

PART FOUR

Education as a key optimization factor  
of the culture and structure of society



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## Socio-cultural generation gap as a new challenge to the university world

**Abstract.** The article deals with the issue of the challenges currently facing the system of higher education at large, and the socio-cultural generation gap between the main actors of the education process that belong to different generations – the student and academic communities – in general. The authors consider the reasons that brought about the above “gap crisis”, its externals, consequences for the university world and the ways to face them. Noted is the fact that, under the massovization of higher education coupled with simplistic and pragmatic approaches to education at large, it is up to innovative entrepreneurial universities to search for certain ways to mitigate the socio-cultural gap and face other contemporary challenges the university world has recently confronted.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural generation gap, innovative entrepreneurial universities, actors of the education process, academic ethos, cultural and educational environment

The fact that modern education system and higher education above all is currently facing new and numerous challenges brought about by a number of objective, as well as subjective reasons, is self-evident. The education sector is undergoing dramatic and comprehensive changes involving every single of its areas – objectives, methods, forms, methodology, actors, principles, approaches and values. An environment of constant challenge has formed and become habitual.

The University is changing rapidly and, unfortunately, has to operate under permanent deteriorating conditions with no improvement forthcoming any time

soon. The above is the leading, though emotional idea, of Burton R. Clark's much-talked-of book "Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation". Remaining at large – at least as far as the form goes – an institution responsible for the non-technical and professional competencies formation, education has ceased to determine such integral anthropological characteristics as motivation, value system, life strategies (including the life success criteria). Meanwhile, undergoing certain changes itself, education ceases to ensure social and cultural intergenerational continuity, since the transmitted forms of cultural content are regarded by the growing generation as inferior in their attractiveness to those imposed by mass culture.

The externals of the above "gap crisis" evidence themselves in a dramatic gap between the content and results of mass education on the one hand, and the requirements placed on the man of education by professional communities, economic and social institutions on the other. Experts are sure that education has always received certain criticism on the part of society. What is currently different about it, is that there are certain times when such criticism becomes severer and more large-scale. These are generally the conditions that bring about educational reforms.

In the current context, there is no escaping the impression that society is in a state of confusion. The growing requests outrun the ability to meet them. Both lagging and advanced education systems fail to face the methodological and methodical challenges; the classical issue of "how and what one should teach" is coupled with a whole host of new challenges: "whom one should teach", "who should teach", "what one should teach", "what is the value of this knowledge", "how traditional educational institutions should be transformed so that they could dynamically and adequately respond to the challenges of the time".

The changes taking place at a dramatic pace, the education world is beginning to accept this randomness as the norm.

Significantly transformed are the main actors of the education process: the student and academic communities. The student body being regarded in the traditional context of a social group, the late changes can be easily explained – changed is the student body itself and its "otherness" is rapidly becoming more and more evident.

The reform of Ukrainian secondary school has reduced the school-starting age to 6 years, and resulted in Ukrainian freshmen becoming naturally younger. University lecture halls welcome a student generation different from their predecessors both in age and social term. Its socialization rate is noticeably lower

than that of the previous years, while the socialization itself takes in the deviant context, as society is still undergoing transition from one value system to the other. The education system is in dire straits since it has to deal with certain categories of a somewhat antisocial orientation or those lacking the ability to navigate in the social space.

Physical condition is another distinctive feature of the new student generation the education system has to take into account: an average 62–64% of the senior pupils have chronic diseases that preclude them from acquiring the ever-growing information content and mastering complex programs. It does not take an expert to understand that the number of healthy teenagers decreases even further by the university age which results into a set of diverse problems, including those of moral and ethical nature. Said otherwise, the number of those for various reasons unable to master the educational standards is constantly increasing.

