

Values of Estonian students, teachers and parents

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Abstract: R. Inglehart (1990, 2005) considers values to be one's reactions to changes in the environment. According to his approach values develop in the socialisation process. Values can be divided into traditional, modernist and postmodernist. According to Rokeach (1973), values are an element of culture, an image of the desirable that might not be directly expressed in human behaviour. Kalmus and Vihalemm (2004) found, based on Rokeach's and Schwartz's (1992) questionnaires, that Estonians consider most important values to be health, strong family ties, peace in the world, clean environment, happiness and state security. Also, the results of the study "infants' and toddlers' intelligence and the impact of the growth environment" financed by Estonian Science Foundation, allow to conclude that parents consider most important that children are healthy, happy and smart (Veisson, 2001). In the framework of the state financed project of Tallinn University "school as developmental environment and students' coping" (2003-2007) questionnaires were administered to 3838 students, 2048 parents, 620 teachers and 120 school directors. According to the mean value a hierarchy of 14 values was formed. It appeared that students and parents think that the most important is academic success, whereas teachers place academic success on the 3rd-4th place and school directors even on the 8th place. Teachers and school directors consider the most important is their school students' security and the second is honesty. Also students and parents think that honesty is the 3rd most important value at school. Students consider politeness and parents discipline worth giving the second place among school values. Students' health is relatively highly valued by teachers and school directors (in case of both groups the 3rd place). Unfortunately, children themselves and their parents think that in their school health is not very highly valued (10th place). Joy of school came on the last place in the values hierarchy.

Key words: values; students; parents; teachers; school directors

1. Introduction

What are values? Values are the external or internal images of wishes, which characterise an individual or the whole group and influence the array of possible actions, means and behaviours (Begley, 2003, p. 3). Value is the cost of something that can be based on whatever appropriate criterion—interest, usefulness, status, social acceptability, etc. (Lindgren & Suter, 1994).

When talking about values, we talk about something that is connected to human's practical experience. Where do values come from? What is important in values' development is the moral and ethical bases, which is acquired in the process of socialisation. Many people consider important values to be justice, truth, health, happiness and love. However, values can also be very personal preferences, which are important only to one particular person. Values are concepts or ideas, which are connected to a certain culture and language. Values have been formed through a consensus and according to the norms of the society. The society needs good members of the society, good citizens, who are able to think independently, to make decisions, to behave like most other

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people in that society behave, to respect traditions and cultural norms, to be tolerant toward different people and ideas; important is the formation of national identity and respect toward laws and norms (Haydon, 2007).

Values are relatively stable convictions about the goodness and fairness of certain aims and behaviour. They are as if filters that determine, how does a person interpret certain information and through that form one's behaviour.

The values of Estonians in the dimension development and changes versus stability have considerably changed through 1998-2006 towards valuing more stability. Unfortunately, soft values have remained on the background. One is rather interested in experiences that offer amusement, which is accompanied with valuing money. Those, who value pleasure in life, are guided mostly by individualist interests, needs and wishes; whereas those, who consider more important responsibility, take more into account the fellow person, are more caring and helpful (Vihalemm & Masso, 2003).

Kouzes and Posner (1996) studied school directors and ranked values important to a leader in the following ways: honest (85%), far-sighted (75%), encouraging (68%), competent (63%), supporting (41%), intelligent (40%), ambitious (13%), loyal (11%), self-controlling (5%), independent (5%).

Glover and Coleman (2005) have argued that most effective are these schools, which have clearly expressed values. According to Coleman (2002) it is important how equal possibilities for everyone are applied in practical life (taking into account both ethnic and gender differences and special needs).

