

The Stew-dent Principle

The concept of education in a university today approximates the system of exchange of goods and services in our society, and mass production in the huge corporate plants.

There seems to exist, at different levels, a producer-consumer relationship, a management-worker relationship and underlying both is the question of the practical or real life relevance of the quality of the product education, that one purchases with money time and some personal politics; and if one is a woman, maybe with one's indigenous charms and salacious offerings.

For the most part students who get into college are from financially-able backgrounds (if one judges by the number of cars on campus or the number of \$300 stereo sets in the dorms), but seriously, it is a well established fact that the ratio or upper socio-economic to lower socio-economic students (less than \$8,000 a year) is quite high, probably about 5:1.

Even grants and loans are based in the former's favor. The implications are that education is not a privilege anymore, if one does not possess the money one cannot get the commodity. It is therefore not impossible to understand that there are many bright poor kids rotting away in high school or walking the city streets looking for jobs, or possibly enslaved in some dull occupation who could benefit by, and benefit society in return, by higher education.

On the other hand, the student in the university often finds himself in a capacity and status similar to a worker and the intuitive resistance to this is reflected partly by the number or percentage who opt for a general program instead of honors (who wants to work?) or who take general arts.

As a worker, the communication for the most part is unidirectional. Do as you are told, accept the facts, don't question them, they are proven time honored facts. Hence, no matter how boring or inexplicit or even if there are errors in the lecture the student shuts up as he is supposed to. (Did you ever ask a question and the prof tried to put you down and the kids shoot fierce hostile glances at you?)

The professor, lab assistant and some grad students, and even some of the security guards constitute management who determine the students' status.

The relationship of faculty to student is very similar to black-white relationships in general, where whites can only relate to blacks through their problems. So professors, for the most part, can best relate to the student when the student has a problem just like in a factory.

Management has status, but the worker has very little, and the relationship between both is problem-oriented. Indeed the student is a nigger and, of course, the black student is a special case

of the stew-dent principle—he is stewed and dented all over.

In addition to the oblique relationship that the student 'enjoys', he also is expected to produce and his rate of production relates to his success.

An equation that expresses the quantitative aspects of the student principle is dA/dt equals KxG , his productivity curve. Where A is the number of assignments, g is a grade, and K being the student constant which is characteristic of each student and is a function of whether he is male, female or black.

His productivity has very little to do with his learning, which can be expressed as a curve, $1/KG$ vs time and as an integral,

$\int_{t=0}^{\infty} dt/KG$ (1)
Where the $1/KG$ plotted against time is his learning curve and the integral $1/KG dt$ is approximately what he learns.

Learning is work and expenditure of energy and it takes time and some skill, but I doubt that professors or management realize that there are mighty few students who really want to learn and not just produce. One may also note that the mechanics of the put-down game is an essential part of the prof-student politic.

An example is the more mature student who has some valuable, practical experience, but is not allowed to apply this to academic problems because it creates a potential threat of academic put-down to the professor or teaching assistant. (Ever had an argument with a lab assistant who has forgotten a lot of stuff he learned or who didn't prepare for his lab?)

If one now considers education as a product or commodity then one ought to have an educational Ralph Nader—caveat emptor—and if one considers it a process, then one ought to evaluate its goals and end results.

As results, is it learning, and among goals is it the responsible use of knowledge in respect to a human society? But this question is weighted and requires extensive dialogue.

So as a product the quality is important. Material content should relate to real life. Often one has to spend laborious hours with problem assignments which are never encountered again, sometimes not even on the exam.

For instance, in Chem 301.3, one might spend 4-6 hours determining molecular structures from amino acid titration curves.

The elegance of this surely can be appreciated, but what is the point when some post doctoral research fellows are unable to do such problems. The old argument for this is that mental calisthenics keep the mind fertile. Of course, one must stretch the mind and this is quite valid in its proper context, but not when there is very little chance of its application in real life situations by

the student who might be lucky to get a job in this or a related field.

Now notice that the ratio of students in general sciences to those in honors is probably greater than the ratio of all general to all honors students. Hence, one may conclude that (1) there are fewer Ph.D candidates, and probably fewer in science, who might benefit from this type of calisthenics and (2) that more students are more likely to end up working at regular routine type jobs which is very far removed from this type of exercise.

So that possibly more emphasis could be placed on learning or relearning basic principles and doing things that are actually done in the great industrial outside rather than over academicizing and wasting the students time.

The educational experiment in China which we hear bits and pieces about occasionally, as per *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 27, seems to be based on real life relevance; not that we should copy China, but a more efficient utilization of the students resources could be considered.

More time or a better selection of material could be made available to the few students who are sincerely interested in learning. Lectures should be scheduled so that there is more two-way communication. The student should be allowed to spend more time learning to read expensive texts, some of which are at the graduate level, and for getting knowledge from other sources, and attend less lectures.

This idea of two-way communication can be an actual potential threat to professional prestige and contains all the ingredients for academic counter put-down, and therefore should be handled discreetly. So if management does not improve the product how long will the consumer continue to buy it?

As a worker or consumer the student doesn't seem to have much choice or voice in this grand computerized mill. It even appears that lecture times have been computerized to prevent any significant number of the student body from congregating at any one period between 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Maybe the windowless lecture halls symbolize a kind of myopia which does not permit any vision beyond the walls of the academic environs. So what's a student to do? Become a sheep, a pig or take risks to improve his lot?

Twenty-first century multiversities with monolithic structures of authority must go on, for progress must continue like a juggernaut. Thus the stew-dent principle goes on unchallenged, except at Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard and others where the arm of the law is big and brawny; and academia is winked at by the law, prostituted by giant corporations and delighted by its own smugness.

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