

Edu World 2016
7th International Conference

**GRATITUDE JOURNAL: COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSE
FOR LICENCE AND MASTER STUDENTS**

Alina Mărgărițoiu (a), Simona Eftimie (b)*

* Corresponding author

(a) Petroleum-Gas University, Bd. Bucuresti, 39, Ploiesti, 100680, Romania, alinapetrescu1@yahoo.com
(b) Petroleum-Gas University, Bd. Bucuresti, 39, Ploiesti, 100680, Romania, simone_eftimie@yahoo.com

Abstract

In a hyper consumer society, adolescents and young people learn to believe that the individual and the individualism are fundamental reference points for the world. Decisions for choosing school/university, professional and socio-economic benefit are priorities, in spite of human relations quality. Competition and celebrity culture influence today adolescents and young people to excessive concentrate on the success.

Present paper proposes to identify the gratitude practice to a group of licence and master students of Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti, young people raised in a society dominated by capitalist values: individualism, financial power, competition, and consume.

We intended to make a comparative content analyse based on Gratitude Journal (experimented by doctor Robert Emmons from Davis University, California) and questionnaire. Content analyse of the journals and questionnaire results demonstrated a low level of gratitude for teachers as mentors for their lives on licence students and a raising gratitude level on master students. Considering the differences between the two generations of students involved in our study the conclusion was that they have different value system (and, as a consequence, they value differently important persons of their lives).

© 2017 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

Keywords: Gratitude; Gratitude Journal; gratitude practice.

1. Introduction

In the current context, of the abundance of stimuli and consumer goods, of pragmatism and consumerist tendencies, of the quest for popularity by any means, of poor language and formalism in



inter-human relationships, of estrangement from team work, the meaning of life (purpose, significance, values, principles, and inherently reasons for manifesting gratitude) has increasingly more to do with consumerism (shopping, tourism, body health, beauty obsession etc.).

Paradoxically, the progress in science and technology contrasts with the failure of humans in their search for the authentic meaning of life. Unfortunately, “we are developed and precarious. It is striking, for example, the disappearance almost complete of some essential issues from the horizon of our interrogation and reflection”. (Pleșu, 2011). A possible cause for this situation is that TV broadcasters depict 'role models' who encourage extravagance, meeting personal needs/pleasures, the lack of inhibitions, possession of material goods and ignoring the duties/responsibilities towards the community. The contemporary Ego tends to be narcissistic, selfish, materialistic, hyper-hedonistic, and competitive and dominated by celebrity culture.

On the other hand, society – with its multiple pressures and offers – incites us to consume, to react fast, to obey social and economic commands, to work more (dominated by deadlines, fear of poverty or unemployment). However, the abundance of tasks, requirements and activities leads to the deterioration of our relationships with others (by neglecting family, parents, friends, colleagues) and, gradually, to “a deconstruction of our mental capacity by over-stimulation and scattering” (André, 2009).

Moreover, the individual discovers that success in life does not depend on the effort to learn and individual value does not reside in knowledge or in character (as was the case in the 19th century) but in the “perceptions others have of him/her; image matters more than reality. In a postmodernist key, image is the reality” (Stan, 2007). We can say that personal image replaces nowadays the fundamental value effort used to represent so far. In the view of A. Baricco (2009), access to the deep meaning of things involves effort: time, erudition, patience, diligence, will.

In conclusion, many adolescents and young people are no longer willing to make an effort, because the meaning of life is given by consumed and success is guaranteed by the obsession of personal image/look.

They forget to be grateful to those around or they do not use gratitude practice, because the very nature of gratitude is to focus on others. “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others” (Cicero, apud Bronson, Merryman, 2011).

We all noticed how society nowadays (through feelings of insecurity in social environment, parents' departure to work abroad, undervaluation of school/education) determines children to sink ever deeper into the virtual world. “Sensing parents' reluctance in following their children into this strange realm, game developers came up with the virtual magister (first encountered in Pokémon), the one who's role is to give advice and comfort, to urge and reward when situation dictates” (Stan, 2014).

“Leaving/abandoning” children in front of the TV and/or computers led to lack of culture and shaping consciences with an acute physical loneliness, libertine in language and attitude, without any sense of decency/shame, lacking responsibility and activism/ pro-activity in the real world, “ill with inner emptiness” (Sartori, 2005).