Inglehart (1990) considered values as people's reactions to environmental changes. According to his approach, values develop in the process of socialisation. According to his theory, the social-economic state of the society is reflected in the values of the generation. Values are divided into traditional, modernist and postmodernist, with the direction of movement from traditionalism to modernism and modernism to postmodernism, which do not necessarily to be expressed in humans' behaviour. According to the approach of Inglehart and Welzel (2005), most common in the context of human development is movement from limitations to freedom of choice, which are characterised by changes in values on an axes of authority, where human development means moving from valuing authority- and power relations towards values that stress individual's independence and choices. This dimension of human development marks the autonomisation of an individual. Another dimension describes movement from the so-called survival values towards values that stress self-expression or a situation, where stressing individuality and general value put on diversity become more important than existential worries. Estonian human development is one of the most progressive ones on the traditional-secular authority scale and comparable to Sweden and Germany. On the other hand, Estonian human development is relatively backward on the axes of individuality/self-expression. Tolerating differences, stressing political and citizen freedoms, trusting people and pursuing self-expression are relatively modest values for Estonian people (Eesti inimarengu aruanne, 2006). Alas and Ennulo (2007) found in their study that students' values have changed. Values connected directly to economic profit, that dominated the end of the 20th century, have started to be replaced by putting more emphasis on social and ethical values. The results of the study indicate a shift in values: social and ethical values above business-oriented values. It has obviously reached people's consciousness that the basis of a long-term success can not be laid without using honesty and humanness as building blocks.

According to Rokeach (1973), values constitute an element of culture, images of the desirable. Schwartz (1992) named among the value types expressed on individual level: power, achievement, stimulation and self-definition; collectiveness in turn is expressed through values such as benevolence, tradition and conformity. Realo, Allik and Vadi (1997) showed that in case of the Estonian sample around half of the values in Schwartz's value questionnaire (1992) that were significantly related to collectivist attitudes. When three values—obedience,

politeness, modesty—were related to all three sub-forms of collectiveness, then values such as family security and respecting parents and old people were selectively related only to family collectiveness; real friendship and mature love were related to peer collectivism, and state security and social order to state collectivism.

Kalmus and Vihalemm (2004) have found based on Rokeach and Schwartz (1992) questionnaires that Estonians consider most important values to be health, strong family ties, world peace, clean environment, happiness and state security. Also, the results of the study “infants’ and toddlers’ intelligence and the impact of the growth environment” financed by Estonian Science Foundation, allow to conclude that parents consider most important that children are healthy, happy and smart (Veisson, 2001).

2. Method

2.1 Aim

The aim of the current study was to find out, which values does the school have according to students, parents, teachers and school directors in 2004 and what kind of changes have taken place in the values according to students in 2006.

2.2 Hypothesis

It was assumed that according to students and their parents, school values are oriented toward academic success and soft values like tolerance and helpfulness are relatively less important. According to teachers and school directors, school values are different compared to the values named by students and parents. Second, it was assumed that during two years school values as perceived by students have not changed considerably, because time for such changes was relatively short.

2.3 Participants and method

Data was collected in 2004 by Tallinn University in the framework of the state financed research theme “school as developmental environment and students’ coping”. Questionnaires about values were given to 3838, 7th, 9th and 11th grade students, 2048 parents, 620 teachers and 120 school directors. It was not asked what their personal values are, but rather, what do they think the school values. The 14 values offered by researchers formed a rank according to their importance on the bases of their mean values. In 2006, the questionnaire was administered again among 427 students, in order to compare the results with data received two years earlier and to see, whether there were changes and what kind of changes there were. In the first study, the differences in the school values according to boys and girls, Estonian and Russian speaking students were compared, also students’ opinions compared to teachers’, school directors and parents. It is important to note hereby, that in case of Estonian and Russian school students the bilingual schools were excluded from the analyses. For this reason the sequence of values is somewhat different.

In the second study (2006) only the data collected from students was compared to the results of the first study (2004). Since in both cases also students’ coping and other indicators were studied in addition to school values, the current article analyses the relations between values and coping. For studying coping we used a questionnaire developed on the basis of the theory of Skinner and Wellborn (1997).

2.4 Analyses

Data was analysed with the help of the SPSS program.

