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Response to “The Chronicle of Higher Education”

Professors and students are laboring under very different metaphors for education, and neither group is particularly conscious of that fact. This is the basis for Walter R. Tschinkel’s article, “The Chronicle of Higher Education”. While this is a simple fact that many students, myself included, intuitively know – it underscores our educational system and puts students and educators at odds with both one another and the intended goal of the system.

I’ll freely admit that throughout my time here at UCSC, I’ve been more focused on my grades and how to “game” the system rather than concentrating on my learning. While there can – and is – overlap between the metaphors used by students and those used by professors, the two tend to diverge significantly more than overlap, and therein lays the issue. While it’s easy for students to say that their learning takes precedence when the going gets tough – and it seems that for every homework assignment and midterm successfully passed, there are always several more coming up with not enough time to dedicate to each – that’s when truly absorbing and synthesizing the material doesn’t seem as important as simply not failing. While the pressure may not necessarily be intended, it often pushes students to prioritize their grades over their learning as we tend to judge academic performance from grades although – and as any student can tell

you – grades are usually an indicator of how well one has played the “game” rather than serving as an accurate indicator of learning.

While I completely agree with Tschinkel’s thoughts about the metaphors and his exploration of what each really means, however contrary to the holder’s original thoughts and opinions of each, I find the disconnect between the student’s chosen metaphor and the reality of the situation to be more interesting as it shows how we are consciously unaware of our actions and how they inhibit our education. Whether we managed to fool ourselves into believing that our tactics somehow convert into learning or students (or at least a good majority of those in Tschinkel’s lecture) have a massive lack of self-awareness, it’s interesting to note that Tschinkel’s belief that switching to a teaching methodology more commonly found in American high schools will prove to be more effective runs counter to the K-12 educational debate around our country currently. Ironically, American public high schools are universally regarded as some of the worst in the developed world while American post-secondary institutions singlehandedly dominate college ranking. And yet, Tschinkel’s switch to a learning environment that has continuously failed American high school students for decades has somehow managed to improve learning in his classroom. While this may suggest that the American teaching style may not be to blame here, that discussion is outside the scope of this essay but is fascinating to note.

In conclusion, while the metaphors we use are a reflection of our reality, they are just that – a periscope into our thoughts and opinions, however true or false they are. The true reality may be vastly different from our beliefs and sometimes is as seen with Tschinkel’s observations. While I, and every student, resolve to truly learn the material

and not allow ourselves to devolve into only caring for what is supposed to be less meaningful points and grades, it's only an illusion that will be shattered when our grades are on the line.