Education often has to perform its key functions in a society which is not only differentiated, but split as well with the challenges of social and cultural identity addressed from completely different and often polar points of view. Unlike most European countries, Ukrainian society is highly and dangerously polarized with the disparity between the rich and the poor at a conservative estimate amounts to 1:40 as compared to 1:25 in the Russian Federation (according to official statistics) and 1:5 in the leading Western European countries. It stands to reason that the above statistics, though highly relative, cannot be ignored. Accordingly, the social identity of those coming from poor and affluent families is totally different, and political upheavals only make the current situation worse.

Mentality patterns are a feature that significantly differs the new student generation from its predecessors. Permanent reformation of the comprehensive school certain elements that, together with other reasons, resulted in a complete loss of motivation for education, scientific work, etc. and was sure to tell on the qualitative characteristics of the student body. Student fraud – widespread educational unscrupulousness – is far from being conducive to enhancing the education efficiency and forming moral ideals and guidelines.

Dramatic have been the changes in the norms that used to be inherent to the University community. The concepts that did not fit in with the notion of academic ethics yesterday have become commonplace today. This refers to copyright infringement, copy-and-paste approach to research work, regular cheating, compilation and outright borrowings, which the student community makes heavy use of rather than rejects, as the case should be.

Scarce attempts to foster a cultural and educational environment sensitive to academic fraud are the exception rather than the rule. And all the more so, as the copyright infringement issue in Ukraine has moved far beyond the University community.

Simplistic and pragmatic approaches to education, as the shortest way to wealth, have driven the humanitarian discourse out of the University activity area. The overwhelming majority of students have ceased to perceive the humanities, which are the basis of the processes of understanding, as necessary. More importantly, the rejection of the humanitarian discourse has pervaded the academic community as well. The bureaucratic approach to “identifying” useful knowledge has almost deprived the higher school of Ukraine of teaching philosophy, which appears to be of current and utmost importance to the system of higher education, for within its subject area it seeks answers to global issues, forms and ensures understanding meanings.

However, it would be unfair to state the deterioration of student performance only. There are certain positive developments, but they are the exception rather than the rule, for mass education and an obvious delay in transition to a new educational structure – open education, have made the negative trends prevailing. The student is not only unwilling, but unable to acquire and assimilate the amount of knowledge accumulated by modern science and which, following the old educational paradigm, is to be conveyed to the student.

A most interesting institutional trap occurs when the University is clearly aware of the fact that it actually disguises the current state-of-art of the student’s future professional area and its achievements, as it is physically unable or lacks time to transfer them, or even introduce students to them. The best of what the student is offered is the knowledge geared to yesterday, which by the graduation time has been long since out of date; and both the student and the University are clearly aware of the fact. The “generation gap” is only being deepened against this background with the teachers’ generation committed to “transmitting” and “conveying” knowledge and modern education enjoying a completely different architectonics. The growth of knowledge is constantly well ahead of resources and the situation is complicated by the fact that even the best universities, that are not nearly in a majority, train students to face the issues that are yet to arise in areas that are yet to emerge. The steady development of civilization, however, requires better educated generations to replace their predecessors.

As things stand now, the “survival game” in the higher education system is nothing near a mere figure of speech.

The teaching community has also experienced significant and equally dramatic changes, with the socio-economic changes of the 90's, resulting in a "washout" of a significant part of highly qualified personnel, with the teaching corps choosing either to emigrate or change career and the professional area. According to experts, the ratio of such external and internal emigration is about 1 : 10. The above process is far from being over since an academic career is still of little interest to the best university graduates; the latter are seeking other professional and career paths. As regards the above, North American and partly Western European universities have got a grip on the issue by substituting those who opt out of the academic career by the best graduates of South-East Asian and East European universities, while Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries are yet to face the challenge.

Furthermore, blurring of lines of the academic ethos and the loss of the traditional University culture norms have contributed to the formation of behavior patterns in the teaching environment, which used to be impossible and unacceptable.