3. Results

In 2004 the reliability (Cronbach's α) of the values scale was $\alpha=0.848$ and in 2006 $\alpha=0.941$. The reliabilities of the coping questionnaire were $\alpha=0.641$ and $\alpha=0.670$ respectively. It appeared that both, students (boys and girls, Estonians and Russians) as well as parents, consider the most important value at school to be academic success, whereas in case of teachers academic success holds the 3rd-4th place and in case of school directors the 8th place (see the mean results and placement in the values hierarchy in Table 1). School directors and teachers consider that the most important one at school is students' security and the second most important one is honesty. Students and parents find that honesty at school is the 3rd most important value. Students think that politeness is on the second place, while parents see discipline on the second and politeness on the fourth place for the school. Good interpersonal relations are for many school directors 4th in the hierarchy and for teachers 5th. According to students and their parents school does not consider relations so important (this value was on the 8th place for both students and their parents). Children think that school rather puts more value on wishes to improve oneself (4th place in the rank). Students' health is rather highly valued at school in the opinion of teachers and school directors (teachers 3rd-4th and school directors 3rd placement). Unfortunately students themselves as well as their parents think that at school health is not very highly valued (10th rank in both cases). Helpfulness, caring, and tolerance are on the last modest places among values. Compared to others, school directors have given a higher importance to tolerance (5th place; in case of parents 13th and children 12th). Joy of school was mentioned as the last school value both by students and parents.

Table 1 The sequence of students' (including boys and girls) values compared to the sequence of values by parents, teachers, and school directors in 2004

Values	All students (Place in the rank and average value)	Boys (Place in the rank and average value)	Girls (Place in the rank and average value)	Parents (Place in the rank and average value)	Teachers (Place in the rank and average value)	School directors (Place in the rank and average value)
Academic success	1 3.35	1 3.35	1 3.36	1 3.34	3-4 3.45	8 3.44
Politeness	2 3.27	2 3.28	2 3.26	4 3.18	6 3.37	7 3.49
Honesty	3 3.17	4-5 3.17	4-5 3.16	3 3.23	2 3.49	2 3.65
Wish to improve oneself	4 3.17	3 3.18	4-5 3.15	7 3.13	Not asked	Not asked
Discipline	5 3.17	4-5 3.17	3 3.17	2 3.24	9 3.25	9-10 3.40
Students' security	6 3.13	6 3.13	6 3.14	6 3.13	1 3.54	1 3.79
Wide knowledge	7 3.10	7 3.12	7 3.08	5 3.14	8 3.27	Not asked
Good interpersonal relations	8 3.03	8 3.02	8 3.04	8 3.11	5 3.43	4 3.59
Helpfulness, caring	9 3.00	9 3.01	9 2.99	9 3.10	7 3.28	9-10 3.40
Students' health	10 2.98	10 2.98	10 2.98	10 3.06	3-4 3.45	3 3.61
Curiosity, brightness of thought	11 2.88	11 2.88	11 2.88	11 3.04	10 3.21	Not asked
Tolerance	12 2.86	12 2.87	12 2.86	13 3.01	Not asked	5 3.58
Correct appearance	13 2.84	13 2.82	13 2.84	12 3.02	14 2.98	11 3.28
Joy of school	14 2.79	14 2.78	14 2.78	14 2.96	13 3.19	10-11

Thus, academic success is predominantly holding the first rank in the school values hierarchy. When analysing the values while having in mind students academic success, it appeared that students who study well compared to students who receive bad grades (two and three) value higher security at school, academic success, curiosity, bright thoughts, wide knowledge, erudition, discipline and politeness. All value equally health, good interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring, correct appearance, honesty, tolerance, joy of school and the wish to improve oneself. Students find less important in the hierarchy human values like helpfulness, caring, and tolerance.

Comparing the results of studies administered with students in 2004 and 2006, it appeared that there were no significant changes in the schools value hierarchy. The rank was rather similar. On the first place was academic success, followed by politeness, wishes to improve oneself, discipline, honesty, and wide knowledge. Interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring, brightness of thought, tolerance, health, correct appearance and joy of school stay in the middle or at the end of the hierarchy. Thus, soft values like interpersonal relations, tolerance and helpfulness, as well as health are still perceived as relatively less important.

