

## Education at the University - in the Opinion of Students and Teachers (2008-2012)

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### ABSTRACT

The paper refers to the role of teachers in education (upbringing) of students in two kinds of schools - the university and the higher vocational school. In 2008 we conducted research between students of The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and the High Vocational School in Biała Podlaska. In 2010 we undertook those problem at the same schools, but we investigated the teachers' opinions. Then we compared the students' opinions with the teachers' opinions. In general, the opinion of students and teachers are similar. But we found problems in pattern of teachers' behavior. Some of them (but not many) are little conscious of their role in educating the young, not very involved in their work, unprepared to classes, not punctual, unjust, and rude to their students. Then in 2012 we make deeper the research by asking students to write how they understand the perfection at the university.

**Keywords:** education, high school, university education, upbringing, authority of the teacher

### INTRODUCTION

Upbringing (education) we call conscious, intentional and planned activities of educators (or its effect), which is intended to induce positive changes in personality and behavior of the pupil. In other words: we understand education as a help in development of a child or young person. Upbringing - at the same time - is possible thanks to authentic meeting of people (Nowak, 2000). Different educational systems in different ways define specific goals, tasks and methods of education (Kunowski, 2007). However, apart from these discussions, it is clear that the teacher usually acts through a number of known mechanisms of educational psychology, such as imitation, modeling, identification, interiorization of norms and values and role playing or giving meaning to situations and events (Przetaczniak-Gierowska, 1998). In the pedagogy they are called direct and indirect methods of education (e.g. interaction through conversation, presenting personal patterns, organization of the educational environment or through the impact of group) (Łobocki, 2009). Upbringing takes place in different environments - especially the family and school (Łuczynski, 2011), also in high school. University teachers are people who can to the greatest extent create the university culture and influence personality and behavior of students (Le Cornu, 2010).

### METHODES AND PROCEDURES

The question arises how university teachers can educate students at researched schools, and to what extent they actually do it. Our research was conducted in two schools (university and high school), both among students and employees, to answer these questions.

Diagnostic survey was conducted in two universities in April 2008 in order to obtain students' opinions. We managed to get a survey of 208 students (at the Catholic University of Lublin - from 107 people and at the State School in Biała Podlaska - 101 people). Among respondents there were mostly students of second and third year. The group consisted of 173 women and 35 men. The subjects were 107 full-time students and 101 part-time students. The questionnaire was prepared by the authors of the article. It included 29 open questions, closed questions (disjunctive and conjunctive), alternative questions and a Rating Scale.

Teachers were surveyed in 2010 almost the same questionnaire. They were employees of the same schools. Unfortunately, we managed to obtain only seventy-one properly completed questionnaires. Almost 82% came from KUL. In the study there participated women (54%) and men (46%). The teachers represented the social sciences (26%), legal sciences (23%), mathematical sciences (21%) and humanities (20%), but also science, philosophy and theology. The questionnaire for academic teachers was also prepared by authors and included 34 open questions, closed questions (disjunctive and conjunctive) alternative questions and a Rating Scale (Łuka & Truskolaska, 2010).

In 2012 we asked students to write any open work about the perfection at the university, because we wanted

to make our research deeper. The topic of that work was: "how do you understand perfection at the university". The 51 written expressions of students were categorized and analyzed both in quantitative and qualitative way. The aim of the study was to answer the question: what is perfection, especially at the university, in the opinion of students of the Catholic University of Lublin. Statements of 51 students of pedagogy (II and IV year full-time) were collected to answer the research question. The statements were written completely arbitrary and had two parts. They provided the answer to the question, "What is your opinion on perfection, and especially what is perfection at the university?" The statements were collected in November 2012. The collected comments were categorized. Then the categories were grouped into four types: "honest fulfilling the obligations", "atmosphere at the university and meeting the needs", "material, organizational and didactical conditions" and "mission and reputation of the university." Subsequently the responses were counted. The result of calculations and conclusions arising from them are presented in forth section of the article.

#### **THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH – STATEMENTS OF STUDENTS (2008) AND TEACHERS (2010) - COMPARISON**

The students, in the vast majority, said that academics shape the culture of the university and affect its environment, mainly the youth. Professors interact primarily through their behavior, which is a role model for students, and especially by the attitude towards students, the ability to transfer knowledge, communication and the way of activities conducting, organization of cultural events and scientific circles. Several persons stated that the care for the university good name, religious attitude and even the appearance of the lecturers is important, too.