A relatively short period of time has witnessed a vast array of diverse literature, which authors, drawing on the findings of various sciences, aim at analyzing both the educational transformations and their possible consequences. Even a brief list of such monographs and articles would take several pages. But in the context of the issue it seems appropriate to note the works of such distinguished experts as L. Lyubimov (2011, pp. 199–210; 2011, pp. 11–26), Y. Kuzminov (2007, pp. 9–15), N. Pokrovsky (2006, pp. 95–98), N. Selezneva and V. Bajdenko (2010, pp. 89–105; 2011, pp. 24–39), I. Zimnaya (2003, pp. 34–42), L. Grebnev (2005, pp. 55–65; 2011, pp. 40–50), the members of the Lisbon Council – P. Ederer, Ph. Schuller, St. Willms (2009, pp. 171–202), as well as the seven-volume work "Philosophy of Education: Search for Priorities" by distinguished Ukrainian authors V. Andrushenko, L. Gubersky, V. Kremen, E. Sylima et al. (2012).

For all of their differences in approaches and research subject areas, the above authors, as well as many others, are not dissimilar in stating that modern education has to face the current challenges in an environment that is not only changed, but completely new. The latter is characterized by permanent changes both at micro and macro levels; the state of growing uncertainty; absence of clear mid-range expectations; the impossibility to draw on the past experience as is, since for the most part it is irrelevant in the new environment and it fails.

The substitution of the core principle "the value of education" for "the cost of education" or the maximum "what is the price of the value?" at least appears to be a key transformation that has dramatically changed the educational routine.

It is important to bear in mind the fact that values are neither the air that a person breathes nor some inherited properties; values constitute a certain “social code”, whose transfer (or destruction) does not occur instantaneously, but in the course of a rather long evolution in the process of training and education (in the broadest sense of these two concepts) (Ilyinsky, 2005, pp. 22–30, 54).

The above transformation is largely of a basic, fundamental importance. At least three types of external environment impact on phenomena are known to exist. The first one is a passive impact, i.e. the one that doesn't modify a phenomenon. The second one is a partially transforming impact, i.e. the one that doesn't modify the essence of the phenomenon. And the third one is an aggressive impact, i.e. the one that changes a phenomenon fundamentally. In this case we are dealing with the third-type impact that has not only changed the values in an educational environment, but substituted them for the price.

The above pragmatic approach substantially modifies the practice of the educational process. Society increasingly focuses on business values, commerce, and “useful knowledge”. As already mentioned above, students come to universities to receive a kind of knowledge that, from their point of view, is extremely useful and ensures the shortest and most effective way to achieve financial well-being (Karmadonov, Stepanenko, 2012, p. 95). Hence is the narrowing of social space around a person (in this context, the student) to a minimum. The majority are only interested in what can be appropriated and consumed with the other things being given a lower priority or even losing their value. It is of interest to note, however, that students are increasingly coming to the University not to get what they want, but to understand what exactly is worth wanting. Moreover, in the course of education the choice becomes harder and harder since the number of options is increasing.

The socio-cultural generation gap clearly evident in the education system is among the core consequences of such environmental impact that is currently receiving, sadly, little attention. In general terms, the above gap can be described as follows.

1. Academic staff overall still adhere to the “values of education”, while the vast majority of the student population put a premium on the “cost of education”. Hence is the quasipragmatic and utilitarian approach to education and its outcomes. And this is despite the fact that education – in its essence – can only produce delayed results; market client-service schemes in their pure form fail here. The above results in the student and employer discontent, as well as the wrong messages to society.



Educational institutions ratings and rankings are based on material criteria only including the graduates' salary, positions, rate of career advancement to TOP positions, etc. It is indisputable though that the above criteria are very important, unlike the cost of education, far from outlining the value of education and, very importantly, showing the University ultimately and really does for its students.

The educational institution has always been regarded as the establisher and transmitter of meanings and values. If a socio-cultural gap has shaped itself inside an institution, the system will fail to give the expected results with the discrepancy between the goals and results on the one hand, and the society expectations and the educational system results on the other hand, continuing to increase. In that regard, it appears of utmost importance not so much to gain the set objectives, as to correctly set them. If society commissions education only to "train specialists" to be able to meet certain requirements, then educational institutions will react accordingly with cheapening the process, massovization of education, increasing the academic staff workload and making at times an unjustified emphasis on remote and online education forms, etc.