All these aspects from social environment worries us, especially that today adolescents creates tomorrow society, and its quality of depends on the values that young people interiorizes.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose and Hypotheses

We have started our study at the beginning of the 2015 - 2016 academic year with an empiric observation related to the negative emotional state of freshman students in *Pedagogy* and some of the master students in *School Counselling and Career Development* from Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti.

As much as possible, we identified during our activities in the seminar the causes of their negative emotional state:

- for freshman students (aged between 18 and 24 years old), the penchant for sadness, apathy, isolation, melancholy and restlessness were generated by "mass-media's intoxication with disasters, accidents, libels, destruction of property, aggression, murders"; by self-doubt and the feeling of loneliness (due mostly to new colleagues); by the stress of adapting to academic environment; by their family situation or precarious socio-economic situation;
- for master students in *School Counselling and Career Development* (aged between 23 and 42 years old), the concern and disappointment were fully justified by the poor prospects in the field of school counselling, since there were no job vacancies in this field for years.

Wishing to change their emotional state and to get to know their axiological universe, we asked them, as an assignment, to fill in a Gratitude Journal for the first semester. This idea has started from the experiment of doctor Robert Emmons from Davis University, California which have asked the students to complete a Gratitude Journal, for 10 weeks; every week, students have written 5 events for that they were grateful. First, author defines *gratitude as an affirmation of goodness*. The results have been surprisingly: 25% of students were happier, more faithful in their lives, and even get ill less during the experiment. R. Emmons have demonstrated that our genetic structure could be conscious controlled; forcing the students to focus on positive things from everyday life, he made them to escape from the track of the routine. (Bronson, Merryman, 2011).

Besides making them focus on the positives of their lives, we thought we might help them develop, by systematically writing in this Gratitude Journal, skills like written communication, ordering thoughts, expressing emotions and feelings, analyse and interpret the dimensions and experiences of their personal lives.

The main purpose of our study was to identify the gratitude practice to a group of license and master students of Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, young people raised in a society dominated by capitalist value system, which focused on individualism, consume and financial power. Our investigation intend to analyse *the hypotheses* that the exercise of gratitude is influenced by the age of the subjects and, implicitly, by social values.

2.2. Participants and Research Methods

In order to fulfil our purpose we have investigated 21 licence students, freshman year, in *Pedagogy*, aged between 18 and 24 years old and 19 master students, in *School Counselling and Career Development*, aged between 23 and 42 years old, all females, from Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti.

For the duration of the first semester, our subjects have written in the Gratitude Journal. At the end of this period, we applied a questionnaire to be able to rank the most influential people in the lives of our subjects and find the reasons for their gratitude.

So, we have considered that the most appropriate methods to accomplish our investigation purpose were methods like *Gratitude Journal* and *questionnaire*. The content of every journal completed by our students and open questions has focused on the following analyse units:

- a) People who influenced them deeply or who put their mark on their personal development;
- b) People who shaped their character and to whom they are grateful;
- c) People who influenced their choice of educational path and, implicitly, professional path;
- d) The main reasons they are content and grateful for.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. If For Master Students, Teachers and Academic Professors Had a Strong Influence on Their Lives, for Undergrads, Teachers no Longer Represented the Main Reference Points.

Analysing their Journals and the answer to the question “Who are the people with the greatest influence on your life or who left their mark on your personal development?” we note significant differences between the two generations. For master students, the hierarchy of important people is: High school teachers and academic professors (various specializations), parents, grandparents, friends/relatives/neighbours; for freshman year undergrads the hierarchy included parents (mostly mothers), closest colleague, divinity (God and influential people in the moral-Christian field: priest, priest's wife, Religion teacher), teachers (especially the homeroom teacher), grandmother/grandfather, best friend.

The answers of master students about teachers were:

- “I have met many wonderful teachers in university which, through the model of their rigorous training have developed my self-confidence and motivated me to study. They are for me an example of professionalism, humanity, wisdom and noblesse” (Master student, 41 years old).

- “I thank to the teachers (Romanian language and literature, English, Math, Psychology teachers) because they learn me to be responsible and to love books” (Master student, 36 years old).

In contrast, license students mention only a teacher whom they are grateful: “Only my head teacher had passion for her profession, the others were distant. She always understood and teaches us to dive up fear, and to spoke free about our thoughts” (License student, 19 years old).

We are glad to notice that on the first place in the hierarchy of important persons for students are parents: “I am grateful to my parents, because they supported me through my failures”; “Family is the most important for me, and the moments spent with my parents couldn't be compared with nothing else”.

