



Is Teaching an Art or a Craft, or Both?

M. Yeşim Alkaya Yener*

Abstract

There have been so many viewpoints brought forward by scholars and other researchers about teaching being an art or a craft. These viewpoints form a wide spectrum from some seeing teaching as purely art and teacher as artist to others seeing it as a combination of the two. Although some researchers see teaching as not a science but an art, a thorough investigation of the subject will reveal the fact that this perspective does not fit the reality. When one thinks of the fact that art originally started within craft, one would also realize that these two terms, art and craft, are tightly interconnected and rely upon each other for success. For the same reason, teaching incorporates both art and craft as its core components and benefits from them.

Keywords: Teaching, teacher, art, craft.

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Hacettepe University, Ankara State Conservatory, Piano Division, Ankara, Turkey.
E-mail: yealka@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Is teaching an art, that one has to be born with the necessary skill to master it, or a craft, that can be learned and improved? Should we look at teachers as artists who are born with necessary skills and not made, or as craftsmen who may or may not be born with certain skills but can learn and improve themselves to master the subject of teaching? This has fired up so many discussions in educational discourse.

The word "art" is coming from Latin "ar" which means to join, fit together. Furthermore, its definition is given, in Webster's New World Dictionary (1991, p.77), as "human ability to make things; creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature; skill, craftsmanship, creative work or its principles (the cobbler's art, the physician's art), etc." The same dictionary (p.322) defines the word "craft" as "a special skill, art, or dexterity; an occupation requiring special skill; especially any of the manual arts, etc." The dictionary makes a distinction between art and craft as saying "... craft is distinguished from art in its application to a lesser skill involving little or no creative thought." As we can see, even in the dictionary we are not able to get a clear distinction between art and craft. Notice the underlined words in the quotation, the words art and craftsmanship are used to explain each other. While the authors of the dictionary are trying to make a distinction between the two words, they, at the same time, are showing that it is impossible to separate them from each other.

It is not fair to say for craft that it involves lesser skill with little or no creative thought. I think craft is the oldest art, or should I say, it is the predecessor of art. Before art there was craft; it started with the needs of human beings. Every simple tool that primitive humans made required some kind of craftsmanship. The first important goal was the practicality of the tools and not beauty. Later on, humans added beauty to the things they made. An aesthetically beautiful and nicely shaped tool served the primitive man much better than a tool made roughly and carelessly. Man soon discovered the relationship between beauty, symmetry and functionality.

FINDINGS

With the development of civilization, naturally, the needs of human beings were upgraded. As they solved their day-to-day problems for survival, they became more and more interested in different needs, like jewelry, better patterns on dresses, decorations, music, painting, literature, and so on... This is when we see art coming into being, because of the human interest in aesthetic. Art was born in craft. The first drawings on cave walls were for the purpose of explaining events through the pictures of objects. Singing started with the need to express the feelings after the events that affected humans. Still today, in certain cultures, when someone dies the relatives create a song mourning the loss. Later of course singing was formalized with vocal training and became an art form. For centuries craftsmen served societies in every aspect.

An artist has to have craftsmanship to be able to accurately transform his imagery creation into an actual solid being. Therefore, the definitions of art and craft

are overlapping. The first two chapters of Collingwood's The Principles of Art are about distinguishing the concepts of art and craft:

"The two are (art and craft) nowadays overlapping concepts and were once coextensive (up to the seventieth century), the modern conception of art is essentially different from that of craft. That is, though contingently related to art, craft is neither necessary nor sufficient for art as presently conceived. To think otherwise is to fall prey to a "technical theory of art" which either treats art as the preconceived end of stereotypical means or such amusement, instruction, or advertisement."¹

"Although Collinwood likes to distinguish art from craft, he admits the continues influence of craft on art: "Great artistic powers may produce fine works of art even though the technique is defective; and even the most finished technique will not produce the finest sort of work in their absence; but all the same, no work of art whatever can be produced without some degree of technical skill, and, other things being equal, the better the technique the better will be the work of art."²