On the one hand, there is no unique and negative estimate of the above facts, since they present a certain reaction to the challenges of the time. On the other hand, the excessive pragmatization of the educational process arouses concern and all the more so as the role of the state, as the main "customer" has undergone and is still undergoing dramatic changes. The state of the Industrial Age alone was responsible both for forming the need for specialists and planning their training in terms of their number as well as in its content. The state of the Knowledge Age essentially fails to gain this objective, given the individualization of the competition. It is up to the person to choose their educational path with the higher education system being responsible for offering possible alternatives (Filonovich, 2010, p. 61).

2. Modern society and its educational segment above all are characterized by a state of constant stress. The academic staff, evolved and shaped under stability, perceives the system variability as a source of constant depression, since the familiar stability does not return and the rate of changes is constantly increasing.

The 1995–2000 new student generation, born in time of the perestroika ending and the USSR break-up, has never lived under stability; their familiar habitat is a daily change of all and everything.

In other words, institutionalization of chaos has taken place and the above phenomenon has a "demographic specialization" (Pokrovsky, 2006, pp. 95–98). Considering the fact that chaos is, on the one hand, natural and familiar to

the next-generation and, on the other hand, presents a constant source of irritation and stress for the academic staff, a change in the mechanism of adaptation to University life that has been around for decades and even centuries has occurred. This process has become much more dependent on age and classmates rather than on Universities and academic staff. Therefore, the traditional ways of formation and transmission of values in the education system have little or no effect at all.

The situation is furthermore complicated by the widespread mutual disassociation likewise permeating the University environment. Any-time and any-place “digital noise” and mass education have virtually driven the dialogue culture out of the University, and this is despite the fact that the dialogue culture forms the basis of both University education and education at large. The dialogue culture is a keystone that ensures transmission, preservation and creation of values, as well as their conscious adoption which today’s system of higher (and not only) education is objectively unable to foster.

The teacher-instructor, “tailored” only to produce the maximum amount of information and a brief instruction for its application, is a priori unable to maintain a dialogue with a certain student. The current system precludes him or her from either being engaged in profound and efficient research activities themselves, or the more so from involving the student in such activities, from nurturing him or her into a colleague understanding and accepting the system of academic values, as well as the University culture and mission. The academic environment, respectively, remains misunderstood and rejected by the majority of the student body; hence is its low relevance and, in many ways, prestige.

The Western high school has partly succeeded in designing the ways out of the current situation. As already mentioned above, students from South-East Asia, India and other countries are ready to fill and already filling in the arising gaps. The domestic system of education lacks such opportunities, and, therefore, the search for answers should take place in another plane. This plane is, however, yet to be identified.

It appears that the transition to mass – or universal in some countries – higher education together with the standoffishness and disassociation that have established themselves in modern society objectively make it complicated for the educational institution to preserve its value-forming and value-transmitting functions.

It stands to reason that there are no simple ways to deal with the above challenges. It is equally impossible either to take the attitude of an outsider, hoping that things would sort themselves out, or to work out an “action plan” aimed at the elimination of disassociation or the mitigation of the socio-cultural gap.

The search area here is most likely to be in the field of methodology at all of its three levels: the partial, specialized and general scientific ones.

It appears that the search should take the direction of constant experimentalism. One should bear in mind, however, that not all experiments can yield positive results and risks could be significant here. Nevertheless, experimentalism currently seems to be the only means of discovering a way out. Moreover, there is no escaping the impression that it is up to Universities to assume the risk of experimentalism. No matter how controversial the above may seem, but the state seems less and less able to be in charge of the processes of such magnitude. Innovative entrepreneurial universities provided they have the necessary resources – staff, administrative and infrastructural resources in the first place – and volitional potential appear capable of an independent search for certain ways to mitigate the socio-cultural gap and face other contemporary challenges the University world has recently confronted.

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