

Barbara Guttman

The Change of Power Paradigm

Nonviolent communication in art education

(Synopsis)

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1. Problems addressed by the doctoral thesis

It has been a general world tendency in the past two decades, that there is an awareness that the current education system needs to be changed. Every few years we witness educational authorities initiating some kind of change. However, the problems seem to remain the same: the academic success of a student has little relevance to their professional success in life; receiving higher education no longer guarantees finding a job or having a higher income, students are bored in schools and they dislike learning while teachers make enormous efforts to motivate them and make them to learn. Furthermore, schools structures seem to be less and less fit to cope with the changes our society has been facing.

Beside this, a great gap can be noticed between what the academic world knows about the teaching-learning process and its application in everyday classroom situations. Even though the sciences of psychology, pedagogy, neurology, biology and even anthropology have decades long theoretical and empirical knowledge about how humans learn and how the teaching-learning process can be made an easy, joyful and meaningful activity, it seem not to be in correlation with the kind of education we have in the vast majority of schools today.

Since 1917 the art scene has been marked by the cognitive shift initiated by Duchamp's ready-made objects. This shift made possible the appearance of a diversity of approaches, opinions, truths and materials used for creating visual art through the 20th and

21st century. Art schools addressed these questions in twoways: either by adding additional subjects to the already existing modernist model or by the creation of a post-modern approach. However, both approaches were only partly successful, failing to either grasp the problem of diversity of materials and approaches to art or to pay attention to human relations which are an essential factor in learning.

A more recent change affecting both general and art education has occurred since the widespread use of internet. The easy access to and the fast and decentralized flow of information as well as the ability to organize in groups of interests and connect to other people regardless of geographic distance and time, has started to affect ideas about learning and how learning can be organized. It has become an ongoing challenge -questioning the structure of art education and how art can be taught in such a rapidly changing world and how to prepare the students of today for the art scene of tomorrow.

2. The intentions of the research

This thesis has been an effort to address the above mentioned questions by collecting knowledge and experience from the fields of psychology, pedagogy, neurology, linguistics, anthropology and nonviolent communication (NVC) and integrating it into art education. Its intention is to contribute to the creation of an education system where learning is seen as a basic human need which is meaningful, pleasurable, autotelic and self initiated if given the right environment. Some problems art students may face while learning to draw are observed, approached and explained through this interdisciplinary proposal. Finally, a new educational approach and model, based on a shift in learning and the organization of the teaching- learning process is suggested.

3. The structure of the thesis

The first chapter gives an introduction to topics in the fields of psychology and pedagogy which can be relevant to art education. It suggests that psychological factors, more precisely intelligence, intropersonal, and intrapersonal may influence the way we learn art. Aspects of human intelligence related to creativity, visual expression and making art are shown in 1.1. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Daniel Goleman's research on emotional intelligence are discussed. A connection between feelings and learning is elaborated in 1.2. This subchapter shows how positive and

negative feelings can influence our ability to act and react and it suggests a “state of flow” as the ideal environment for learning and creative expression. Conditions for the appearance of flow are also explained. The importance of a teacher’s personality to the whole teaching-learning process is shown in 1.3. This subchapter suggests an approach to education where working as a teacher does not mean playing a role, but rather requires a genuine presence of the whole personality, which will correlate with subchapter 1.4 where teacher-student relationship is discussed. The same subchapter also discusses the influence of the student-student relationship to one’s progress in learning. Finally in 1.6, the importance and the influence of groups on learning art are shown. Since humans are biologically predisposed to live with, interact with and learn from members of a group, the group is proposed to be the most natural, the most stimulating and supportive learning environment.

Chapter Two presents decades of the experiences of educational models that are based on the value of human freedom (2.1.). Examples are given to show how learning is a natural need of every human being which is autotelic if allowed freedom. The chapter also presents two different structural models in education, one with a hierarchy based on power of position and knowledge, and another one with a functional hierarchy where all participants of education enjoy equality (2.2.1. and 2.2.2.). The concept of functional hierarchy is illustrated with several cases of successfully run schools and courses.

The third chapter of this thesis deals with the question of the drawing gap. The phenomenon of artistic decline in children aged 10-12 is explained by the different theories of Betty Edwards (3.1.), Zsuzsa Gérő and Andrea Karpati (3.2.).

