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BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS OF CONTEMPORARY STUDENTS

The research considers relative behavioral patterns of contemporary students generated by the author in the course of longstanding practical experience in pedagogic activities at higher education institutions. The author hypothesizes some incentives which affect students' conduct and academic results. A special focus is made on interpersonal relationships between a teacher and students. The research is aimed at finding psychological methods of improving the quality of training at higher education institutions.

Keywords: *behavioral patterns, psychology of education, teacher and students, incentives, communicative approach*

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ПОВЕДЕНЧЕСКИЕ МОДЕЛИ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ

В исследовании рассматриваются условные поведенческие модели современных студентов, генерированные автором в процессе многолетнего практического опыта педагогической деятельности в учреждениях высшего образования. Автор выдвигает ряд гипотез относительно побудительных мотивов, определяющих поведение и академическую успеваемость студентов. Отдельное внимание уделяется аспекту межличностных отношений между преподавателем и студентами. Исследование ориентировано на поиск психологических методов оптимизации качества обучения в учреждениях высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: *поведенческие модели, психология образования, преподаватель и студенты, стимулы, коммуникативный подход*

The pure essence of the procedures followed by a teacher of a higher education institution may, theoretically, be reduced to the following algorithm: studying the curriculum of your course, thorough homebased preparation, conducting classes, and multistage monitoring of students' knowledge for feedback. Yet the above algorithm can scarcely be feasible unless it allows for a social and psychological component which is an integral feature of communicative approach underlying modern education.

There is a jest spread in Russian-speaking academic environment. A student comes up to a professor and asks to let him go from the next pair of classes. Having received the permission, the student wonders if the professor will mark his absence. The professor answers that he does not take a drink at work. The humor is hidden in the pun since the Russian equivalent of the verb 'mark' can also be understood as 'celebrate'. They say "Many a true word is spoken in jest", so this research aims to work out the correlation between students' attitudes and teacher's level of job satisfaction. We presume an efficient teacher should simultaneously be a competent psychologist to motivate students, contribute to mutual understanding, suppress incipient conflicts, and, eventually, reach the higher education purposes. The research provides some behavioral patterns of students and is based on the author's personal long-standing experience of dealing with them. "No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience" [3]. It is deprived of pseudo-academic pomposity and strives to offer comprehensible solutions to sophisticated interpersonal issues teachers encounter in auditoria.

Apparently, setting up a typology of behavioral patterns should be preceded by clear understanding of students' incentives, leadership or at least a desire to keep up with the Joneses being one of the most important. Young people tend to be ambitious, and the feeling of getting behind the team may urge the students forward and promote their advancement in studies. Intellectual competition is a powerful device which often outweighs such extra benefits as a university scholarship or privileged job assignment at the end of the course. One more obvious incentive is a desire to aggregate innovative knowledge, skills and competences in order to become competitive in the labor market upon graduation. A certain percentage of students are driven by the conviction that a success in a person's life is utterly impossible without a university degree. They may not have identified their vocation yet but study to obtain a diploma which is alleged to open the doors to prosperity for them. Many male students do not conceal that they make use of intramural education as a remedy against compulsory military service.

Being aware of students' motivation factors allows developing and systematizing their behavioral patterns, or types. Having a clear idea of psychological types of students is supposed to improve the methodology of conducting classes, avoid emotional burning out and achieve both personal and business goals. Now let us turn from the general to the specifics.

The rarest possible type is a "hater". You bump into such students once in a while, maybe once a decade, but you will never forget them, you bet. Their hatred to you is so intense that you almost can feel it physically. Of course, every time it happens you presume you are to blame and start rummaging in yourself. You worship the professional ethics and would never ever insult a student. You treat people the way you want to be treated by them yourself. You might have reproached some student for being inattentive or failing to do homework, yet always in a friendly or neutral tone. A teacher's moral self-torture may result in depression and had better cease in proper time. A psychological premise that most psychic traumas originate in the childhood is as trite as true. Let us just admit that "thought control" [1] and "dark sarcasm in the classroom" [1] experienced by your student at school could have caused idiosyncrasy to teachers as a social class, and your only guilt is your belonging to this noble profession. The worst piece of advice for a teacher in the above situation would be to lose their temper or get down to threats. Take it easy, "teacher, leave them kids alone" [1]. Unsurpassed Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi said, "There is no happiness for him who oppresses and persecutes; no, there can be no repose for him. For the sighs of the unfortunate cry for vengeance to heaven" [2]. Genuine, high-principled "haters" tend to vanish and turn up at your exam only, being as accommodating as the entire hospitality industry.

