



Developing
The Artisan
teacher



Artisan:

a person skilled in the applied arts: a craftsperson (dictionary.com)

I have been blessed, or cursed perhaps, with an incurable curiosity for teaching. I have spent the past 30 years teaching, studying teaching, and observing teachers and, since it is generally fulfilling to satisfy one's curiosities, it has been a labor of love and not a bit of drudgery.

A consistent, recurring pattern has emerged through all these observations. The most successful, gap-closing, achievement-producing teachers view teaching as a craft. They are artisan-teachers... skilled in the craft of teaching.

The word artisan has gained popularity recently. It has become an adjective that connotes a high quality, hand-made, unique nature. An artisan "this or that" implies that a craftsman created a product in small quantities, applying specialized knowledge and skill, with a measure of artistic creativity. We often hear of artisan bread, artisan cheese, or artisan jewelry.

Historically, the word artisan is a noun. An artisan is a craftsman. An artisan makes things. Stonemasons, coppersmiths, bakers, tanners, playwrights, songwriters, and tailors are artisans. The fruits of their labor have utility. They create items of value. The item's value is not entirely based on utility, however. It is also based on beauty, design, and delight.

- An artisan creates an item that is not only sturdy and functional, but beautiful and delightful to use.
- An artisan is not purely an artist, though artistic expression is found in their work.
- An artisan is not purely a scientist, though scientific knowledge is essential to their work.
- An artisan is not merely a technician, though skilled labor is the core expression of their work.
- An artisan is one skilled in the applied arts, a craftsman... a unique combination of artist, scientist, and skilled laborer.
- Excellent teachers are just like this. They are Artisans- artful, knowledgeable, skilled, masters of their craft.

Principle 1: Stagecraft

DEFINITION: The ability of the teacher to enhance instruction through skillful use of props, music, lighting, scenery, choreography, body position, voice, music, costumes, and visual/audio effects.

INFORMED BY: Theater

Teachers can make lessons significantly more impactful and memorable by applying theatrical elements. There is much to learn in observing how actors ply their craft, how choreographers create a symphony of experience, how expert set designers create engaging scenery, how great lighting focuses attention, and how a good music underscores an unforgettable performance.



Classroom examples:

- a geography teacher holds a globe while teaching longitude
- a PE teacher using salsa music to enhance an aerobics routine
- a literature teacher creating a mockup of the globe theater to enhance the reading of King Lear
- a US history teacher positions himself on "center stage" as he delivers an introductory lecture on reconstruction
- a science teacher freezes rubber balls in liquid nitrogen and then shatters them for effect

Principle 2: Complementary Elements

DEFINITION: The ability of the teacher to sequence instructional experiences that build on the preceding and set the stage for the subsequent.

INFORMED BY: Culinary Arts, music composition

A chef creates a series of courses that fit perfectly in sequence...a tart salad followed by a savory 2nd course, followed by a sweet dessert.

- Certain foods are matches made in heaven...
- apple pie and vanilla ice cream
- a hotdog with chili
- a grilled steak and a baked potato
- pretzels and beer
- barbeque and Brunswick stew

Or... a composer creates an opening movement that slowly builds momentum then follows with virtuoso performances on individual instruments, then allows for a time of disharmony which is then, at the perfect time, reconciled into a triumphant chorus, followed by a time of whimsical introspection, then back to the chorus again.



Classroom examples:

A 3rd grade teacher begins the day with an individual reflective time of journaling, then transitions into a whole group movement oriented activity, then to a small group cooperative learning session, then back to an individual time of elaboration and question generation, then to a whole group Q/A game, then a short break, then some more...just like a fine meal proceeds from course to course, the preceding sets the stage for the subsequent. The total effect is greater than the sum of the parts.

Principle 3: *Time and Timing*

DEFINITION: The ability of the teacher to understand the relationships between time, energy, and efficacy; the ability of the teacher to appropriate the optimal amount of time to each instructional element (Time) and utilize instructional elements at just the right place in the lesson to optimize their efficacy (Timing).

INFORMED BY: Standup comedy, storytelling, screenwriting, choreography, acting and public speaking.



A comedian develops her “act” to last eight minutes and designs three short pieces into the act at 45 seconds each, two longer pieces at ninety seconds each and one ending piece that covers 2:45.

She begins with a 45 second piece, then uses the two 90 sec stories, then to another 45 sec. joke and then finishes with her best material after the audience is suitably warmed up, a brilliant 2:45 story with a wicked twist at the end. The audience screams for more but the comedian always leaves them wishing she would tell just one more joke... she never does.

The keynote speaker at a national conference designs his 45 minute speech for maximum effect. He conceptualizes his talk as a “string of pearls” and links them together with smooth and humorous transitions. The “pearls,” seven of them, consist of two personal stories, a quotation, a poem, one set of surprising data, a survey question, and a riddle.

The 45 minutes seem to fly by as the audience is caught up in the emotional roller coaster created by the speaker’s use of time and timing. He begins with a riddle and a bit of awkward silence as the audience contemplates its meaning.

- Then he follows with a story that lays out the essential issues of the talk, then a poem further crystallizes the issues and its irony gets a good chuckle from the group.
- The quotation makes the issue seem more important than before, then the set of data drive home the personal nature of the issue.
- The survey question provides active engagement just past the middle of the talk when energy usually falls a bit, then the final story builds to a poignant close with a final twist that reveals the second story as the answer to the riddle that began the speech.
- Bravo! The audience is enthused and moves into the breakout sessions of the conference with high energy and high expectations for what they will gain there



Classroom examples:

A middle school math teacher is teaching binomial factoring notes that many of her students already show mastery of the skill. She nixes her plan for further instruction and inserts a repetition exercise asking students to practice the skill five more times right away... good timing. Practicing a skill at the cusp of mastery optimizes recall and transfer.