But, our results show that teachers do not succeed to influence pupils as other time, they no longer represent the go to person formatively and axiological, they no longer generate spiritual transformations. Amid the rapid changes in the education system and the denigration of the image and status of teachers in our society, the motivational status of many teachers is seriously affected. From Gabriel Albu (2009, p. 255), “many teachers are motivated only by the security feeling that they have a job (that helps them to survive) and / or a certain feeling of power. For the most precarious and also the most evident

understanding, to be a teacher means to meet the pupils, everyday confrontation with them, to teach (what the curricula impose), to examine, and to evaluate pupils' performances".

Much to our surprise, we noticed the fact that the religious dimension started to take precedence in students in terms of the decrease in importance of the church in our society, and of people with influence within the Christian moral: "I am grateful to God for passing the Baccalaureate exam and for being a student now" (18 years old); "An important person in my life is the priest who drove away my dark thoughts and always listened to me" (21 years old); "I am thankful to our priest's wife for lending me books written by Saints and monks" (19 years old).

This religious dimension in students reveals the influence of the Religion classes in schools, but also the need of young people to look for authentic role models in an immoral society. Church can represent the 'ship' that offers salvation and grants students the emotional balance needed to sail the 'rough seas' of life.

3.2. If Master Students are Grateful to Many Persons Which Have Marked their Character and Their Educational Route (And Also Professional), License Students Underline the Support of their Parents and Self-Education

Socio-economic crisis, values scale inversion, maintaining a fear and stress culture indicate the low number of persons that contribute to license students' development in comparison with the relatively high number of significant persons which have been nominated by master students (who have marked their character and educational route) – teachers, parents, grandparents, friends, colleagues, relatives, neighbours. This result indicates a weakening confidence of license students (aged between 18 and 24 years old) in other persons; this also demonstrates limited human connections, prudence in social / personal relationships.

F. Furedy (apud Albu, 2009) noticed that lately it have been developed "a morality of precaution" in this uncertain world and "detachment of others seems to offer protection against sufferance and emotional risks". Eroding trust between persons, existential anxiety, and limited personal / friendship relations affect physical psychic and psychosocial health for future generations.

So, students' connections with extended family or neighbours are less, fragile, although wanted, and are generating a lot of joy and contribute to the build of self-identity: "My soul is very happy when I see my grandmother. I am grateful to God for the grandmother He gave me. The family reunions with her make me feel myself" (18 years old).

Once again we noticed the consequences, the influences of individualist society which destroy extended family and society links.

The new education paradigm (learning to learn, to look for and to efficiently use the information) have get into students' mentality and attitude, and the proof is the fact that they are conscious about the role of self-education for developing their own character. To the question "Which are the persons that you are grateful for modelling your character?", a significant percent of persons (75%) have indicated self-education, books, motivational movies, voluntary activities, public personalities' lives analysis, following models of life of actress (for example, a license student, 20 years mentioned that "if I had the chance, I would thank to the actress Sophia Loren, Angelina Jolie, Michelle Pfeiffer because they represent for me

models of strong, beautiful women which have had succeed in their career”). And the self-education continues to be investigated in learning approaches, along with other important goals of education.

3.3. If For Master Students, the Reasons for Gratitude are Connected With Others, for License Students Those are Selves-Focus

About gratitude reasons, our findings indicate a significant perception difference between license and master students, both on mentality and behaviour in their own lives. While master students indicate different gratitude reasons (their chance for a good training, professional evolution, teaching qualification, relation with colleagues, marriage, birth of a child), gratitude mediated by other (parents, teachers, husbands / wives, pupils, their own children, friends, university and work colleagues etc.), license students focus excessively on their own (are grateful for health, for physical condition, good mood, because they exist / breed / live).

Interesting is that, in most students' answers we find cognitive, relational, attitudinal stereotypes of the world we are living in and social messages of media (“live the moment”, “power”, “fight”, “succeed”):

- “I thank to God for every day I live, for every moment of my life” (License student, female, 18 years old);
- “Personally, I thank to God for giving me more power than I thought and so I can fight with life difficulties” (License student, female, 21 years old);
- “I’m grateful for good physic condition and, with God and my parents’ help and sure I will succeed in all my objectives” (License student, female, 19 years old).