A very similar opinion is expressed by their academics. They added, that the realization of values is important in shaping the culture of high school, in particular the level of scientific work (e.g. the constant widening their knowledge), the method of conducting classes (e.g. opportunities for discussion, the relevant requirements), introducing students to the history and traditions of the university and the active way of representing the university to the outside, too.

Values preferred by academics - in the opinion of students - are primarily knowledge and religious values, but also social prestige, and (to a small extent) the material values, rarely - the hedonistic values. Teachers found that the values which they themselves consider to be the most important are successively: moral values (37%), knowledge (35%), social prestige (21%), the material values (15%), religious values (12%) and hedonistic values(1%). Interestingly, social prestige gained the high value, especially in comparison with religious values (especially in KUL). It seems that the respondents are aware of this deficiency, because in the next section they expressed the opinion that university staff should first of all realize the moral, social, intellectual and religious value. Students present a very similar opinion, but the majority considers that teachers should realize first of all intellectual values, and in the second place the moral and religious values.

Most of the young people expect from their teachers mainly appropriate attitude to students: justice and impartiality, honesty, respect, good manners, forbearance and tolerance, kindness, patience, openness and understanding (in the following order). Students also want their lecturers to be more involved in their work (creative, reliable), cooperate with students and conduct interesting and less monotonous activities.

Despite the awareness of these deficiencies, the vast majority of students (75%) believe their teacher as a scientific authority (the most students), both - moral and scientific authority or moral authority only (the smallest group of studied youth). Some students found that only some teachers deserve the name of authority, while others are completely not any authority. Students from the Catholic University of Lublin treat their professors as the authority more frequently than students from PSW (State High School). The full-time students treat professors this way more often than part-time students.

At the same time as much as 88% of teachers (including 91% of the KUL and 70% in the PSW) state that teachers have authority in the university environment. KUL staff believe that this is both moral and scientific authority (68%), while lecturers of PSW that, above all in the field of science (60%). Thus, it appears that teachers give themselves more authority than the young give them.

Surveyed students in the majority (62%) evaluate the behavior of teachers as good or very good, describing them as friendly, kind, cultural and worth following. But as much as 14% of students speak negatively about professors' behavior, writing that they are arrogant, "wrapped up in themselves and omniscient", treat the work as sad duty or a punishment, have bad classes (they are boring), reduce activities, discriminate some students.

At the same time 32% of students perceive the behavior of teachers as different. They underline in his remarks that everyone is different and this is difficult to evaluate general behavior of all teachers. They write for example: "the majority behaves very well, but there are exceptions which do not respect the students", "behavior is generally correct, although there were unacceptable incidents (e.g. teasing people from the village)". Worth thinking

about is the student's statement about the professors: "There are two types – those we will never forget and the others we would never want to be."

Most of the respondents perceive their professors as people who are: lenient, friendly, open and communicative, competent, intelligent and witty, able to pass on the knowledge, honest and fair, truthful, timely and cultural. A small part of the students defines their teachers as: unfair and unjust, uninvolved and bored, haughty, proud and unpunctual.

Lecturers more critically evaluate the behavior of their own and their colleagues. Half of professors (43% at KUL and 70% in the PSW) believes that the behavior of teachers in their schools is proper, good or very good. The second half (especially employees of KUL) evaluates critically the behavior of their colleagues, subordinates, superiors, and perhaps his own. Many lecturers criticize some colleagues, but in the same speech they stress reliability, hard work and involvement of others. Most often cited faults (which is also confirmed by the teachers answering the following question) are: not engaging in work, creating the appearance of activity, arrogance, disrespect for other people (staff and students). Knowledge, kindness, openness to the students, courtesy, conscientiousness, religiosity are usually mentioned among the advantages. Many people in their statements emphasize that there are "those good ones".