When looking from the time perspective, it is clear that changes that took place within two years are not very big. Still, when analysing the data of two studies, it is possible to say that there are no changes in estimating values such as academic success, discipline, honesty, interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring, and tolerance. Statistically significantly more importance in 2006 was given to politeness, wishes to improve oneself, wide knowledge, curiosity and correct appearance. On the contrary, in the opinion of students the school values statistically significantly even less health, security, joy of school (see Table 2). It is said that health and security have lost even more importance in students' opinions. The same situation is with joy of school, which has the last placement among the sequence of values in both studies and its value has even become statistically less important.

Table 2 Changes in students' school values hierarchy by mean results in 2004 and 2006

Values	Average in 2004	Average in 2006	T-value	P-value
Academic Success	3.35	3.39	1.52	.127
Politeness	3.27	3.32	2.428	.015
Wish to improve oneself	3.17	3.26	3.72	.000
Discipline	3.17	3.21	1.479	.140
Honesty	3.17	3.19	1.009	.313
Security	3.13	3.07	-2.770	.006
Wide knowledge	3.10	3.20	4.100	.000
Good interpersonal relations	3.03	3.03	0.028	-.978
Helpfulness, caring	3.00	2.97	-.989	.323
Curiosity, brightness of thought	2.88	3.07	7.681	.000
Tolerance	2.86	2.90	1.563	.119
Health	2.98	2.80	-7.055	.000
Correct appearance	2.84	2.97	4.563	.000
Joy of school	2.79	2.71	-2.596	.010

Analysing the values of Estonian and Russian schools, it is not surprising that students from both schools place on the first position academic success. Last place in the rank in the Estonian schools and the second last in the Russian schools is joy of school, whereas there is a difference in the rates: students of Russian schools admit more often joy of school. There are also other differences. First it appeared that in the Russian language schools statistically significantly more attention is paid to students' discipline than in Estonian schools (3rd place; 3rd-5th

place in the Estonian school). An orientation to establishment of discipline gives reason to the opinion that Russian language school is more authoritarian. It is positive to note that the Russian language schools seem to put more emphasis than the Estonian language schools on students' security and health.

Table 3 The differences in Estonian and Russian language school students school values and placement in the hierarchy according to the study in 2004

	All	Estonian language school students	Russian language school students	Significance
Academic success	3.35	3.35	3.35	
	1	1		
Politeness	3.27	3.25	3.29	
	2	2	2	
Honesty	3.17	3.16	3.19	
	3-5	3-5	4	
Wish to improve oneself	3.17	3.16	3.18	
	3-5	3-5	5	
Discipline	3.17	3.16	3.22	**
	3-5	3-5	3	
Students' security	3.13	3.12	3.18	**
	6	6	6	
Wide knowledge, erudition	3.10	3.09	3.13	
	7	7	7	
Good interpersonal relations	3.03	3.01	3.10	**
	8	8	8	
Helpfulness, caring	3.00	2.98	3.04	
	9	9	9	
Health	2.98	2.98	3.04	**
	10	10	10	
Curiosity, brightness of thought	2.88	2.87	2.90	
	11	11	11-12	
Tolerance	2.86	2.86	2.90	
	12	12	11-12	
Correct appearance	2.84	2.83	2.84	
	13	13	14	
Joy of school	2.79	2.76	2.85	**
	14	14	13	

Notes: ** Difference is statistically significant at $p<0.01$; * Difference is statistically significant at $p<0.05$ (comparison of percents).

The school values perceived by boys and girls are surprisingly similar. Statistically significant differences appeared only in case of wide knowledge and erudition, which according to boys is much highly valued at school than according to girls (see Figure 1).

The results of the current study reveal from the correlation analyses that students' coping is in positive correlation ($p<0.001$) with the following values as security, academic success, health, good interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring, joy of school, curiosity, brightness of thought, tolerance, wide knowledge and wish to improve oneself. Coping was more weakly related to ($p<0.05$) honesty and discipline. The relationship with coping and correct appearance was statistically not important.

