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The Axiological Universe of Academic Teachers. Case Study: Petroleum Gas University. Preliminary Stage

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Abstract

Teachers in higher education have fulfilled, and fulfil even today, several roles. One of them is that of knowledge provider, another is that of researcher and another is that of transmitter of values, beliefs and life principles. This latter role influences the options, visions, motivations, priorities and even the life meaning of future intellectuals. Representing a preliminary stage in a larger project, this study aims to bring to the fore the axiological universe of academics (with more than 20 years expertise in higher education from Petroleum Gas University of Ploiesti), a dimension quasi-neglected by researchers in science education and education system administrators alike.

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1. Introduction

As we already know, the academics have fulfilled several roles along time, and they still do. One of them – and maybe the most dedicated one – was (and still is) that of knowledge provider. Another role – and maybe the most referred to lately – was (and still is) that of scientific researcher in a certain field of human knowledge, and another was (and is) that of transmitter – more or less intentional – of values, beliefs, life principles.

Even if this latter role influences - more or less profoundly – the options, concepts, motivations, beliefs, priorities and even the life meaning of future intellectuals (Mureșan, [1], Frankl, [2], Yalom, [3], Zohar [4] și Marshall, [5]), it is quasi-neglected by researchers in education sciences and by the administrators of the education system.

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2. Methodology

Although in a preliminary stage, this study aims to discover the values around which the academics’ lives are organized, the values at the base of their relationship with themselves and their students and the values they want to transmit to their disciples.

A total of 26 subjects from the Petroleum Gas University of Ploiești participated in this research. All of them have over 20 years of expertise in higher education. We have imposed this criterion because this category of academics has grown and developed before 1989, which means before the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. We intend that in the following stages of the research to extend our subjects’ sample to those with less than 15 years of expertise in higher education (respectively with academics educated after 1990, under a democratic political and administrative regime) and to compare, from the point of view of their own values, the two generations of academic teachers.

Our sample had the following structure:

Table no. 1. Sample structure according to gender

| Gender     | Teaching staff | Percentage |
|------------|----------------|------------|
| Women      | 13             | 50         |
| Men        | 13             | 50         |
| Total      | 26             | 100        |

Table no. 2. Sample structure according to field of expertise

| Field of expertise          | Teaching staff | Percentage |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Technical and engineering sciences | 13             | 50         |
| Humanities and social sciences     | 13             | 50         |
| Total                          | 26             | 100        |

3. Results

Following the collection and analysis of answers, it emerged that:

Table no. 3. Values academics most believe in

| Female academics, engineering sciences | Female academics, humanities and social sciences | Male academics, engineering sciences | Male academics, humanities and social sciences |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Truth (are incriminated: hypocrisy, lies): 12 p. | 1. Honesty (are incriminated: pride, self-sufficiency, opportunism): 9 p. | 1. Sincerity (are incriminated: lies, wickedness): 11 p. | 1. Sincerity (are incriminated: lie, wickedness): 11 p. |
| Correctness, honesty, honour           | 2. Honesty (are incriminated:                           | 2. Honesty (are incriminated:                           | 2. Honesty (are incriminated:                           |
|                                        |                                             |                                             |                                             |
(are incriminated: fraud, arrogance, imposture): 10 p.
2. Honour, sincerity (are incriminated: lie, hypocrisy): 7 p.
3. Altruism, solidarity, mutual respect (are incriminated: selfishness, individualism, offenses, rejection): 9 p.
2. Altruism (are incriminated: selfishness, ignoring others, isolation): 9 p.
3. Political values (are incriminated: fight for power, politics, corruption): 6 p.
2. Generosity (are incriminated: stinginess, greed): 4 p.
greed, theft, selfishness): 5 p.
2. Justice, equity (are incriminated: injustice, privileges, favouritism): 5 p.