Students responded the question: "how scholars treat students?" They stated that in the class most lecturers treat them - friendly, as a subject and partner, in a demanding way but fair. On exams, students - in his mind - are treated fairly, but also often severely and with high requires, sometimes mildly and tolerantly, some professors try to direct, "and even talk and discuss with students". Interesting is the statement: "as a partner - a student passing an exam has the right - if he can properly argue - do not agree with the examiner." However, some of the teachers are not fair, and even act hostile, suspicious and degrading, they treat students as "idiots and fools." But after classes - teachers are mostly friendly, nice, polite, courteous, sometimes indifferent, or unavailable. Many students state that there is no contact with the teachers after classes.

Treating students in class is evaluated by the teachers themselves most often (69%) as good, respectful, professional, friendly. A large part of interviewed teachers stresses that they want to transfer knowledge in such a way that encourages students to learn. We can also meet the voices of criticism, but they are a minority. Treating students in examinations is described by the vast majority to be fair. Some people think of them as too lenient, and some as severe. There are also responses that point out the lack of respect for students during exams, but these are the voices of individuals. While, there is often no contact with students outside the classroom - in the opinion of the employees themselves. However, if the meetings take place, the majority of respondents stated that usually they are characterized by culture, kindness and positive attitude.

Respondents evaluated teachers for several important features (on a scale of 0 to 5). Assessment was as follows (the first is the students' assessment, and the other – teachers'):

- honesty in 3.56 and 4.0,
- dutifulness - 3.70 and 3.95,
- truthfulness - 3.95 and 4.15,
- punctuality - 3.23 and 3.40,
- justice - 3.02 and 3.95,
- involvement in work - 3.84 and 3.75 and
- manners - 4.30 and 3.95.

Some people have pointed out rightly that you can not judge all teachers in general, but as individuals. Self assessment of lecturers is usually slightly higher than the assessment of lecturers made by students. KUL teacher evaluation is somewhat higher than PSW or very similar and oscillates around a position 4. In both schools the weakest point of employees is punctuality, and - in the student evaluation - also justice. The greatest differences occurred between the universities in the field of personal culture, which is far below assessed in PSW, and better in KUL. A feature of teachers (of PSW) concerning the involvement in work achieved extremely low values – 2.66! (Knight, 2002).

Students also assessed how teachers communicate with them. They found that teachers turn to them most frequently in everyday language, simple, understandable and - polite. Often this language is referred to as scientific and specialized. In this case, the majority concluded that teachers explain confusing terms and expressions. Sometimes teachers also use the language of the youth. Individuals stated that teachers turn to students "not always as they should", "it happened that the teacher insulted the students." In general - 3% of students believe that all

teachers can communicate in a communicative way, 65% - the majority of professors, and 32% - that only a few professors are communicative.

Academics believe that the language, they turn to the students, is correct (grammar), a scientific but understandable, characteristic of an area and cultural. Only one person drew attention to the emerging (rare) grammatical errors, and another person to the appearance (very rarely) of profanities. Most teachers (76%, including 90% of the KUL and 62% of the PSW) - like the students - estimate that they communicate with the youth in a communicative way.

Respected norms of behavior are also educational patterns for the younger generation. The vast majority (88%) of the students indicated that the specific standards of behavior were applied at their schools. Most frequently they emphasize the need to respect the general principles of good manners and respect for both - teachers and students. In addition, 6% of students emphasizes the importance of appropriate dress, the prohibition of vulgarisms, a few people mention the prohibition of smoking in college. The necessity to be dutiful, involved in work and punctual. is also underlined. Characteristic is the fact that students of KUL connect norms of behavior with religious values, which is not stressed by the respondents of the PSW.

Opinions of teachers on specific standards of behavior were surprisingly divergent at the Catholic University and PSW. Lecturers from the Catholic University in the 84% reported that such standards were applied, and from the PSW - only in 30%! Successively: the moral, cultural and religious standards were cited most frequently. Some people gave concrete examples: respect for others, neat clothes and cultural expression, fairness at work.

The prevailing customs and traditions are also an important element of education. The vast majority of students (83%) stated that certain habits or rituals were cultivated at their schools. Traditions associated with the inauguration of the new academic year, an oath, initiation ceremonies, Juvenal, public open days, "rector days" and "an academic quarter" are mentioned most often. Catholic University students in large part (60%) stressed the habit of pray in the classroom, participation in Holy Mass, the celebration of the anniversary of the death of John Paul II - the latter was also recognized by students of PSW. Students in 44% considered that these practices were necessary, useful, important for a sense of academic community, supported the culture, traditions and create the atmosphere of the school. One of the students noted that the traditions "testify to the fact that studying is something important in our lives".

