

# Faculty Update

SPECIAL EDITION

## STRIKE OF 2006

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## *Management's Theory of Education...*

A CANDID PHONE INTERVIEW WITH MR. MAKIM MCPHIT

Recently at the St. James picket, our VP of Academic Excellence and Innovation, Michael Cooke, echoed Management's proposal that, out of concern for students, managers would assist them in completing the last seven weeks of all their courses, and that this could even be accomplished in two weeks, if necessary, so long as course outcomes were met.

We were astonished. How could managers, whose current expertise is in administering, educate students in specialized disciplines and training that usually takes seven weeks to present, process and master, let alone in only two weeks?

Since our VP was unavailable, we telephoned Management to find out. We were put in touch with Mr. Makim McPhit. We're unsure of his exact position. He informed us that once you rationalize a process you don't need to actually know anything about specific content to be able to operate it, and that this applied to managing as well. So being a manager of anything was rather arbitrary and becoming obsolete. "Nowadays, we're all just managers of whatever you have to manage," he said.

When asked how Management would do what they announced they'd do, he replied:

*"Well, it's actually quite simple once you understand the four latest revolutions in education, something I think managers have done better than faculty. Let me explain. The first revolution was applying a corporate model of doing business to learning by thinking of it as 'the business of learning'. Now that's thinking outside the box, and thinking out of boxes is why we're managers."*

We were about to object that while business was a valuable profession it may not be appropriate to literally apply the business model to the teaching-learning process itself. Only he interrupted us and said there'd be time for questions later.

*"The second revolution," he continued, "had to do with what we like to call 'student-centred learning'. You remember that white paper the VPs Academic put out in the 1990's? Revolutionary stuff. The whole point was to get away from this 'sage-on-the-stage' teaching approach. Only we decided to bypass the 'guide-on-the-side' approach we originally proposed – too expensive – and leapt forward to the 'PowerPoint-runs-the-joint' approach. Since a machine now presents the content instead of a sage or a guide, anyone can run the presentation, including managers. More win-win, outside the box thinking, I'd say."*

We pointed out that PowerPoint was quite a sophisticated presentation tool. It could be used to do a lot of interesting, innovative teaching. But such teaching still required a solid knowledge of what was to be taught.

*"Ya, it's a pretty sophisticated tool. Only we encourage faculty to follow our lead and use it to oversimplify everything. I mean, you've been to one of our meetings. Nowadays, people don't have time to*

*process complex, difficult stuff or participate in discussions. Besides, attention spans are declining. Bullet everything that needs to be said in less than eight words, and no more than eight bullets to a slide. Eight by eights, educates.”*

We were about to ask that if this were true, why have so many colleges shifted to a seven by seven semester system, when he continued.

*“Now the third revolution in education is perfecting the barn door theory of teaching. You know, you throw some dung at the barn door; if it sticks, it sticks; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t. This is basic. Only we’ve revolutionized it by reducing and oversimplifying material into little nuggets of know-how, and then massaging them with marketing techniques. That way you throw less at the barn door, and what you do throw sticks better.”*

We asked Mr. McPhit if this didn’t reduce knowledge and skill to just information and technique, but he didn’t seem to hear, or perhaps understand, the question.

*“I think the part you’re having trouble with,” he replied, “is massaging material. It means making knowledge short, catchy, accessible, memorable. Like “Canada became a state in 1868”. Ya, ya, I think it actually was 1867, but what’s a year or so? Nothing that’d be useful here rhymes with seven. Besides, it more or less meets an important educational outcome – learning something historical about your country so you can be a good citizen.”*

We began challenging him on the value of presenting memorable misinformation like the newspaper ad they recently ran on the strike, but he said there’d be time for discussion later.

*“And that’s the fourth educational revolution – leaving behind aims, process and objectives and leaping forward to efficiently meeting learning outcomes any way you can. See, if you’re going to rationalize something as complex as educating, you have to focus what you’re aiming at in vaguer, simpler terms. The problem with the old way was being locked into a particular process and content in a particular place and time. By contrast, outcomes are highly results-oriented in a nebulous way. So you can more or less arrive at where you more or less want to get to in lots of ways. You know, flexibility is everything in this age of everchanging change. Let’s take the bottom line example in education. When you start thinking of learning as a business, you suddenly see ‘Aha! There’s really only one outcome in all education – learning. So as long as you’re more or less achieving that outcome, you’re more or less educating’.”*

We were about to discuss his line of reasoning when he continued.

*“So you can see that it’s because most of us managers are in synergetic sync with the latest educational revolutions that we’re more than qualified to help students complete their courses this term. And ya, your VP is probably right. If you’re really pumped, you probably could teach a half a course in a couple of weeks. Now our time is pretty much up, but I can take one question.”*

At this point, we questioned whether this whole revolutionary theory of education was actually valid for preparing people well in their personal lives or for their working and public lives.

*“You mean getting ‘em ready for jobs. Damn good question, damn good. You’re already showing me you’ve learned a lot from what I just said, and demonstrating critical thinking skills to boot. Well, we think so, and we’re the managers. And how could we be managers of colleges if we didn’t know much about educating?”*

We thought it was a good question, damn good. ⌨ ⌨ ⌨ ⌨