A "sleepyhead" type is one more dead-end branch of a student community. Fortunately, their bitterest enemy is an alarm clock rather than a teacher. Attending early morning classes is like a heroic deed for them, and performing heroic deeds is not what we do every day. As a rule, "sleepyheads" are not trailblazers in their field of study, and consistent absenteeism just contributes to the lack of progress. It may result in developing inferiority complexes instead and sleepy students' transition to the first aforementioned category. Even when "sleepyheads" manage to attend your classes, they lie down on the desk and have a nap, which sets a bad example for the group and may arouse a fair indignation of the Dean of the faculty who is used to monitoring the quality of the educational process through a transparent glass door of a classroom. Anyway, "sleepyheads" are expected by an unpleasant surprise later on when they get employed and reveal that their boss may not only hire but also fire employees.

Another type increasingly growing nowadays could be classified as "wheeler-dealers". These are usually gifted and creative students with entrepreneurial spirit who do not like to wait for getting a university degree to start up their own businesses. A widespread subtype is students who have to work to pay their training fees or maintain their families. The negative side, obviously, is their frequent non-attendance at the classes, yet a wise professor tends to understand their position and

practice individual approach rather than make them choose between work and studies. No one knows how many hours “wheeler-dealers” sleep under the circumstances but they are well aware of how to deal with time management, and their academic results are quite decent, as a rule.

“Haughty” guys are constantly grinning and looking at you askance. Alternatively, they may have a resentful appearance but looking askance is their integral feature anyway. It is their cup of tea. It brings back memories of the famous “Evenings near Moscow”: “Why are you, sweetheart, looking askance, bowing your head low?” However, our case has nothing to do with shyness. It is a sign of absolute, utter distrust. You may surpass unsurpassed Pestalozzi trying to make friends with the “haughty” megalomaniacs. It will never work since you are alien to them, perhaps, because of your mere profession. They will do you a favor by answering your questions at a seminar but you do not even dream of gaining their confidence, let alone gratitude. It is highly likely that when your study course is over the “haughty” will pretend not to notice you in the university lobbies in order not to greet you. It must be beneath their dignity, and you had better learn not to make a tragedy out of that.

“Nearsighted” students cannot see farther than a diploma. They know for sure that a diploma is what remains after you forget all you have been taught at university. A belief in diploma is like a belief in God for them, and knowledge is just a peripheral widget which can easily be googled for. If you are a teacher of English, you will waste your time describing the advantages the language of international communication gives to people. “Nearsighted” are going to work and rest inside the country using their mother tongue. Having to leave one’s country at short notice for career or emergency purposes is what may happen to everyone but them, so they prefer to study by their own mistakes. Actually, they are entitled to. At least, they will have a Bachelor degree that will definitely mesmerize all nationally based employers. A modern teacher is not an evangelist who disseminates the only true knowledge and makes indigenes believe in genuine gods by all means. Give as much knowledge as you are supposed to but remember that in your business a great deal of success is attributed to a listener rather than a speaker, so do not be too obtrusive. One may cheat at the exam but they will never cheat the life. “Whoever is unwilling to help himself can be helped by no one” [3].

“Pacifists” are male students who are ready to study whatever courses, ranging from molecular biophysics to liberal arts, in order to postpone the honorable duty of military service. Higher education seems to be a burden to them but they choose the lesser of two evils. Not to fail an examination a “pacifist” asks his professor to put himself in his shoes. Students’ Air Jordan sneakers will hardly fit professors’ feet well, yet sometimes it works.

“Sportsmen” are somewhat similar to the previous category. They realize that no professors in their senses will regard sports as a harmful thing or prevent their students from becoming “faster, higher and stronger”. Of course, there is a side effect comprising a limited possibility for a professor to “sow wisdom, the good and the eternal” since “sportsmen” are constantly busy training muscles to the detriment of science. However, wise professors are tolerant and compromising, and “sportsmen” are diligent and respectful enough, so, no conflicts tend to arise.