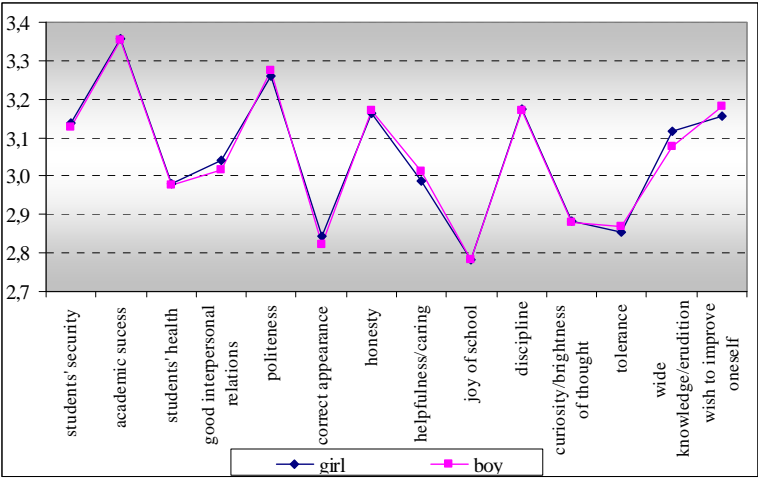


Figure 1 Mean values of boys and girls

4. Discussion

The results of the current study show that our culture values success and achievement at school higher than soft values such as good interpersonal relations, helpfulness, and caring.

Cultures that value personal achievement can predispose tendencies that bring forth the individuality like self-boosting, a tendency to compete, and pursue for academic achievements, since such behaviour can help the child in future. Such focus on self-boosting does not support and does not pay enough attention, for example, to helping others (Schwartz, 1994).

The current study revealed the fact that students, as well as their teachers and parents, think that school values predominantly academic achievement. Also Allen, Weissberg and Hawkins (1989) have found similar results in their study. At school achievements in studying are most important. In their study academic success was positively related to students' cognitive competence, friendships, student's behaviour and positive mood (according to teachers). As mentioned above, according to Schwartz (1992), the individual level value types are power, achievement, stimulation, and self-definition; collectiveness is expressed by value types such as benevolence, tradition, and conformity. In the current study students and parents see the school values rather as individualist. Teachers and school directors find collectivist school values such as good interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring and tolerance, significantly more important than students and parents, while the latter are more oriented toward success.

The values of school according to students and parents in our study were relatively similar. Also Pedilla-Walker (2007) has argued that mother and child mutual relations are important indicators that influence children's behaviour. Accepting the values of parents by children was significantly and positively related to pro-social behaviour and negatively correlated to asocial behaviour. Chan (2007) has claimed that children in average school age learn positive role models and care about behaviour, making decisions, coping skills and how to be effective. For that they need the positive role models of caring teachers, parents and other significant grown-ups. Sportive activities together give a good chance for that. The purposeful influences by parents can make them more active in taking part in raising the child. The positive factors of the social context in turn help along to make parents' beliefs and values more positive. The study included single parents and parents with low

social status, whose values became more positive (Ehrensaft, Cohen, Chen & Berenson, 2007).

In Russian language schools, students value security more than in Estonian language schools. Masso and Vihalemm (2003) have also noted that in case of the Estonian Russian population putting value on security has increased within the last 12 years.

5. Conclusion

To sum it up, one can argue that in the opinion of students, teachers and parents the most important values at school are academic achievement, wish to improve oneself, politeness, honesty, and discipline. Soft values such as good interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring, and tolerance are considered less important at school in the opinion of all mentioned parties. An exception can be considered to be school directors, according to who soft values at school are relatively highly valued. One can assume that school directors, who take relatively frequently part in different trainings and have obviously also a stronger social sensitivity, are able to evaluate human values higher and see problems more widely. One should also note that students' coping is positively related to most values under study. Thus coping depends on both academic achievement as well as on success in interpersonal relations, tolerance, and caring. Coping was weakly related to honesty, which is somewhat alarming. This means that one can also cope without being honest. Health too was valued at school more highly by school directors than by students, parents or teachers. Thus, health doesn't appear to be so important in case of children in the average school age. For parents of small children, the child's health was in turn the most important value (Veisson, 2001).

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