The fourth chapter presents the basics of NVC. The way the NVC paradigm differs from the usual one reveals how we feel is not caused by something that is happening to us or by what another person does, but because a need of ours was or was not met. This paradigm marks a general shift in approaching problems and people, as connecting to and understanding needs becomes the primary focus. In 4.2, the two modes of NVC connection, empathic (active) listening and genuine self-expression are explained, and it is suggested that communication flows more harmoniously if these two modes are not mixed. 4.3 describes the four basic steps of the NVC structure: Observation, Feelings, Needs and Request; giving examples for each.

Chapter five compares the difficulties students in art schools may face in their drawing lessons with the drawing gap (5.3). These two problems are examined from the NVC point of view and its understanding of judgemental attitudes (5.1). It is shown that the judgmental mental model may be the potential cause of difficulties in achieving progress in drawing for both for children aged 10-12 and art students, and that it may mean that we are talking about one problem (5.3. and 5.3.). In 5.4, the efficiency of Betty Edwards' drawing exercises is explained, with the creation of non-judgmental thinking patterns in students which lead to a state of flow. Finally in 5.6, three elements; syncretism, flow and non-judgmental approach are suggested to be the basic elements of a problem-free development and self-expression in drawing.

The sixth and final chapter suggests a teaching-learning model for visual art education. In 6.1, changes relevant to general education which occurred in the 20th and the 21st century are presented. In 6.1.1, the influence of the internet on the flow of information is explained, while 6.1.2 deals with the influence of the internet on the organization of learning and the appearance of self-initiated flat hierarchy among internet users. In 6.2, some changes which occurred in visual arts throughout the 20th and the 21st century are discussed, mainly stressing the influence of Duchamp's *Fountain* on diversity in artistic expression in the past 100 years. Subchapter 6.4 presents a new teaching-learning model, named the Diamond Model, which is based on functional hierarchy and the value system of NVC. The Diamond Model is suggested as relevant to current challenges the educational system faces in 6.4.2. In 6.5, its relevance to contemporary art education is elaborated. Relevance and advantages of the Diamond Model for art education are explained in 6.5.2. Finally, the suggested method is illustrated with my personal experience of applying elements of the Diamond Model to drawing lessons given by the author.

4. Conclusion

Learning is a basic human need which can be a meaningful, pleasurable, autotelic and self-initiated activity if given the right environment and approach. A thorough change of education is needed – not only in the way we teach or how schools are organized, but primarily in the way we *think* about education: what education is and should be. Knowledge and decades-long experience of other sciences such as psychology, pedagogy, neurology, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, etc. can be a valuable source for helping and understanding of need for this change. However, the way we structure education and what

methods are recommended are not sufficient. In order to truly create a deep shift in the education system, a shift on a personal level or more precisely a change in the personality of teachers need to happen as well.

A nonviolent communication paradigm used in art education offers remedies for restoring the natural human love of learning, development and self-expression. It can be used to understand and help problems art students may face while learning visual art and give them technical tools to overcome these problems. Besides providing a different attitude to learning and the organization of learning arts, it also provides necessary technical tools for the practical realisation of this approach. Furthermore, its focus on human needs provides a structure which is able to accept and manage people with diverse or even opposite ideas, values and attitudes and which can particularly be helpful for learning visual arts at the beginning of the 21st Century.

According to the new paradigm suggested in this thesis, the task of the educators of the future is to awaken, support and nurture these natural human potentials in a learning environment which is free, supportive and compassionate and whose aim is to serve students' need for learning instead of standardized knowledge. This can lay the ground for the creation of an education system which is more genuine and more likely to support and meet the *real* learning needs of students and teachers. Beside this, it can contribute to learning being a meaningful and fulfilling activity.

The Nonviolent Communication Paradigm can also be used to address the cognitive models of students and to support them in developing a nonjudgmental attitude towards themselves and their work. In this way students can be stimulated to self-create the three elements helpful for the development of drawing: non-judgmental thinking patterns, flow and syncretism.

The Diamond Model is an effort to offer a new educational structure, which will be better able to cope with current changes and diversity in the art world. It abolishes the old power hierarchy in education and introduces a more egalitarian structure and allows students and teachers to benefit from interacting and learning from one another. It allows learning which is more personal and which connects with other members in the group to encourage creativity and knowledge acquisition. It also creates a non-judgmental learning environment based on freedom, acceptance and compassionate connection, which are essential factors for meaningful learning and appearance of flow. This is essential when learning to make arts and expressing ourselves creatively.