“Mummy’s girls” entered the university to please their parents. They are consistent in doing their homework and raise their hands in a classroom so that mummy and dad can be proud of them. They are ideal performers but every time the slightest initiative is required they grow torpid. Parents are not prone to demand that their children be leaders as they know for sure who the leader in the family is. Students of managerial specialties tend to study the topic of “Leadership” within their course framework. By default, students are expected to like leadership and strive for it. “Mummy’s girls” do not want to be leaders but they are too obedient to show it. Therefore, their essays on the issue of leadership are a summit of hypocrisy. Nevertheless, they get the highest possible grades for their insincerity as the essays are blameless in terms of the language.

One more type deserving attention is “colleagues”. These students treat professors as their peers, which seems to be better than false reverence. They stretch a hand for handshaking first and may ask you how you are doing or why you are in a bad mood today. A professor may reveal to his great astonishment that having his personal space crossed may be even pleasant, with so much indifference around. The next surprise comes when a professor notices that his “colleague” and almost friend affords to attend his classes at will, which means more and more seldom. Indulgence is what friends are for but you cannot help thinking that something is wrong here. Perhaps, you are not the best psychologist in the world. No wonder allowing for Martin Seligman with his learned helplessness concept, Daniel Kahneman with psychology of decision-making, judgment, and hedonism, or Steven Pinker being a guru in psycholinguistics [4].

“Invisible beings” do attend your classes but enjoy the power of silence there. They sit at the desks as far as possible from a professor and hope the distance will protect them from the professor’s obtrusiveness. You may engage all your eloquence explaining apparent advantages of communicative approach in contemporary training, which is especially helpful when you study foreign languages. You descend to platitudes and say it is impossible to learn to speak without speaking. You describe the fascination with amicable chatting, when there is not any compulsion, when students speak when they have something to say, not when they have to say something. You quote Antoine de St-Exupéry who was certain that “there is but one true luxury, and it is that of human relations” where “relations” are often regarded as communication [5]. “Invisible beings” agree silently and keep abstaining from taking part in group discussions. The capacity of a professor’s memory is enough to spell and pronounce Eyjafjallajökull easily but he will have real trouble remembering “invisible” students’ one-syllable names till the end of semester.

“Gifted idlers” are totally opposite to “invisible beings”. As a rule, these are compulsive gasbags who cannot help talking. Unfortunately, a professor is not considered to be their interlocutor. The unsurmountable passion to share information propagates to their desk mates only but creates the irritating buzz no one in a classroom can get rid of. The professor forgets about the communicative approach and asks excessively social-minded students to stop talking. Equally well you might ask bees to stop buzzing. However, every cloud has silver lining. Every time you suggest that a “gifted idler” come up with his opinion on the academic issue under consideration, he instantly switches to the point and tells you a lot of things that, quite surprisingly, do refer to the matter. You feel that on certain conditions this kind of student could become another Einstein. You also feel the merit will not be yours.

“Perfectionists” take a pessimistic view of the slogan “It is not the winning that matters but taking part”. Taking part may be a torture for them but they will do their utmost to become number one in the team. The life is given once only and is lived in vain if an individual does not eventually become the CEO of a multinational company or something like that. However, so far they care for the best grade. They can make titanic efforts to prepare a brilliant presentation or just borrow it from the Internet. It does not matter since the end justifies the means. Perfectionism is said to be a kind of disease but it will hardly result in decease, so you had better not pretend to be a professor of medicine and restrain your students from self-perfection, however weird it is. Anyway, it is much better than napping on the desk.

“Sagacious” students study because they realize that solely knowledge and skills pave the way to success. No degree, no nepotism will work if a person is zero in terms of professionalism. No sane employer will hire an ignoramus to ruin his business just because he played hide-and-seek with the ignoramus’s dad in remote childhood. Thus, an individual should study well to outstrip other job applicants in fair competition or get down to the next step of higher education. Sink or swim. Striving for knowledge is an integral part of respect to a person who gives it. “Sagacious” students are your target group. It is them for whom you spend long hours preparing for the classes to make your lessons

not only cognitive but also interesting. It is them whose eyes you look for in a classroom. It is them who turn to you for aid to get ready for a conference. It is them who visit your optional classes. It is them who greet you and smile at you sincerely because they know you are their friend. It is them who make you feel happy all day long after the classes they attended because the teacher's felicity is an opportunity to give something to those who want to take it.

As a conclusion it should be stated that the above categories are both recognizable and relative. They frequently mingle to generate much more intricate behavioral and psychological patterns because all students are personalities and should be treated as individuals with their own merits and flaws. Any generalizing and systematizing is good as a theoretical tool, yet in practice we deal with people, where each person is a separate universe which calls for a delicate, individual approach.

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