

MANIFESTO

DESIGNER AS THE CRAFTSPERSON - Inclusion of crafts in early education & beyond.

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PHILOSOPHY & IDEAS:

In today's age the aim of education and specifically art education should be to develop critical thinkers who are ready to approach life and its problems with a can-do attitude towards problem solving.

My personal teaching philosophy is based on mutual dialogue and questioning between the learner and the teacher. I also believe in giving freedom to the learner to experiment and explore which eventually leads them to be independent decision makers and creative thinkers.

Schools and Institutes should not be creating merely worker drones that fit into particular kinds of industry, dependent on their education and the institute to serve the larger interest of the industrialist. The learner should be a holistic individual serving a purpose and playing their part in the spectrum of the society and life. With an open mindedness to strive for various career options.

To achieve this, it is important to work at grassroot levels and not approach it at later years at the university level. Because by that time the learner has already been prepared and trained for a certain lifestyle and life. To unlearn all that in a limited time period of 4 years is an almost impossible task. Therefore as mentioned earlier the change should be generated from the early years' education. Childhood is the time when seeds for almost anything can be sown that can reach the fruition state in adulthood.

So the seed for questioning, experimentation, exploration and investigation should be sown at this very stage along with introduction to local cultures, crafts and alternate career paths.

In my short span of teaching and a longer one of working in the industry I have realised that crafts are a very important element of any culture and society. They are reflective of that culture's values and local resources. The current need is not only to revive and intervene with the crafts but to look at them as a living heritage that is to be passed on to the coming generations.

To achieve this I believe the better approach is the *designer as the craftsman* instead of the traditional way where the designer works with the craftsman. This requires a mindset shift, training for which starts at an earlier age and so that it can become an integral part of the designer/craftsman's lifestyle and choices.

INFLUENCES:

I have been influenced by the following:

1. Froebel
2. Bauhaus
3. Finland's Education Reforms

All three of these are from very different eras in history but they all have a few things in common. First is a holistic approach to education. Secondly they all involve hands on learning and collaborative experiences. Lastly they all support crafts in some form or the other.

FROEBEL: His philosophy revolves around the understanding that learning is not compartmentalised rather it is a holistic process. His method is learner centric where children learn through play and collaboration with their peers. He also introduces them to gifts (toys) which act as a basis for future problem solving and time management skills. The emphasis is laid on what the learner can do instead of what they can not do. Along with the gifts there is use of clay and drawing as well.

My take away: Froebel made me understand that basics of knowledge and skills should be provided and then learners should be allowed to explore and experiment.

BAUHAUS: Bauhaus School of thought believed in function preceding form. In Bauhaus School students were given a one year education called foundation course where they were introduced to the basics that were taken up and applied in detail in the rest of the three years at the school. This is also resonant of the Froebel's philosophy to some extent.

Here the practicing artist/architects were also the teachers bringing back some form of master apprentice relationship.

Another point that Bauhaus stressed upon was crafts and industry eventually working together along with this they believed in the designer and artist working with the craftsperson to improve the quality and aesthetics of the craft products.

My take away: Crafts and industry are vastly different in their DNA, they cannot meet at any point and be one. It will always be an either or situation. Introducing and training students in crafts at a later stage creates an alienation between them as designers and the craftsperson as a labor. To overcome this I believe crafts should be a part of life from the very beginning of the child's educational journey.

In Conversation With: The British approach to the local Indian crafts. Even though it was very imperialistic of them to think that they needed to teach the indian craftsperson a better aesthetic vis-a-vis the British one to appeal to the British masses. *But what this*

made me realise was that crafts need to be upgraded with current times so that they remain relevant and not die out. One way of achieving this is to pump new blood in the crafts community in the form of fresh ideas by a new generation of craftspeople who are not necessarily inheriting the crafts from their forefathers.

FINLAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: Finland reformed their education system in the 1970s and the 1980s making it more holistic. They work on the philosophy of cooperation and not of competition in their schools therefore promoting collaborative projects from early on. But the most important change that they made is the inclusion of crafts in their schooling from the beginning. It teaches the learners to develop critical thinking skills, material understanding, processes, techniques and technology. It also introduces learners to local crafts and resources and develops an entrepreneurial spirit. This approach opens up opportunities for alternate career paths, those interested in traditional professions like medicine or engineering can opt for extra testing and university education. Even they would have had the experience of delving into arts and crafts which will make them better humans and professionals.

My take away: *Integrating crafts with early education helps in transforming the learners' attitude towards learning and exposes them to craft cultures.*

After looking at all three of the above movements and philosophies I have gathered that crafts are integral in teaching students problem solving, critical thinking, collaborative approach, creative thinking, material exploration, investigation, idea generation, observational skills, and exposure to alternate lifestyles, career paths and cultures. And instills in them the importance of understanding the crafts as living heritage which is important for the survival of any cultural heritage.

STRATEGY:

Since I teach undergrads this was my starting point. I believe that crafts should be an intrinsic part of the art and design education. But one thing that I have noticed is that it is difficult to introduce the student to crafts at such a later stage in life or to make them appreciate the handmade. And all our courses either intervene with the design or with the process of the artisan's craft. Which led me to think Why can't the designer and the craftsman be one? Why do the two have to be separate?

I am proposing to adopt a similar strategy as Finland and introduce crafts in all schools at primary and secondary level as a compulsory part of the curriculum. It would be introduced in stages with different goals at each level. Crafts will be taught keeping in mind the current times, local crafts and resources available in a particular area. Since the aim is to promote and support local crafts therefore in each province different crafts

will be taught as per the local practice. Which would further be divided according to cities and towns.

Four major approaches to teaching crafts should be kept in mind under which all the studies would proceed; these are similar to Finland's approach but will be modified to our local crafts, environment, society and resources.

Skills & Design:

Skills of the craft and understanding of the design principles. And devising forms and products that address current needs.

Society & Culture:

Exposure to the craftsperson's culture and work environment and seeing how it can be incorporated in the learners' own environment and the larger approach to societal needs with respect to local crafts and resources.

Art & Technology

Combining crafts, design and technology to get better results. An interdisciplinary approach to arts and sciences keeping the crafts and their ecology in the forefront.

Crafts Appreciation & Entrepreneurship:

Inculcating the appreciation of the handmade and the artisanal. Also taking an entrepreneurial approach to crafts so that in future the learner can combine the two together.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

First step is to have a visual introduction to local crafts at the primary school's level. This can be done by showing the young learners the products and pieces made with these crafts and involving the learners in discussions and reflections about the pieces and crafts.

Next step will be to introduce the learners to the materials and age appropriate tools.

At this stage the learners will be allowed to delve into the actual making with the use of tools and materials. The aim will be to let the learner develop a relationship with the material and create from imagination rather than aiming for a proper functional form.

And gradually move them towards more techniques and guide them towards problem solving skills.

More emphasis should be on playing with the material and understanding its properties so that collaborative and investigative skills are developed.

SECONDARY:

At the secondary school level learners will build on their prior knowledge and skills and further enhance them to design better solutions through the crafts.

Next step will be an introduction to the craftsperson's working environment in the form of field trips and workshops in the actual environment. Both these activities will not only increase the learners' visual vocabulary and develop observation skills in the students but will also give them first hand experience of the crafts' cultures and environment. At this stage technology will also be involved in problem solving.

Learners should be encouraged to reflect in terms of what is the local crafts culture, what is their stance on it and how they see it. What can be done to make it better.

ART UNIVERSITY:

At this stage specialising in chosen crafts will take place if the student is aiming for craft related studies. And creating designers who will consider themselves as the craftsperson instead of simply guiding the craftsperson. They will also be looking at their chosen craft as a future entrepreneurial opportunity. Concentration will be on the techniques and technology along with the societal requirements.

CONCLUSION:

I strongly believe that incorporating crafts in our educational system is the way to create well rounded individuals who have 21st century skills. And is also the way forward for our local crafts.

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