

A DON"

The moral: such possible side-effects of University education - scars and complexes - can certainly provide a powerful potential source of motivation. The world is also full of people "who carry permanent psychological scars from their youthful experiences" & whose effectiveness as adults was made more rather than less.

"Rats and men come to love the things for which they suffer". There is empirical evidence supporting this generalization. One may say, therefore, that learning which is associated with such "suffering" as is due to exams and high expectations (creating high anxiety etc.) may come to be loved for its own sake. Such a noble end certainly justifies a little bit of "suffering".

Moreover, this over-concern with suffering psychological scars, etc., only reveals a philosophy of man as a delicate creature. This low regard for the stuff of which humans are made is certainly not justified by historical or empirical evidence. Such evidence clearly suggests that humans are not brittle and will not break (some will - but they will in any case) so easily - not with exams and grades. It is far more healthy and realistic to work with a philosophy in which our all too human students are seen as made of sterner stuff willing to face severe challenges within the structure of the University system.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The author then goes on to disagree with Drucker's very realistic view that the "cooling out" process is indispensable given the complexity and competitive nature of society. Grades are used for educational purposes within the University. Outside it, if prospective employers would use them for their purposes (at their risk), that's their business. Moreover, I fail to see what is so "disorganizing" or "alienating" or "punative" about such use of grades by agencies other than the University. Whatever Sorokin says, just what evidence is there that it "mishapes the minds and distorts the souls of those whom it touches"? At least, grant to organizations what you would grant the individual organism - the free pursuit of its own good.

A carrot a day keeps the student awake. After a brief detour, the author makes another attempt to get down to brass tacks - and this

time he realizes 'the importance of being earnest'. Examinations and grades, he believes, are rationalized by professors as a "carrot & stick (somehow sounds better the other way) device to reward achievement in the learning process and to coerce (watch it!) underachievers to do better". Let me clarify how this "device" constitutes the very step in the learning process which the author is unwilling to step on. The "stick" is what psychologists call a "drive" (provided in this case by exams) and "carrots" are what they call "incentives", (expectancy of reward, provided in this case by grades). Drive and incentive together constitute the two sides of the coin that we call "motivation". Now, I do believe, that a drive to acquire information or learn (some call it a "curiosity drive", I call it a "drive to organize") is an essential property of all organisms with a nervous system and increases in direct proportion to its complexity. I even published a paper on this about 7 years ago and pursued this thesis in my doctoral work and found some evidence for it. However, a decade of University teaching has brought disillusionment with it. I am finding it extremely difficult to hold on to my hypothesis (by the way, this is an instance of a genuine hypothesis since I am willing to let experience refute me!). No wonder, some who had been in University teaching much longer had thought I was wrong!

Now, if the drive is either non-existent or has been lost on the way in school, then there is nothing morally wrong in creating it by setting up, what one commentator called, "a framework of expectations". High performance can be expected only within such a context of high expectations; where examinations are seen as barriers to be overcome or as challenges to be met. In such a context, one learns not only the subject matter but also the value of adequate preparation in meeting challenges and overcoming barriers. Only in this sense can higher education be said to constitute 'a preparation for life'.

Grades (carrots) can contribute their share to motivation by serving as feedback indices of one's degree of competence. It is not too easy to deny, therefore, that a few carrots per semester are fairly rich motivational health foods and contribute to the student's general well-being and self knowledge.

Furthermore, there is certainly nothing immoral about motivating (not "coercing" now) underachievers to perform better. We know quite well from personal experience (as well as from empirical evidence) that a sense of achievement is, in fact, what ultimately provides an individual with feelings of mastery and self-fulfillment. When we know that achievement is such an important ingredient in the development of self-esteem, what can be undesirable about motivating underachievers? To be educated is an achievement.

Grades again - but now they speak louder than words. At this point, let me reiterate - the function of a University is not to fix the value or worth of a person. However, one has to agree that grades have always acquired this property of worth and do become generalized to the whole person. But this is a matter of social attitudes towards grades and the individual merely absorbs and reflects these attitudes in judging himself. Let us then try to take care of this problem at the roots and educate the student and the society at large (which is partly what I meant when I said the baby could do with a good wash). Grades should be value free and this is not a contradiction in terms as it might appear at first sight. The assumption that "grades are degrading" (which the author has made elsewhere) begs the question since it shows that we have already swallowed the notion that grades in fact establish the worth of a student. Since there are individual differences in the types of competence a person can have, grades cannot reflect the worth of a person - only his competence in certain types of tasks. Varying the words (but not the spirit) of one commentator we could say - individuals can be excellent and equal too. The author's view that "grades are degrading", therefore brings out an interesting contradiction. According to his own view, grades do not reflect information of any value. Granting the correctness of this assumption, it is clearly contradictory to maintain that grades are nevertheless degrading.

The function of grades is an informative one - both for the individual and the prospective employer - reflecting the individual's level of competence in a discipline (and hence their "worth" only for a certain type of work). What other method can one suggest by