that is flowing and it is being passed on. Somebody else has nurtured and grown the fruit and it is being given to the student now. It encourages 'What is' / status quo / readymade answers . When I ask the question 'Why is it like that?'- answer - 'It is so'. Result oriented approach / take-aways / deliverables.

It can also inadvertently become a transference of conditioning / prejudices held by the teacher about what is art and what is not; good art and bad art, to the student without questioning or deliberation. It can also be seen as passing on domain knowledge beyond which the student can travel. There is thin line here - it may aid or hinder in going beyond the prescribed boundaries depending on the way teaching happens - if these rules and regulation are handed down with a heavy hand demanding strict adherence, then the student may find it difficult to unshackle herself, but if it is given lightly it may become an enabler. But normally they are caught in a reward / punishment cycle. (I know of teachers who insist on pencil shading using only 45 degree lines. Nothing else is allowed. Passing on rotten fruit. " I'm teaching my students whatever I know sincerely" may not be good enough)

'Seed' would be the intangible aspect of the process, it is an insight acquired by the student which can be applied by her in variety of ways, in different situations at a different point of time. The results may not be seen immediately, impact not measurable. A shift in thinking, a compelling idea, an understanding which takes deep root and will grow and bloom at some point when the situation is right. 'Seed' what is learned / acquired in the process of doing an exercise or during discussion or reflection by the student. Even after the assignment is over this insight lingers on. It brings in a sense wonder, curiosity and capacity to explore. The seed will enable the student to make her own interpretations. (Example of Vidyalankara Prof. S.K. Ramacahndra Rao teaching us Indian aesthetics. He had spoken about Samhitas: Prabhu Samhita, Mitra Samhita, Kanta Samhita in 1987. The ideas remained with me and recently I made a presentation on applying these Samhita principle to better understand Indian advertising.) It gives her courage to defy and break rules and in the process nurture her individuality. It encourages to explore 'What can be', future. This I can say is student centric process.

Teaching in 'Seed' mode, is using process oriented method. So that the student understands the process of creating a work of art, from idea to execution and next time she is not dependent on the teacher. The emphasis is not so much on the result but following process so that student becomes independent. The idea is to give the student enough tools and processes to break away from the existing conditioning.

To grow creativity, ideally, what is needed is not '**what is**' but '**what can be**'; Or a healthy combination of both, so that the domain knowledge of 'what is' can give the understanding of the present to that the student and encourage him to go beyond the existing limits and enter the realm future.

If the teaching is emphasizing at 'what is' even the present practices of evaluation, internal marking or external jury, exams and so on also lean heavily on the side of 'fruit'. The valuator is looking for measurable outcomes, however subjective it is. The student has been given a fruit and he has to lob it back, with some modification but not too much of deviation. Also because it may be difficult to set parameters to evaluate the seed, since each one is essentially different and at different stages of growth.

### **What can be taught?**

Normally the word skill is used only to denote an ability to achieve academic realism in the work or better still hyper realistic rendering capabilities of the students. When she has this ability the student is told that she has good skills. But there are many more skill sets required to become a complete or good artist which the students have to acquire, which are either given

less importance in today's art schools or totally non-existent. If we can unpack the skill sets to be learnt by the present day student it will reveal the complexity of learning process

**Observation skills:**

- To become visually sensitive.
- To see what is in front of the student in great detail
- Looking at a work of art with great care

**Drawing, rendering and documenting skills:**

- Hand - eye coordination skills, drawing and rendering skills
- Skills in handling various materials
- Ability to choose appropriate tools / mediums and use them in effective ways

**Fundamental understanding of visual language:**

- Understanding line, form, colour, texture, space; scale, position, orientation
- Understanding principles of organization
- Developing aesthetic sense

**Visualization / conceptualization skills:**

- How to give shape to an idea - initial notations, exploration, refinement
- Conceptualize and idea

**Imagination / creativity:**

- To bring imagination into play and generate creative ideas
- Think in abstract terms / go beyond the visible. Move between tangible and intangible
- Old and new dialogue; achieving valuable change
- Disruptive and non-disruptive creativity

**Divergent thinking skills:**

- Non-linear thinking
- To give and accept more than one answer for a given problem
- To practice cross pollination of ideas / cultivate multi disciplinary approach

**Translation / transformation skills:**

- Transform what is seen or an experience into unique, individual output
- Translate experience of other senses into visuals

### **Understanding meaning making process and various creative strategies:**

observe / document / Transform / suggest / exaggerate / stylize

proximity / frame/ association / scale /

make invisible visible / create visual metaphor

combine / fuse / synthesize

distortion / displace / shift / repurpose / change context / deconstruct

abstract / refine / simplify

defy expectation / question taboo /

revisit / revive dialogue with past

irony / subvert

### **Ability to question:**

- Critical thinking / Framing the right question / Defy convention

### **Articulation and Communication skills:**

- Jargon and using appropriate language; self-reflective abilities, writing and articulating about one's own work

### **Theoretical and historical perspective:**

- Understanding theoretical ideas and historical perspective

### **Collaborating skills:**

- Ability to work with others

### **Co-opting technology :**

- Co-opting technology as an extended possibility; Using Internet as an exploratory device and learning tool.

### **Understanding structure of the art worlds:**

Hierarchies, power equations, forces which shape the art world, process validation and circulation, Institutions and individual players and the roles they play.

**Problem solving skills:**

Defining the task, figuring ways to solve it with available resources. Application of the understanding and insights acquired so far in a new situation.

Applying the same understanding in evaluating the student will actually reveal more about her capabilities and weaknesses with clarity. If this is difficult to become part of the conventional marks card, then an attached report may be enough to record teachers observations in detail.

**Process oriented teaching / learning:** It is accepted that when learning is achieved by doing, or going through a process there is a better understanding /absorption by the student. Especially in higher semesters, the exercise themselves can be designed as complex problems through which students are taken through in stages. Initially each exercise can foreground one or two skill sets while rest will play a supportive role. Exercise can also be designed in such a way as to take students on a journey from tangible to intangible and facilitate acquiring insights during the process and the accompanied discussions.

It would also be essential to differentiate between teaching and learning before I end. Learning where the onus is more on the student. A student centric approach will bring about the unique talent and diversity inherent in each student, rather than moulding them in the shape of the teacher's replica. The teacher will become a guide, mentor or facilitator. For me a good teacher is a continuous learner. Somebody who can inspire the student by her hunger for learning and growing and a good student will reciprocate this.

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