Collingwood's six characteristics of craft are intended to illuminate the traditional meaning of the term as "the power to produce a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and directed action":

- 1) Craft always involves a distinction between means and end.
- 2) A distinction between planning and execution implied by foreknowledge of results.
- 3) The ends are prior to the means in planning and conversely in execution.
- 4) A distinction between raw material and finished product or artifact.
- 5) A distinction between form, or the changes wrought by craft and the matter identical in raw material and finished product.
- 6) A tripartite hierarchical relation between various crafts, one supplying what another needs, one using what another provides in which the finished product of one craft is the raw material of another; there is a "hierarchy of means" whereby one craft supplies another with tools; or there is a "hierarchy of parts" where different trades or crafts are enlisted to produce the separate parts, say, of an automobile.³

Some scholars have denied creativity to craft, claiming its aims and products are fully preconceived, and therefore leaves insignificant room for imagination. On the other hand, art has been always seen as a creative progress. An artist does know what he wants but at the same time he does not know how the work will be when it is completed. Maitland's sentences explain the paradox very well:

¹ R.G.Collingwood, The Principles of Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), chs. 1 and 2.

²Ibid., p.26.

³Ibid., pp.15-17

“To foresee the results of creative work is a logical impossibility given this view: if the artist has a clear idea of the results toward which he is aiming, then either he is not engaged in creative work, or the clear idea itself the final result of a creative act that has already occurred. Yet, in some way, the artist must know what he is about and where he is heading. Otherwise, he would be unable to make aesthetically discriminating or relevant choices or to correct his mistakes.”¹

Now, after all this said about art and craft, what is teaching and a teacher? An art and an artist or a craft and a craftsman? What are the similarities between the activity of the artist and that of the teacher? Here are some opinions of various teachers and scholars on the notion, as presented in Smith's book *Aesthetics and Problems of Education*:

“A distinguished teacher of the classics] "I believe that teaching is an art not a science....Teaching is not like inducing a Chemical reaction: it is much more like painting a picture or making a piece of music, or on a lower level like planting a garden or writing a friendly letter."

“A professor of philosophy on the nature of learning] "Education ...is very far from being a performance in which the learner is a mere passive spectator. If the subject is to detain him, fix his thought, and feed his interest...his attitude toward the subject must resemble very closely that of an artist toward his material...[He] must be prepared to enter into that complex relation of submission and mastery from which the "discipline" of art emerges."

“A philosopher of art] "Teaching itself may be considered an art, and not in the merely technical sense of the word. A teacher manages a complex of qualities. What he sees developing between the students and himself. His aim is always increased communication, i.e., participation in the social process."

“The president of a major teachers college] "...the treatment of teaching as a form of art. Here the field of teacher education has splendid opportunities for new development. If we can find the intelligence and the imagination to examine and study the art of teaching as we have other performing and interpretive arts, we may be able to add an element of immeasurable importance to teacher education."

“An educational researcher] "The artist is...the prototype of the teacher.... The art of teaching lies... in communication and projection of an essentially private experience.... The art of teaching is as valid a subject for artistic criticism... as is the painter's canvas."

“A Philosopher of education]"... the effective lecturer who is capable of promoting learning in his students has rendered his performance into a work of art.... It arouses emotion; it is carefully and formally organized with a view to the emotions enhancing the content... and its direct and immediate effect on an audience is aesthetic in quality." ²

¹Jeffrey Maitland, "Creativity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34 (1976), p.397.

²R.A. Smith, *Aesthetics and Problems of Education*, Ralph A. Smith ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 564-565.

As we can see in these quotations, there are very sharp opinions like "... teaching is an art, not a science..." Of course we can understandably say that teaching can and should incorporate aesthetic elements, but one has to understand that there is a serious amount of science involved in teaching. It may not be like mathematics having certain solutions and formulas to certain problems, but, it has many paths that are open to any teacher who is willing to explore and improve. In fact, teaching is a science that benefits from other sciences, like psychology, sociology, etc. For instance, any teacher of any subject area has to know about human psychology so that he/she can have a healthy relationship and keep good communication with his or her students. The opinions quoted above are romantic approaches to teaching. In reality, there is much more to teaching than just being an art and an artist's creative canvas.

