

Augmented Teaching (or The Gardener)

There are three major components in my teaching of animation and visual effects which I am constantly trying to improve upon: technical, motivation, and creativity. All three rely on a wiki to facilitate their implementation, which I explain in context below. I like to call this integrated methodology, “Augmented Teaching”, and it can be seen as an extension of the classical teaching strategies (lecture, critique, lab, review) which I still also use in the physical classroom setting as well.

Technical: *the student’s orientation to knowledge is incorrect.* Instead of seeing the instructor as the intellectual superior and they themselves as inferior - the instructor should be seen as a gardener. A cultivator of a clear ‘path’ to knowledge. The path is the wiki, where the professor does most of their actual teaching (or gardening). Once this hierarchy is eliminated, instruction then can become asymmetric. A solid framework of fundamentals is of course taught, but it’s the ever changing problematic situation which really solidifies and expands this foundation. By finding the answer to their own specific production problems, the student develops more than just memorized technique but the skill to garner and extend knowledge. This is an emancipatory type of learning that really sticks. When faced with not-knowing and without direct help, the mind begins to neurologically engage. First it is a painful process which the student responds to with aversion, but after success a broad smile appears, and the phrase, “I learned more in this class...” one hears time and again.

Motivation: *the student must see the professor as a peer.* Even with the elimination of the intellectual hierarchy above, because of grading, the professor is still seen as the superior to whom they need to either be subordinate to or “trick” to get around. Perpetuated by over a decade of learning within this hierarchy, the student must realize that reality is the final adjudicator. A sense of self worth needs to be formed not from the “stamp of approval” of passing a class, but an emancipatory motivation when a student sees it is their self who is preventing their own dreams from coming true. Motivation cannot come from fear, but only when the student invests in themselves. The learning potential from this world-view expands dramatically in the context of an institutional setting. No longer trying to get just a good grade, they become much more personally invested in their projects through peer group engagement. It is here, when the professor and student becomes equal, that learning really takes off. For if the professor becomes the peer, all peers become professors.

Creativity: *the structure of creativity is the structure of the wiki.* Ideation is a lifelong challenge which one constantly loops through each time we try to create something new. This is incredibly difficult for a student, for it always brings them back to that pain of not-knowing. In essence, this is a problem of structure. One needs to set up a framework in which they can build up a good idea, rather than being drowned in possibilities. Within the context of animation and visual effects, one can break down the creative workflow into the form of the professional pipelines of the major studios. A proven process which naturally fosters spaces in which ideas may come (research, design, screenplay, storyboard, etc.), that are the same spaces where a student might eventually earn a living. This helps to both stimulate creativity in the more professionally oriented students, while also a certain rigor in their more art oriented peers. By intertwining the creative process with the structure of the technical, the two are developed simultaneously - each a catalyst for the other.

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(Note the use of the capital letter “G” - capitalization needs to be exact)

Recent lecture on Augmented Teaching at Wellesley College:

<https://blogs.wellesley.edu/symposium/fine-arts/>