A high school history teacher is teaching a 90 minute block. He views the block as four discreet 20 minute segments and makes sure that segment 3 has lots of active engagement and physical movement built in since this is the time in the block when energy ebbs to its lowest level. He places the most difficult learning tasks in segment 1 and 4 since it is natural for students to attend best to what comes first and last in a sequence.

A fifth grade teacher has given her students 25 minutes to finish an assignment. She notices that many of the students are not offering their best efforts at the task. She informs the class that she has changed her mind and now wants the assignment finished in 15 minutes. The new time constraint increases the students’ sense of urgency and their work becomes more robust. She also notes that two students who were working well before are now overly anxious about the new completion time. She communicates to each individually that they may use 10 minutes after lunch to complete if needed. Their work returns to a more relaxed and productive pace.

Principle 4: *Personal Presence*

DEFINITION: The ability of the teacher to establish and maintain an interpersonal connection with students characterized by affinity, interest, respect, admiration, influence, loyalty, importance, efficacy and unconditional positive regard.

INFORMED BY: Leadership, Celebrity, Influence, Persuasion, Psychology of followership, Group dynamics, Herd mentality, and Emotional intelligence.



The Army captain asks for three volunteers from his platoon to accompany him in a dangerous rescue operation inside a small town in central Iraq. The captain, although barely older than the rest of the platoon members, commands much respect from his troops. During the previous three months he has proven himself to be not only a brave and disciplined soldier, but also a warm and approachable human.

He is quick to admit his mistakes, slow to blame others, first to offer encouragement and leads through a quiet but strong, persuasive style. All twelve of the soldiers volunteer.

Perhaps the most endearing characteristic of Princess Diana was her ability to be, at once, royalty and a commoner. She was Diana, Princess of Wales and a kindergarten teacher... both. This "duality" is often a part of strong personal presence... someone who is intelligent- yet approachable, beautiful- yet humble, large- yet gentle, talented- yet other-focused.

Ronald Reagan is often cited as an example of a person with great personal presence. Experts who analyze such things suggest that he had a unique opportunity to project strength and also warmth. His most amazing tool for communicating strength and warmth simultaneously was completely non-verbal. Experts agree... Reagan had a warm smile and steely- strong eyes and he used them in unison to cast a sense of personal presence

Classroom examples:

A high school English teacher has the highest attendance rate of any teacher in the school. It seems that students who are absent will show up just to attend her class, then go back home to nurse their illness. Her secret? She has created a community within her classroom based on teamwork. "We're not as smart a class when you're absent" she insists to her students.

When students are absent for any reason she notes their re-entry usually saying something like "I'm glad you're back. It's not the same around here when you're gone."

A middle school science teacher gets so engrossed in a good experiment that he loses track of time. He truly enjoys his work and often says to students "I have the best job in the world... I get to do science every day and share it with my friends." In the school yearbook he receives the "I love my job" award.

A 6th grade teacher is known for innovative pedagogy. She is constantly reading, attending workshops, and trying out new approaches to teaching. She often asks her principal to assign her students who are behind or need special help. Her greatest satisfaction comes from discovering a new way to teach difficult concepts to her students. Her students, especially her struggling learners, seem to bask in her calm confidence that she can lead them to learning.



Principle 5: *Delight*

DEFINITION: The ability of the teacher to create instances of learning that are particularly pleasing, charming, unexpected, or surprising... To create a moment that is unforgettable, has a twist, or exceeds expectations.

INFORMED BY: Marketing, Customer service, Product design, Event planning, Architecture, Fiction writing. The first hotel chain to put a chocolate on a pillow gets the idea.

A writer weaves an interesting and entertaining plot into their novel, then delivers a delightful twist at the end taking the story in a completely unexpected direction. The reader immediately re-reads the chapter and smiles.

A business traveler enters the department store at 8:55pm looking for a clean shirt to wear the next day. "How late do you stay open?" he asks the salesperson. "As long as you need us" the salesperson replies. As the traveler hurries to make his purchase he thinks how unexpected that was and how he'll plan to shop here more often.

A new car model has designed all the key controls for audio and climate control into the steering wheel, just inches from the driver's fingertips. As the driver changes radio stations while keeping her eyes on the road she thinks how cool that is... a grin appears on her face.



Classroom examples:

A 3rd grade teacher creates a "current events quiz" station in her classroom. Students may stroll by and try their hand at answering news quiz items. When they are correct they receive goofy prizes.

A middle school teacher takes the time to mail a note home to all his students in the first week of school. The note says how pleased he is to have the student in class and includes a "get out of homework free" coupon and a small magnet to hold the coupon on the family's refrigerator.

The parents see the coupon every day and often think "what a nice gesture" and smile.

A high school math teacher is introducing the unit on probability. At the end of the lesson the teacher announces that there are cards taped onto the underside of each student's seat. Five of the cards say "you win free movie passes" the other twenty cards say "better luck next time."

"Before you open the cards, write on the outside your odds of winning. If you are correct and you get a movie pass, you can keep it." The students squeal like 2nd graders as they make their predictions and open the cards.



Mike Rutherford, Educator, Author, Speaker, creator of The Learning Centered School and The Artisan Teacher multi-media series will teach selected principles in his dynamic and engaging style. Mike is recognized as a leading national authority on adult learning, professional leadership and teacher efficacy.



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