Mass media is launching to young people messages like “live fully your life, live the moment, fight for your wishes” and minimizes the role of moral consciousness (you don’t have inhibitions, decency) and lead to a personal ego oriented to the biologic imperatives or, at most, to a pure rationalism (without imperatives that belong to the humanism and axiology). Postmodern human being do not censure his behaviour or his communication, so that “everyone could say anything anytime anyhow anywhere about anyone” (Paraschivescu, 2013).

Unfortunately, friendship and love represents gratitude reasons very few mentioned by license students (only 25% of them), which could lead us to the conclusion that these are fundamental values that in nowadays society suffer the most profound denaturation.

On the other hand, young people do not want to make things with effort, or friendship needs time and constantly involvement, “need time for conversations and for intuitive understanding of breaks and silences, and even the benevolence to be open and vulnerable” (Pahl, 2000).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Although investigated group was a small one and we cannot generalize our findings, the gratitude practice of our license and master students is different depending on age, and this confirm our research hypothesis.

An important finding of our study was that gratitude reasons of master students (aged between 23 and 42 years old) are connected to the important persons around them, while gratitude reason for license

students (aged between 18 and 24 years old) focus excessively on self (good health, physical condition, state of mind, existing / breeding / living). This result indicates the dynamic of social values and the every generation / society's influence on individual values. Self-centeredness is more obvious for students of 18 years old that indicate the values from a hyper consumer and hyper technologized society. D. Tapscott (2011) remark that the days of young people belong to the computer, internet, mobile phone interaction. In order to understand net generation, we have to take into account their essential values that change the way they learn, education, school, family and society. They have grown up, with or without adult's intervention, "like actors, creators, players and collaborators". (Tapscott, 2011).

To avoid the risk of technological alienation of students and for regaining the authentic values, we recommend that school adopt a humanist and axiological vision on education. Unfortunately, school practice invites us to see, as F. Dolto (2009) notices, the neurosis effects of school life, with obsessive schedules and programs, with homework and lessons as purpose (not means), with limits for the intelligent initiatives and curiosities.

A research significant finding was the limited number of persons mentioned by students as important for their character development and educational route orientation. Also, through the gratitude reasons of students, *love* is mentioned only by 25% of them. We consider that teachers should encourage friendships between students during seminars for personal development or through extracurricular activities.

The most worrying result of our research is the decrease of teacher's influence on pupils / students. If for master students, university and pre-university teachers had and have an important influence on their lives, for license students, teachers do not represent significant reference points. Seems that, under the pressure of changes, demands and frustrations inside of education system, in the last years, more teachers have lost their professional motivation and sense; and they do not represent for pupils / students models for followed. On the other hand, inside educational system have broken teachers without vocation for this profession and unmotivated for a good training; this have affected students' motivation and teacher – student communication. Social context degradation seems to go hand in hand with the deterioration of student – teacher relationship.

In conclusion, we recommend to the teachers for pre-university and university system to constantly try to develop this value of gratitude in their interactions with students and to maintain gratitude practice or this attitude being models of gratitude promotion for their own teachers.

References

- Albu, G. (2009). *Educația, profesorul și vremurile: eseuri de pedagogie social (Education, Teacher and Times: Social Pedagogy Essays)*. Pitești: Paralela 45.
- André, Ch. (2009). *Stările sufletești. Învățarea seninătății (Moods. Learning Serenity)*. București: Trei.
- Baricco, A. (2009). *Barbarii. Eseu despre mutație (Barbarians. Essay on Mutation)*. București: Humanitas.
- Bronson, Po, Merryman, A. (2011). *Șocul educației. O nouă perspectivă asupra dezvoltării copiilor (The Shock of Education. A New Perspective on Children Development)*. Pitești: Paralela 45.
- Dolto, F. (2009). *Difficultatea de a trăi (La Difficulté de vivre)*. București: Trei.
- Pahl, R. (2000). *Despre prietenie (About Friendship)*. București: Antet.

- Pleşu, A. (2011). *Despre frumuseţea uitată a vieţii (About the Forgotten Beauty of the Life)*. Bucureşti: Humanitas.
- Stan, E. (2007). *Educaţia în postmodernitate (Education in postmodernity)*. Iaşi: Institutul European.
- Stan, E. (2014). *Lecţia uitată a educaţiei: întâlnirea Micului Prinţ cu vulpea (Lesson forgotten Education: Meeting the Little Prince with fox)*. Iaşi: Institutul European.
- Tapscott, D. (2011). *Crescuţi digital: generaţia net îţi schimbă lumea (Brought up digital: Net generation changes your world)*. Bucureşti: Publica.