



Uncarved Blocks

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A concept mentioned in *The Tao of Pooh* is called the "uncarved block," and merits consideration by educators. It suggests that people are like wooden blocks. Life experiences make impressions or "carvings" into the block, which ultimately change the block.

Imagine for a moment that each student comes to us as an "uncarved block." Since the object of education is essentially one of facilitating change and growth, teaching necessarily carves impres-

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This article is based on materials in *The Professor's Handbook* by Gary A. Holt, Kay E. Holt, and Richard Hood, published by Mancorp Publishing, Tampa, FL in 1996.

sions into the block. Yet, the impressions which we carve into the blocks of our students can be either positive or negative. If the educational process is successful and appropriate, the student graduates with greater wisdom, self-confidence and self-esteem and leaves the Ivory Tower grateful for the learning experience.

If the educational process is negative, the student may still graduate with wisdom, but may lack self-confidence and self-esteem and will likely leave the educational environment with resentment for the experience. The destruction of self-esteem is almost a point of pride in the medical model, though an unfortunate characteristic from a perspective of educational methodologies.

Dr. T. Sam Roe, who is originally from Korea, points out that according to the Eastern philosophy if the block becomes sufficiently "scarred" (*i.e.*, by negative carvings), it may become useless. This could be manifested as contempt for education, the profession, the institution, or perhaps, as burnout or unwillingness to participate in future educational growth experiences. This concept is worth our consideration as we consider how many alumni have negative views of the Ivory Tower and faculty, regarding how many alumni are not financially supportive and regarding the disdain which many practitioners have for continuing educational opportunities.

We leave lasting impressions (*i.e.*, "carvings in the block") via the manner in which we design educational experiences, learning environments, student evaluations, and the way in which we interact with students. This is reflected in the following quote:

A teacher affects eternity . . . he can never tell where his influence stops.

—Henry Brooks Adams

Particularly at a time when most academic institutions very much need the support of alumni, it is appropriate to consider the impressions which are carved into the "blocks" of our students, lest they should become academic scars. When we truly make academic success our mission and use *appropriate* educational pedagogy as the tools of our craft, we can expect to carve blocks of beauty, rather than blocks of scars.