The surveyed teachers in 71% (small differences in favor of the university) recognized that the universities held formal and informal traditions. The lecturers mentioned them more than students, for example: matriculation, "Kulturalia" ("Days of Culture"), Christmas meetings, Lent and Advent recollections, preaching in a university church, prayer vigils, "Days of Pedagogues", public lectures, conferences, academic choir performances, St. Andrew party. "Academic quarter", "a zero exam", a slightly shorter first classes of the year are cited as less formal traditions. The surveyed teachers assessed cultivated traditions very positively and described them as needed, nice, integrating a community and creating school's climate. There was no critical voices at them, and only three neutral opinions. Overall, it seems that teachers are a bit more attached to tradition cultivated in the college than students. A lot of old and some newer customs are cultivated at the university. Whereas in the PSW respondents mentioned only a few basic traditions (first above mentioned).

The next question concerned the participation of teachers in everyday university life, especially their social activities. When asked if the students turn to them for help, 97% of respondents answered in the affirmative way. However, only 27% said that they were the tutors of any student group or organization - the most frequently - the tutor of one class of students or a scientific circle. Only 47% lecturers of KUL committed to the social life of the university (usually through voluntary participation in meetings or by helping people in need). However, these results strongly differ from the responses at the PSW - where only 15% of respondents declare their interest in the college social life!

The student statements confirm only to some degree the teachers' opinions. A large part of the youth (71%) know whom they may ask for help when they want to solve any problem. Class tutors were indicated by 30% of young people, staff of dean's office - by 23%, the university authorities - by 21% of the interviewed students. Other academics (in some cases called by their name) and students' government were mentioned much less frequently. In addition, 64% of respondents know students' organizations operating at their universities, but only 11% of students knows who from academics is their tutor. It seems that - in the minds of students - the teachers are much less involved in varied assistance to students than the teachers think of themselves.

Students in the 67% admitted that teachers created a positive atmosphere on campus, usually through a positive attitude to students, smile, nice behavior and conversation. However, only 14% of the students appreciate a sense of humor of their teachers. At the same time a large group of young people (18%) does not see the positive role of teachers in shaping their school climate. Slightly fewer teachers than students (58%, but up 95% from KUL and 23%

from the PSW) said that lecturers create a positive atmosphere at the university. Appropriate attitude, especially openness to students, kindness, understanding and respect for them is mentioned first of all among the ways of building this climate (Petegem, Aeltermann, Keer, & Rosseel, 2008).

Strengthening motivation to learn is also an important part of education at the university. Many students (68%) say that teachers motivate them to gain extra (additional) knowledge. Most do it through encouragement to become familiar with additional literature, to promote participation in scientific circles, participation in scientific conferences. It should be noted that most of these proposals are indicated mainly by full-time students of KUL, other groups of examined students less frequently mentioned such action.

According to the teachers, a bit more, because 80% of the lecturers (in KUL - 91% and 69% in the PSW) encourage students to gain extra knowledge. The most frequently mentioned methods are: giving additional literature, encouraging to participate in conferences, seminars and open lectures or using the indicated websites, and also showing the benefits that can be achieved by such action in the future, such as on the labor market.

According to the most students, common attitudes of the young, shaped by the lecturers, are: dutifulness, conscientiousness, orderliness, respect for knowledge, commitment and activity. However, in several statements (4%) there appeared negative signals - a statement on the transfer of the idea of morality in words, not deeds, showing indifference or boredom.

Teachers the most often list the honesty, truthfulness, responsibility, sensitivity, reliability, conscientiousness, diligence. So it seems that lecturers - in their own opinion - attach greater importance to moral values. And the students think that their teachers formed mainly work-related attitudes, particularly connected with intellectual work.

Young people in the majority (72%) believe that the university helps in shaping the personality of its students. Most frequently it happens through the gained knowledge, meeting new people, new experiences and through developing interests. It is noteworthy that only 1.5% of the respondents points out that they meet with their teachers as the authorities. The university teachers - also in 72% (but up 90% in KUL and only 54% in the PSW) state that the university helps in shaping the personality of students. Most frequently, according to the teachers, this is achieved by their own example, behavior, setting and the enforcement of requirements, pointing to the positive role models, emphasizing the importance of proper moral attitude, discussion in class, but also by a wide range of activities which develop students' interest. It seems that the teachers stress rather their intentional influence, and students - indirect impacts of the whole environment.

#### THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH – OPEN WRITTEN WORKS OF STUDENTS (2012)

Our research from 2012 shows that the students understand the term of perfection as a goal-oriented action, and the goal of the action is good. At the same time, the subjects - who contribute to create academic community - point to the need to strive for excellence at the university. Our students point to four key elements that development the perfection at the university: the conscientious fulfillment of obligations, appropriate atmosphere, suitable conditions for studying (material, organizational and personnel) and taking care about reputation of the university.

Table 1. Categories which are synonymous with perfection at the university - in the opinion of students – summary

No.	Description	Number of choices	
		N	
1.	Good fulfilling the duties	91	1
2.	Atmosphere and meeting needs	79	6
3.	Material, organizational and personnel conditions	42	9
4.	Mission and reputation of the university	8	

They understand the conscientious fulfillment of obligations as: by lecturers - skillful transfer of knowledge, a

high level of education, improving teaching methods, developing the students' interests and motivating to work, putting proper requirements, individual attention of lecturer to students, by students - preparation for classes and exams, gaining knowledge necessary for living and working, improvement and self-realization.

The students understand the appropriate atmosphere as: good interpersonal relationships, respect for others, honesty, caring for the welfare of students and staff, justice, fairness, openness, understanding the needs and difficult situations, support for students, good communication between staff and students, helping people from outside the university e.g. as volunteer, students' help for the university e.g. the organization of conferences.

The students emphasize necessity of engaging both students and lecturers in good job at the university. The opinions expressed in the study are congruent with the approach of Father Janusz Tarnowski (1992), very known Polish pedagogue. He emphasizes the need of continuous improvement of educators and teachers. Their examples attract youth, they become personal model for young people. Youth is involved by the example of lecturers and want to be better and better. (Łuka & Truskolaska 2012).

These results are consistent with the research results from 2008 and 2010, carried out by the authors. They indicate what areas are most important in shaping the culture of higher education and striving for excellence at the university - in the opinion of our students and lecturers.

### CONCLUSIONS

The performed studies tend to a few remarks:

- the most statements of employees seem to be consistent with the statements of students, there were not large discrepancies, which may indicate the reliability of those statements;
- the statements of the students, are surprisingly similar in both schools, which represent the university and higher vocational school, while the opinions of KUL and PSW staff are often quite divergent;
- the teachers evaluate themselves slightly more positively, the students are generally more critical - but not in all aspects of the assessment;
- the both groups of respondents indicated that the realization of values in everyday life through behavior towards other people is one of the key elements shaping the education at the university;
- opinions of both groups - lecturers and students suggest perceptions of teachers as a very important group in higher education and directly affecting the students; most teachers deepen knowledge and also help to shape a friendly atmosphere and provide positive patterns of behavior; at the same time the respondents consider the contribution of the university as an important aspect in shaping attitudes and personalities of students;
- statements of employees (in substantive and formal aspect) also testify to the poorer culture of higher vocational school in comparison with the university, e.g.: fewer mentioned traditions, a few statements that the school has no standards of behaviour, low evaluation of personal culture and commitment of the lecturers;
- the disclosure of critical students and teachers voices is valuable - their dissemination (through publication) can improve certain aspects of school functioning, even at the individual level - so it has practical connotation; students think that teachers should, among others: prepare more interesting lessons, be more involved in the job and fair to students, in all cases, they should turn in a cultural way to the students and come to class on time.

We can cite the anonymous voice from the survey as a short summation of the research: *"Contrary to the opinion of many people, the essential role of the university teacher is not just 'cultivate' science at a high level, but also set a good example to students and do good activities (research and teaching mission) - both are very closely related, and even the best scientist can not be a good academic teacher, if you neglect lectures or ignore educational mission."*

It is obvious that it is difficult to make authorized generalizations because of too few responses of lecturers, but you can treat the discussed results as a contribution to further and more detailed research which we conducted partly in 2012 between of students of CUL in Poland. We wanted to lead further research in Turkey at Baskent University in December 2013 and in Italy in LUMSA University in April 2014.

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