

Out of control

In the 1960's, a set of rules were devised by John Cage and Sister Corita Kent¹; which can be applied as a lens to contemplate the ways art teachers navigate the spaces in and around control:

The main rule is to work. If you work it will lead to something. It's the people who do all of the work all of the time who eventually catch on to things.

Within this mighty assemblage, we see the outcomes of teachers' responses to the *Out of control* provocation, where they have enacted work that is both *in, from* and *out of* control to serve the desire to make, and the need to facilitate the most meaningful learning experiences possible for their students.

Consider everything an experiment.

Schools, as institutions of and for learning, are characterised by structure, regulation and routine. Working within such highly organized frameworks of order - that in nature are preoccupied with measurement - poses a challenge for the art teacher, which is to ensure critical creative reflection and the making of adventure that is essential to serve their own needs for creative fulfilment, and in turn, their students in their creative endeavours. This is what art teachers traffic in, the spaces and places where learning happens in minds and souls, not in the databases of multiple-choice questions².

Find a place you trust, and then try trusting it for a while.

If art is the literacy of the heart³, then these art teachers share with you the objects of their hearts as markers of their time, self-discipline, commitment, reflection and pleasure in practice. The thinking, the examination of an idea and the synthesis of research to extrapolate from past stories and practices, to present day contexts, are shaped into future potentialities. These art works are the by-products of these teachers' exercises in and out of control to bring attention to learning; learning which in turn feeds into the learning experiences they cultivate for their students.

Be self-disciplined: this means finding someone wise or smart and choosing to follow them. To be disciplined is to follow in a good way. To be self-disciplined is to follow in a better way.

Out of control takes the self-discipline of control and order, and metamorphoses this into disorder and adventure. Teaching visual art is an adventure in giving students the confidence to make mistakes and recognize them as beneficial, because they are evidence of learning, and evidence of some beauty that art teachers have the ability to recognise in their students' humble and beloved products. In this way, their engagement in practice reflects a quiet recognition that not everything important is measurable, and not everything measurable is important⁴.

Nothing is a mistake. There's no win and no fail, there's only make.

Art teachers are adept at working in, and around rules; moving in and out of spaces where we play with assuming and relinquishing control; making, observing and breaking all manner of rules along the way. Rules can liberate just as easily as they can constrain the art teacher in and out of their practice.

These art works derive from a launch into the spaces and places that deliver a thousand tiny problems to solve; that is the very essence of making art. In their making, these works contain the freedom of

vast problem solving, each building and shrinking until the art work reaches a culmination, a sweet moment we know as resolution, where all of the components reach a state of harmony, that may deliciously contain both disharmony and disunity. These moments of resolution are paradoxical in their ability to flicker in the periphery of control, where they can simultaneously allow a sense of contentment, solution and restlessness, where all of the problems appear to be resolved and yet; the demand exists to make another, or many more, because something is not quite fulfilled- and that unknown element must be chased, sought after, pinned down, toyed with, thrown aside or perhaps reclaimed for later.

It is out of all of this seeking, and making that something wonderful and mad is made.

'Out of' is understood as being that which is *'from'*, or that which is *'resulting from'*, and as such is the bundling of meaning, intention and knowledge; the result of the learning within circumstances of immense control, dedication, self discipline, frustration and sheer pleasure. Once this bundling is conceived and arranged in the mind, it is then communicated to the arm (or what ever facility one uses) to enact the leap of faith; the jump into the unknown, that then enables the *'out'* of control. In short, the artwork shared in this space has been made possible through the control these teachers have managed to wield over their art practice.

Art teachers need opportunity to reside in contemplative spaces to distil, where they can acquire the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to inspire and provoke their students to cultivate their very natural and innate inclinations for curiosity, problem solving and problem posing. We know that teaching is a creative profession, and when properly conceived, is not, and should not be, a delivery system⁵. The nexus of learning, teaching and sharing skills rests in their ability to both exercise and deliver *from* control – to revel in the pleasure of encouraging students to take leaps, and to trust that a few simple marks on a daunting and blank sheet of paper, will still, be a step in the right direction.

We're breaking all the rules. Even our own rules. And how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for unknown quantities.

The works presented to you in *Out of control* resound with these art teachers' understanding that learning in art requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of their work as it unfolds⁶. In this way, they are physical manifestations of the expectations and hopes they have for their students.

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¹ *Ten rules for students, teachers and life* (Kent & Cage 1967)

² Robinson 2006

³ Eisner 2002

⁴ Eisner 2005

⁵ Robinson 2006

⁶ Eisner 2002