Table no. 4. Values referring to their own work

| Female academics, engineering sciences | Female academics, humanities and social sciences | Male academics, engineering sciences | Male academics, humanities and social sciences |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Professionalism: 2 options; Quality; Self-improvement; Efficiency; Competence; Rigour; Conscientiousness; Communication; Openness. | Professional competence; (Scientific) Truth; A work well done; Conscientiousness; | Professional competence; Knowledge; Continuous development; Hard work; Applicability of transmitted knowledge; Willingness to do one’s job as best as possible. | Acknowledgement of results: 2 options; Thoroughness; Professionalism; Quality work; Integrity; Self-improvement. |

Table no. 5. Fundamental values that higher education should currently instil in students

| Female academics, engineering sciences | Female academics, humanities and social sciences | Male academics, engineering sciences | Male academics, humanities and social sciences |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. Work: 11 p. | 1. Respect (for self, for others, for work, for intellectual performance): 12 p. | 1. Respect (for self, for science, for one’s profession): 13 p. | 1. Professionalism/ excellence: 7 p. |
| 2. Professionalism/competences: 9 p. | 2. Competences, professionalism: 7 p. | 2. Knowledge: 9 p. | 2. Competences: 6 p. |
| 3. Respect (for self, for peers, for work): 8 p. | 3. Responsibility: 5 p. | 3. Correctness: 5 p. | 3. Work: 4 p. |

We deemed interesting the last messages academics would address at their last meetings with students (in their career):
a. Female academics, engineering sciences: „Do not lose your dignity!”; „Trust in yourselves, be honest and do not back from hardships!”; „Win the battle with life fairly!”; „Keep learning and believe in surpassing your own limits!”; „Love life!”.
b. Female academics, humanities and social sciences: Don’t forget to be good people; Learn how to know yourselves; Be honest, serious, competent.
c. Male academics, engineering sciences: „Love! Love your enemies too!”; Be dignified in every situation; „Without knowledge (without technical training) you will not be able to adapt!”; Have faith and hope in your success in life!; Learn as much as possible and use your leisure time in a useful way.
d. Male academics, humanities and social sciences: „Be honest!”; Be willing to help others; Be responsible and believe in yourselves; „Learn as long as you live!”; Show your magnanimity and generosity!
Table no. 6. The value that will save/preserve humankind

| Female academics, engineering sciences | Female academics, humanities and social sciences | Male academics, engineering sciences | Male academics, humanities and social sciences |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Faith in God: 2 options;               | Faith (in God): 2 options;                        | Profound faith in God: 2 options;   | Responsibility: 3 options;                    |
| Love for one’s neighbour/peers: 2 options; | Appreciation for others;                          | Correctness;                        | Work (and dignity): 2 options;                 |
| Correctness;                           | Humanism;                                         | Family and friendship;              | Trust (in people);                             |
| Self-improvement;                      | Culture;                                          | Hope;                               | Learning, culture and quality work;           |
| Faith and hope that we will only promote the good; | Overcoming individualism;                         | Moral value;                        | Love for people and nature.                    |
| Perseverance in reaching goals.         | Struggle for perfection.                          | Fear.                               |                                               |

Table no. 7. The values needed by future society

| Female academics, engineering sciences | Female academics, humanities and social sciences | Male academics, engineering sciences | Male academics, humanities and social sciences |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. Work: 7 p.                          | 1. Morality, principledness, tolerance: 11 p.    | 1. Morality: 9 p.                   | 1. Responsibility: 7 p.                       |
| 1. Faith (in God): 7 p.                 | 2. Generosity, dedication, mutual help: 8 p.     | 2. Honesty: 7 p.                    | 2. Kindness, humanity, self-sacrifice for others: 6 p. |
| 2. Order, discipline: 5 p.              | 3. Professionalism, sobriety, competence: 6 p.   | 3. Competence: 5 p.                 | 3. Work: 5 p.                                 |
| 3. Correctness: 4 p.                    |                                                  | 3. (Acquired) Knowledge: 5 p.       |                                               |
| 3. Competence: 4 p.                     |                                                  |                                    |                                               |
| 3. Trust (in people): 4 p.              |                                                  |                                    |                                               |

4. Discussions

Following the research and data interpretation we have observed that academics – with more than 20 years expertise in higher education – are preoccupied with their own values, respectively with those on which they base the relationship with themselves, with others/ students, with their own work; with the values of the future generation, the correlation of the cognitive dimension of their lives with the axiological one. We have obtained important data that illustrate their values, beliefs, ideals and life principles.

