

Education Without Lectures

Universities are strangely conservative about education. Every year they are full of classes which their staff lectures at, and textbooks are bought and assignments done and exams written. It isn't totally inefficient. A few people learn something and retain it. But the system makes a dismal showing when we look at the number of flunks at the end of the year and make a realistic assessment of what the students have learned. The pass mark is fifty, but if you've ever seen any final exams between fifty and sixty it doesn't take much wit to perceive that such a student knows nothing of the subject he was examined on.

Why not re-engineer a university so that 100% is the passing mark and the flunk rate insignificant? It is not impossible and the money invested would be hardly more than the money spent on the present bumbling apparatus. It is no use saying that the students should study harder, should study longer, should be more responsible, should be more serious, etc. The student is what the student is. He flunks only if the university is unable to handle and teach him. Every student who does not learn what the university tries to teach him, marks a failure for the university as well as for himself.

Need New System

The great bug in our method of educating is the lecture system. We lecture to a class and try to teach a class, but a class has no brain and never learns anything. Only the students do. All the students in a class are at different levels, the lecture only hits one level and so misses all of the students. Worse, the lecture is an outflow of the professor. The students are passive and nobody learns anything without outflowing himself. Try to drive a car after merely listening to the best of lectures on driving. To be brutal about it, the main effect of lectures is to teach the professor his own subject. The questions and discussion which go on during any lecture are not a real outflow from the students, what there is of it only serves to give the professor an illusion of student outflow.

In engineering terms the density of outflow per student per lecture is too small to be in any way effective for the student. Students do outflow, of course, in labs, in discussion among themselves, when they do problems, etc. The best students outflow a great deal. But nothing in the system nurtures student outflow. Again in engineering terms the university system overdamps student outflow. Hence the general low level of education, student passivity, low standards (50% pass), high flunk rate, etc.

Can this be corrected without introducing something as pain-

fully experienced as the tutor system? Certainly.

Abandon lectures. A professor should never give a lecture unless he has something new to say or a new way to say it. Put your lectures on tape. Have hundreds of tape machine booths so that a student can listen to a lecture when he is himself ready to take responsibility for learning what is on the tape. If visual material is required for the lecture, use video tapes and TV booths or cheap eight milli-

by

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meter projectors with self loading film capsules. For special courses, such as languages, tapes could be keyed to illustrated texts along with equipment allowing an extra tape band for the student to record his own voice.

A staff of Consultants would replace the lecturers. A consultant in a subject would do nothing but answer student questions. He would not tutor. If a student was so lost he needed a tutor he would be referred to the proper tapes and texts and programmed texts.

A band on registration day, years and semesters and final exams. Take in your student any week of the year he is ready to start. Give him a checklist of everything he has to know to get a certain degree, each complete item on the checklist being an hour or a couple of days or a week's work. When he knows that item cold he goes to the Item Tester. If he gets 100% on the item test he gets a pass for that particular item on his check sheet; if he gets anything less he flunks and is told to come back again sometime.

Bi-Monthly Exams

Once a certain section of the checklist has been completed the student is put up for, say, a bi-monthly comprehensive exam (which could be machine corrected) that would test his retention. Any item where he got less than 95% would be knocked off his checklist passes

and he would have to be re-tested and re-passed on it by the Item Tester.

A completed checklist covering everything you have to know and be able to do for a certain field is exchanged by the university for a degree. Graduation would come at the student's own learning rate and motivational level, maybe after two or after seven years with time out for nervous breakdowns or broken arms or six months as a beatnik in Mexico City. Graduation would become a personal triumph rather than an assembly line in May. Every time someone graduated would be an excuse for his friends to put on a big bash.

Would it be too expensive to hire all the Testers and Consultants necessary to run such a system? No. The student body is a wonderful source of slave labor. Put down as part of a student's checklist requirements a period of duty as Consultant or Tester. There is no better way to get a subject down cold than by having hordes of undergraduate monsters asking you questions about it all day long which you have to answer in a meaningful way, or than by thinking up nasty questions to see if they really learned what they were supposed to have learned.

End Suicides

Minimal cost, an end to May suicides, no students walking around lost because the lectures got ahead of them, and an end to student passivity, and best of all a student body that knows what it knows cold — that's what you would get.

Is this an impossible dream I've made up to entertain myself? Not really. I attended such a school this summer. It was like falling into a washing machine — but oh what an incredible experience! I learned more about the realities of education in this one summer than I have in the seven years I've been on the McGill staff. Unfortunately they are lessons which can't be applied to lecturing.

The place is as radical as its teaching method, it has schools in every English speaking country except Canada and they operate without endowment. Skills are graded more like the Judo belt system than by the degree system of the universities. It has one of the fastest and probably the most efficient communications network in the world. It teaches what I call in my lighter moods "quack psychiatry"; its aim being the spread and testing of techniques which produce super-normal sanity, techniques which impressed me more than have any other techniques in this line. It marries people. I attended three weddings while I was there. It is as dynamic as the early Christian church and makes any modern church look sick-sick. It seeks the evolution of the first sane civilization this planet has ever seen and it will probably succeed. Its growth rate and dynamic stability is such that it will be one of the most formidable educational institutions in the world within fifty years.

But all that is another story. Its strange and enormously efficient educational technology is what I wanted to mention here for you to think about. I thought about it.

The name of the place: The Academy of Scientology, 1812 19th St. NW, Washington 9. DC, USA, the North American central organization.

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NEWS: loose (news desk), lisa, masha, george, ba, huda robinson. SPORTS: a (desk), dave mcferlane, and maybe more, like the abominable snowman. PHOTOS: harry red, wanda?, goldfish, lynny and new times for microdel. Get your tickets while they last, and seize upon the goalposts. The redmen band strikes again. And thanks for the beer, all you S.Eng. Ejects.

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