The Teacher As Facilitator

We all know the scene, Daniel-san is on his hands and knees sanding the floor, then he is waxing car after car and then painting a fence of enormous length. Finally he gets fed up and confronts his sensei (teacher) and says he hasn't learned anything, he's quitting. The rest is cinematic and Martial Art history, his teacher throws punches and kicks at him and Daniel deftly blocks each with "wax on, wax off, and paint the fence". Drivel? Cinematic and Martial Arts nonsense?

Actually the idea of teaching this way is very old and respected. It is based on the idea of "second order change" promoted by Dr. Paul Torrance in his 1999 book "Making the Creative Leap Beyond." It refers to any change that doesn't directly attack the problem or logically effect the subject taught. In other words you teach the technique by doing something different with the same skill required to do the technique.

But despite this it is not often done in the teaching of Martial Arts in the US. I have taken Judo, Aikido, Karate, Kung Fu, Tai Chi, Tae Kwon Do and Kickboxing, and only one teacher used the technique of second order change. Why? I believe because we have a mind set in this country of a teacher being a "sage on the stage," and it is a very hard mindset to break.

To bring about second order change a couple things need to occur. The most profound is that the teacher must relinquish the idea of "knowing it all," of being the fount of knowledge and wisdom. They must literally stop being a teacher and start being a facilitator or what has been called "a guide on the side." If the teacher can remember that he too is a student then the instructor will become open enough to accept second order change. But how does one do this, accept the role of teacher/pupil or what has been called facilitator? How does one become open-minded in anything? Is it possible to change yourself if you don't think this way now?

These questions go to the heart of the problem and to them I emphatically say YES! We can change ourselves into facilitators of any art or subject that we now are teachers of and the experts are behind me! But what exactly is second order change? As told by Torrance, second

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order change is any change that doesn't directly attack the problem or logically affect the subject taught (Torrance 1999, p.6).

In the example of Daniel-san he is “taught” the proper moves in Karate by waxing cars, sanding floors, and painting a fence. He learns it by doing something else. What is traditionally done in the dojo (literally “place of enlightenment” it refers to the practice hall of Japanese Martial Artists) is drill drill drill. It is analogous to teaching English skills by having students do drill dittos over and over. In my experience this is one of the worst ways to teach English, so why would the Martial Arts be any different?

Aikido Sensei Roy Suenaka observes a student performing a technique.

Attitude is everything! The great Martial Artists were the most humble of people and they were great facilitators of the art because of it. When Musashi (Japan's most famous swordsman) was asked by a student to teach him the art of fencing he agreed. But to the student's surprise Musashi had him chop wood and carry water. Musashi had the student do manual labor for 3 years, then he had him walk around the perimeter of the workout mat every day, hour after hour for one year. Lastly Musashi took him to a ravine that was spanned by a narrow tree trunk. The man eventually realized what he had been taught and crossed over. He was given the strength, footwork and mind-set of a Martial Artist and he never realized it until his training was over (Deshimaru 1982, p. 30).

Perhaps it is lost upon the reader what a great gift was given to this young Martial Artist. Musashi was possibly the greatest swordsman who ever lived and this was how he passed on his knowledge. He could have charged the student money and the student would have paid him. He could have drilled the man in technique, he could have done and asked ANYTHING and the man would have agreed. Musashi knew this and chose second order change as his method of teaching.

But we can't just have students walking around our mats and chopping our firewood for us. First of all, we live in a different society than Musashi. But more importantly we need an appropriate

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environment and mindset to enact second order change. I have consulted the masters of Martial Arts and creativity to help me pool together a list of necessaries to make such facilitation possible. This a list of what the experts say are a must for facilitation:

- Expect "miracles" (Torrance 1990, p.3)
- Don't criticize student performance (Torrance 1999, p. 19)
- Accept limitations as challenges (Torrance 1990, p.11)
- Search for honesty and realism (Torrance 1990, p.11)
- Encourage visualization (Torrance 1990, p.11)
- Explore mystery and solve it (Torrance 1990, p.11)
- Juxtapose seemingly irrelevant elements (Torrance 1990, p.11)
- Make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Torrance 1990, p.20)
- Give opportunity for experimentation without evaluation, grading or marking (Torrance 1990, p.15)
- Go beyond what you think you are physically capable of (Torrance 1999, p.49)
- Use warm ups (Torrance 1999, p.19)
- Dig deeper into the learning as the class progresses (Torrance 1990, p.23)
- Be positive and supportive (Torrance 1999, p.59)
- Encourage emotional involvement and beware of rigidity in thinking (De Bono 1967, p. 68)
- Have progress be your goal, not "useful knowledge" (De Bono 1967, p. 23)

I can hear the groans from here! "This sounds like an academic class that is being taught not MARTIAL ARTS!" To this I say learning is learning and facilitation is facilitation. If we look at what Musashi did in the instance related above we find that many of these "academic" principles were utilized in his approach, especially the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated elements. He didn't realize how cutting edge he was in the 1600s! It might be useful to see what other Masters and Martial artists have to say about what is important in learning Martial Arts:

"Then, how can you straighten your warped mind, purify your heart, and be harmonized with the activity of all things in Nature - make God's heart your heart - there is no discord in love, no enemy in love'. A mind of discord thinking of an enemy is not consistent with the will of God"

"Understand the harm and benefit in everything, be aware of what is not obvious"
-- Musashi 1993, p. 16

"Bruce Lee believed in an emphasis on change and discovery of self -- he was completely against rigidity in the mind or body."
-- Payne 1981,p. 23

"Don't cling to any particular style or technique, you should be open-minded and fluid."
-- Payne 1981,p. 23

Example after example can be found of this type of thinking. The Masters have told us to be fluid, to keep our minds open, to love and not hate, to view no one as an enemy, to see how anything and everything is useful. The similarities between this and what men like Torrance say is obvious; as a matter of fact, it is the same thing said differently.