After investigating and correlating the information we have deduced that the values they believe the most in are: honesty/correctness, integrity, dignity, faith (in God). In subjects’ opinion the less present values in the (Romanian) contemporary society are: truth, correctness, mutual respect, honesty, altruism, solidarity. The interviewed academics consider that in human interrelations there is a lot of hypocrisy, deceit, imposture, careerism, selfishness, alienation and feeble generosity. They are concerned with the extent rate of upstartism, dilettantism, hypocrisy, careerism (a rat race for a privileged social position), of conceit, superficiality, nerve and lie.

The subjects have noticed that a great danger – in this context – is encouraging and developing forms without substance (when speaking about individuals as well as institutions). A lot of activities take place only formally, in order to be ticked off a to-do list, to save face and to fulfil – in fact – the criteria imposed for wage increases and professional promotion.
Nevertheless, our subjects seek to manifest themselves as correct people, respectful, self-exigent, serious and concerned about their own professional improvement. In short, they are conducted by the principle of unity of thinking, action and word.

Regarding their relationship with their professional activity, the values guiding them are: professionalism, the quality of their work and the recognition of their results. Of course, for our subjects, conscientiousness, communication with students, a job well done and self-improvement / continuous development are equally important. Academics (with over 20 years of expertise) are aware of the importance of the personal model for the evolution and options of their students and of their responsibility to society. Also, they are aware of the fundamental value higher education must instill in future alumni – in an organic, intrinsic and interactive way: work. It is closely followed by respect (for themselves and others, for their profession); at the same time there is also the thirst for knowledge, professionalism and excellence.

We discover that there are values (very) feebly represented such as: courage, team spirit, the capacity for self-assessment, originality and cooperation (as essential elements of freedom).

When there comes to the last message they would address students at their last meeting, we have noticed the importance given to dignity, to a life lived with pride, to trust in one’s own force, to life-long learning, love of neighbours, hope and faith in one’s own success in life and, especially, to not dissipating one’s time with dangerous/useless things.

From the data obtained emerges the fact that subjects in PGU Ploiesti believe that what will always preserve and save humankind from anarchy, chaos and self-destruction is (profound) faith in God, work, responsibility, appreciation of others, family, culture or – why not – fear. Future society needs values such as: generosity, dedication, mutual help, principledness, tolerance, faith in God, humanity, fairness/correctness, responsibility. Values such as protecting the environment, voluntary simplicity or religious unity of people are only feebly represented.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This first stage of our research proves the necessity to probe the axiological universe of academics, a dimension quasi-neglected by scientific research and by those who intend to define – officially – its current statute. As we may see, the academic teacher is not only a valuable and solid source of knowledge, a rigorous exponent of research, but he/she is also an inexhaustible and incontestable provider of values, beliefs and life principles. From this research emerges the fact that academics with more than 20 years of expertise in higher education (from Petroleum Gas University of Ploiesti) focus on the following values: work, responsibility, honesty/fairness, self-respect, respect for others, respect for one’s profession, faith in God, tireless concern for knowledge and self-improvement. It is recommended we extend the research to the other category of academics, with an expertise of less than 15 years in the field (which entered the higher education system after 1990, under a democratic political regime). Also, such investigation maintains the state of awareness and self-assessment of subjects asked to clarify and explicitly express their options, priorities, rejections, convictions.

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