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A Few Thoughts On The Difference Between Education And Training

[This is an excerpt taken from a letter to the editor of *National Forum: The Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, Spring 2000, p. 46.]

If I may add some additional comments to Dr. Wilson's excellent article on Grade Inflation ["The Phenomenon of Grade Inflation in Higher Education," Fall 1999, "Lagniappe"], there is another major pressure coming into the universities, and particularly the state universities. It is the increasing insistence -- particularly from state governments (with the associated control of the money) -- that students, when they leave, must be able to walk right into some job without any further "training." This sounds so reasonable that what gets lost is that the universities are *not* in the business of "training." Their business is "educating."

The difference? It's the difference between *know how* and *know why*. It's the difference between, say, being *trained* as a pilot to fly a plane and being *educated* as an aeronautical engineer and knowing why the plane flies, and then being able to improve its design so that it will fly better. Clearly both are necessary, so this is not putting down the Know-How person; if I am flying from *here* to *there* I want to be in the plane with a trained pilot (though if the pilot knows the *Why* as well, then all the better, particularly in an emergency).

The difference, also, is fundamentally that *Know How* is learning to Think Other People's Thoughts, which indeed is

also the first stage in education -- in contrast to learning to Think Your Own Thoughts, which is why *Know Why* is the final state of education. Indeed, both Know How and Know Why are essential at one moment or another, and they interact all the time; but at the same time, the center of gravity of education is and must be in the Know Why. For emphasis in Know How, go to a training college.

And the further pay-off point is that when the *educated* student goes into a job, the ability to think one's own thoughts is also the source of flexibility so that, as the job requirements change or the job enlarges, the educated student is able to move with the changes. This should be a central issue with employers, but all too rarely is this the case. If only trained, then, if the job changes, the student has to be retrained.

Are all students fit to be at the university? This is really not our question; if students can meet the standards and *want* to go to the university, that's their choice. But if a student tells me, in the middle of taking a core-required thermodynamics or fluid dynamics course, "Don't give me all that theoretical stuff; just give me the equation and tell me how to use it," then I know that the student wants to be trained, not educated. . .

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