So how does one apply this knowledge to the Martial Arts arena? Very carefully! Here is a basic approach to the facilitation of Martial Arts using the information gathered from all of the above Masters:

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**Warm ups:**

The body needs warm-ups as does the mind - never begin training without physically and mentally warming up. The physical warm ups should include stretching and not simply strength building exercises, so the body is prepared for what lies ahead. Mental warm-ups are less often done in dojos. They can include a variety of breathing exercises and focusing exercises. Imaging can be used to aid in focusing. The goal is to create awareness in everyone of "the moment" and to calm the mind.

**Environment:**

Even though one purpose of learning Martial Arts is to attain knowledge in the area of self-defense, this does not mean that the teacher should ever be abusive or patronizing to his/her students. Yes, it is a serious endeavor, but one that should be approached with kindness and always with the benefit of the student foremost in mind. This leaves no room for self-aggrandizement or greed. The students should be loved and respected by their teacher. The student, if truly interested in the art, should in turn respect the teacher. If the student does not he/she should be asked to leave the dojo.

**Juxtapose seemingly unrelated elements:**

This is artfully displayed in the examples above, but how does one do that sort of facilitation in one's own dojo? One way is to analyze basic movements and discover their essence. Then find an activity that seems unrelated that does the same movement and do it repeatedly. For Aikidoka (those who study Aikido) sword cuts with a wooden sword or even a stick closely resembles a basic move used in the art. 1000 sword cuts (or stick cuts) or even chopping wood with the same motion will drill it into the head of the student. It may seem to the student that you are merely building up strength or even wasting their time, but quietly assure them that the practice is necessary for them and then do techniques afterwards that use the movement, the results can be astounding!

**Go beyond what you think you are physically able to doing:**

By no means should this be done every class! But perhaps once a month, or even once a year, push the whole class to the limit and then beyond. This can be done with sit-ups or push-ups or even the sword cuts mentioned above - the idea is to reach what you think is your maximum effort and then go beyond it. Don't forget to join in! It makes everyone question who they are and what they are not capable of.

**View limitations as challenges:**

This is a must for anyone who teaches Martial Arts. Time and again students say I can't do this because I'm too fat, too slow, too weak, too skinny or too old. Gently talk to those students and instill in them the idea that we are all unique physically and mentally, and we must work from were we are onward. The word "can't" is a barrier to any improvement, don't let them get away with saying it!

**Don't criticize students:**

This speaks for itself. If a student wants to learn from you it is not your privilege to pick out their faults. This doesn't mean stop helping them improve their technique, that is your role. But don't bad mouth them or criticize them. Help them, that's your job. If a student doesn't wish to be helped they should not be in your class, and you should ask them to leave.

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Emphasize flexibility in thinking:

No Martial Art is the be all and end all. Don't lie to your students and claim that it is. Encourage them to improve and go in the direction that best suits them. If that is another dojo, then it's another dojo. There is no room in the dojo for your ego either.

Love what you do:

If you don't love the Martial Art that you practice it is probably time to move on to another. If you don't love Martial Arts in general then you shouldn't be in it - it is not for everyone. If you did love it at one time and don't any longer, find out why and either leave the dojo because it no longer has anything to teach you or find a way to reenergize your interest in it. You will not be able to have a loving, supportive environment if you do not love your art! Torrance found in his studies of creativity that the very best teachers and facilitators loved their field, they had a passion for it (Torrance 1990, p.1). Be a great facilitator!

Strive for miracles in your students and yourself:

Don't content yourself with an adequate performance from yourself or your students. Don't be contented with the accolades of others, that is illusion! Always push yourself and your students towards improvement in the art.

Dig deep:

Don't be satisfied with techniques as you've learned them, dig into them! Find out what makes them work. Discover the reality behind them: do they always work, what happens when they don't, or when they do? What about their effect on people of different sizes, speed, abilities or weights? Find what you think is the essence of the technique and test your theories.

Encourage visualization:

Is the technique similar to another unrelated movement such as pouring a glass of water, swimming, or blocking the sun with your hand? Encourage the students to find visual guides to help them better understand the movements. Visualization can also be done with breathing exercises, and you can envision breathing in white air (good air) and breathing out black (bad air).

These are just a handful of ways to approach the facilitation of Martial Arts. If you add even one of these ideas to your teaching it will facilitate greater learning for all of the dojo. Second order change works in the dojo, but it can only happen if you, the teacher, are open-minded and caring. The greatest teachers are the most humble - it is time to bring great teachers to the Martial Arts being taught in America.

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