Anyone can say that he is a born teacher and has every necessary skill to master the act of teaching. But would it be true? One of the most important differences between teaching and art is that teaching is performed interactively between the student and the teacher. This means that the result of the teacher's performance is the student, and the average class achievement is the solid indication of his success. Thus teaching is expected to have measurable results. But the same expectation does not apply to a performance or acting. We can not test the audience in real meaning. In other words, evaluation of a teacher can be done more objectively than that of an artist. Evaluation of artists of any kind is usually done in a more subjective way. So many painters, composers, writers and poets had not been understood in their own times by the society and therefore their works were not given the deserved value. Later their works were understood and they became famous artists. Were they bad artists before? Not really. There might be so many reasons why they were not appreciated like others, we do not know. But what we know is that the treatment of these artists by the society was certainly a subjective one. We would not see this happening to a teacher. A teacher is evaluated easily, after a couple semesters of teaching, by looking at his students.

If the teacher is an artist, then he is either a performing or a creative one. The best fitting is the performing artist, because teachers perform in front of an audience, their students. As I mentioned before, the relationship of the teacher to his students and that of the performer to his audience is very different that the audience of the performer are passive listeners whereas the students of the teacher can be active during the class period. Students are not artistic materials, they are more intractable.

There are other differences. Artists are freer, compared to teachers, in terms of imagination and how they would realize it. However, teachers are bound to follow certain rules and regulations. An artist's responsibility is, mainly, to himself, whereas, a teacher has to observe the students' needs, mood, level, etc. Another difference is that teachers, usually, have a clear idea of course objectives, and they have a goal to reach at the end of the last class. Everything is prearranged, supposedly, and set to specific times. On the other hand, artists know what they want to create, but, during the course of creation, things may change dramatically and constantly. The time table to complete the work can sway significantly as well, depending on the artist's mood and the spiritual state. They have the freedom; they

create anything they want and use their time and materials however they want. This is a major difference between teachers and artists.

An artist is concerned about aesthetic elements. He is judged by these criteria. In art, aesthetic standards are preeminent, whereas in teaching, appraisal of learning is the most important goal and aesthetic judgments and criteria are of secondary importance. This does not mean that the aesthetic elements are not important in teaching, because they are. For instance, aesthetic qualities of a teacher can be very influencing and effective in teaching. Aesthetics in a teacher's behavior, speech, dressing, organization, in his treatment of the students are very important, but these are not the main goal. The primary aim in teaching is to help students learn the subject as much as possible. If the goal is learning, then aesthetics are some of the vehicles that would help us to reach the goal.

Teaching is closer to craft than it is to art and teaching can be taught. Like everything, it requires hard work, research, practice and experience. The common assumption that teachers are artists who are born with certain skills is an easy way out. However, this is far from reflecting the reality. How important are these skills and how much do they mean without discovering and working on them, or without crowning them with knowledge and hard work? We do not know how many people have super talent for a certain art form but are doing something else. To have certain biological advantages is just the beginning. Of course we have to have two legs to be an athlete, but having an athletic body does not give us the real advantage. Practice and conscious hard work is the key that will help us to stand out among others. Having sensitive ears and a capable brain does not make us musicians, what makes us musicians and artists is the years of learning, training and an enormous amount of practice and detailed work. Eble gives a good example in his book *The Craft of Teaching*:

“The marginal truth in this belief applies no more to teaching than it does to any occupation, profession, or skill. Hence, there are born actors, born salespeople, born politicians, born comedians, born athletes, and may be born doctors, dentists, engineers, seamstresses, and certified public accountants. Athletes come closest to being born-anything; a seven-foot male with good hands, fast reflexes, and sharp peripheral vision can hardly escape being a born basketball player. Yet even natural athletes spend an unnatural amount of time conditioning their bodies, acquiring skills, and practicing amidst conditions of intense competition. Potentially great teachers become great teachers by the same route: through conditioning their mind and spirit and body, acquiring skills, and practicing in respectful competition with great teachers living and dead.”¹

¹Kenneth E. Eble, *The Craft of Teaching: A Guide to Mastering the Professor's Art* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976), p. 21.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Some teachers may have certain natural advantages, like a nice speaking voice, sympathetic personality, good looks, charm, etc. Nevertheless, these are not the most important things to begin with. It is the determination and hard work that matters. Beethoven did not have the greatest looks and charm in the world to be admired, but, it was his mind, his music and his creative genius that made him a milestone in the history of music.

Teachers should be like craftsmen who look for the new ways and techniques of teaching. Teachers use their art of improvisation during a class period to immediately adjust and administrate the sudden needs and changes. This is when they need creativity. They have to have vision and a large imagination when looking for different ways and methods, and they have to improve and use their craftsmanship for preparation of the subject matter for the class. One can master the act of teaching, if he or she has the will for it.

Finally, teaching is an art when the need for teachers' creativity and imagination, needed to overcome and handle the unforeseen obstacles met during an educational journey, arouses. At the same time, it is a craft that needs to be learned and improved when creativity and skill alone are just not enough. If craft is the bone structure of teaching, then, art is the flesh that gives the final touches to its body.

REFERENCES

- Bateman, Walter L. (1990). *Open to Question: The Art of Teaching and Learning by Inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bok, Derek Curtis. (1991). *The Improvement of Teaching*. New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1991.
- Cahn, Steven M. (1978). *Scholars Who Teach: The Art of College Teaching*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Collingwood, R.G. (1938). *The Principle of Art*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Eble, Kenneth E. (1972). *Professors as Teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Eble, Kenneth E. (1976). *The Craft of Teaching: A Guide to Mastering the Professor's Art*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ericksen, Stanford C. (1984). *The Essence of Good Teaching*. 1st Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gulette, Margaret Morganroth. (1984). *The Art and Craft of Teaching*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hatch, Winslow Roper. (1966). *Approach to Teaching*. Washington: U.S. Office of Education.
- Hight, Gilbert. (1955). *The Art of Teaching*. New York: Vintage.
- Howard, Vernon. (1982). *Artistry: The Work of Artists*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Johnson, Glenn R. (1976). *Analyzing College Teaching*. Manchaca: S. Swift Pub. Co.
- Schwartz, Mimi. (1991). *Writer's Craft, Teacher's Art*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook.
- Shea, Mary Ann. (1987). *On Teaching*. Boulder: University of Colorado, Faculty Teaching Excellence Program.
- Smith, R. A. (1971). *Aesthetics and Problems of Education*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Umstattd, James Greenleaf. (1964). *College Teaching*. Washington, DC: University Press of Washington.
- Wilson, Robert Charles. (1975). *College Professors and Their Impact on Students*. New York: Wiley.

Öğretmek bir Sanat mıdır, yoksa Zanaat mı?

Özet

Öğretme eyleminin bir sanat mı yoksa zanaat mı olduğu konusunda eğitim bilimciler ve diğer araştırmacılar tarafından çok çeşitli görüşler ortaya atılmıştır. Bunlar, öğretmeyi tamamen bir sanat, öğretmeni de bir sanatçı olarak görenlerden, her ikisini de içerdiğini düşünenlere kadar geniş bir yelpaze oluşturmaktadır. Her ne kadar, bazı araştırmacılar öğretmeyi bir bilim olarak değil de bir sanat olarak görseler de, bu bakış açısının, konu iyice irdelendiğinde, gerçeklerle çok bağdaşmadığı görülmektedir. Sanatın köklerinin zanaatla başladığını ve her ikisinin de birbirleriyle, gerek kuramda gerekse uygulamada, iç içe geçmiş ve birbirlerinden faydalanan alanlar olduğunu düşünürsek, öğretme eyleminin de aynı şekilde sanat ve zanaat boyutlarını içerdiğini ve her ikisinden de yararlandığını görebiliriz.

Doğuştan gelen bazı yeteneklere ve biyolojik avantajlara sahip olmak işin yalnızca başlangıcıdır ancak bunlar geliştirilmeden çok anlam ifade etmez. Tabii ki başarılı bir sporcu olmak için sağlıklı ve elverişli bir vücuda sahip olmak gerekir, ancak asıl avantaj sağlayan bu değildir. Bir sporcunun diğerlerinin arasından sıvrılmasına neden olan asıl etmen antrenman ve bilinçli çalışmadır. Örneğin, profesyonel bir müzisyen olmanın ön şartı hassas kulaklara ve belirli seviyede bir zekâyâ sahip olmak olsa da, bir müzisyeni seçkin bir sanatçı yapan unsur, yıllarca süren eğitim, öğrenim, sayısız pratik ve detaylı çalışmadır.

Elbette ki kişinin yapısında var olan çeşitli yaratıcı yönleri, sanatsal becerileri, karizması, ses tonu ve konuşma biçimi, anlatımcılığındaki tiyatral becerileri ve çeşitli kişilik özellikleri devreye girerek öğretme eyleminin verimini etkileyecektir. Ancak, görüldüğü gibi tam anlamıyla başarılı bir öğretme eylemi birden çok faktöre bağlıdır ve bu faktörler geliştirilebilir. Dolayısı ile öğretmenlik öğrenilebilen bir olgudur. Bu öğrenilebilme ve geliştirilebilme her iki konum için de geçerlidir: öğretmeyi bir sanat olarak düşündüğümüzde, sadece doğuştan gelen yeteneklerin yetmeyeceği, bunun değişken güncel faktörlere göre geliştirilmesi, çeşitli taktik ve tekniklerin öğrenilmesinin gerektiği kaçınılmazdır. Görülüyor ki öğretme eylemini sanat olarak tanımladığımızda, çeşitli becerileri geliştirme ve teknikleri öğrenme zorunluluğundan dolayı derhal zanaat boyutu da gündeme gelmektedir. Bununla beraber, öğretme eylemini bir “zanaat” olarak düşündüğümüzde ise, bir öğretmen adayının, öğrendiği beceri ve teknikleri uygulayabilecek esnekliğe ve yeteneğe sahip olması, yaratıcılığını kullanarak çabuk çözüm üretebilme becerisine sahip olması, yani biraz sanatçı olması gerektiği açıktır. Görüldüğü gibi, öğretme eylemini bir “zanaat” olarak değerlendirdiğimizde ise, buna derhal “sanat” boyutunu eklemek zorunda kalmaktayız. Bu durumda, zanaat ve sanat, ikisi de birbirini besleyen; gelişmek ve

mükemmelleşmek için birbirine ihtiyaç duyan ve birbirlerini tümleyen iki ayrılmaz olgu olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Eğer, kabaca sanat beynin, zanaat da ellerin ürünü ise, ne ellerin beyinsiz ne de beynin ellersiz işlevlerini göremeyecekleri bir gerçektir.

Öğretmen, gerek bir sanatçı gibi hayalleri ve yaratıcılığı ile gerekse bir usta gibi becerileri ve titiz çalışması ile mesleğini daha ileriye götürmek ve daha verimli kılmak için daima araştırmak ve kendisini geliştirmek zorundadır. Mesleğinde başarılı olabilmek için öğretmenin bir sanatçı gibi doğaçlama ve çözüm bulma yeteneğini, bir usta gibi de öğrenme ve öğretme becerilerini geliştirmesi gerekmektedir. Sonuç olarak, eğer zanaat öğretme eyleminin iskeleti ise, sanat da ona estetiğini ve şeklini veren etidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretmek, öğretmenlik, sanat, zanaat.