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Shaping Estonian primary school pupils' values by using bullying-prevention methods

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to identify to what extent using the methodology of the programme 'Bullying-free school', initiated in the Kingdom of Denmark in 2007 and implemented in schools in Estonia since 2013, has supported the development of ethical values in primary school pupils. The methodology focuses on four value attitudes: tolerance, respect, consideration and courage, and achieving these through developing a behavioural culture that attaches value to oneself, fellow-pupils and adults. The data were collected by means of a semi-structured focus group interview, addressing pupils' behaviour, experience and feelings.

The study revealed that the bullying-prevention programme has developed joint values in school classes – tolerance, consideration, respect and courage, as well as an ability to think about these values and discuss them. Better results have been achieved in the classes where bullying prevention is conducted systematically and consistently.

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Value judgements; value attitudes; values education; bullying prevention

Dealing with values education in the first years of school

Many researchers (Bardi, Lee, Hoffmann-Towfigh, & Soutar, 2009; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Rämmer, 2009) have emphasized that it is essential to begin with values education as early as possible in order to guide value judgements and their development. Inglehart, Baker and several other researchers have proved that the majority of value judgements and attitudes develop in adolescence and change very little later in life (Bardi et al., 2009; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Rämmer, 2009, p. 84). Piaget defines values as misleading mental constructions interpreted by human mind and depending on human will to attach value to something (Piaget, 2006, p. 12). An understanding of right and wrong requires moral reasoning skills, which can be practised already at preschool age. Kohlberg divides the stages of moral development into pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional levels, which are characteristic of certain age and closely connected with each other, thus indicating when children are able to develop certain value judgements (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, pp. 54–55). The age group observed by this study (7–8-year-old children) belongs to the conventional stage of moral reasoning, which is characterized by the desire to avoid disapproval and the feeling of guilt, but the children will have developed an understanding of the right and wrong behaviour already at the pre-conventional level. Therefore, values education has a crucial role in children's families and care institutions, as in adolescence pupils develop the main basis of values, which they will build on in the future.

In the first years of school, it is fundamental to pay particular attention to familiarizing children with moral beliefs and codes of conduct, and the following of them, as well as shaping a positive attitude towards attending school and learning. It is also important to cultivate mutually respectful behaviour and cooperation skills. Higgins (2007) argues that socialiser's views on what kind of person the child should turn out to be are a strong influence on the development of values, and influence the person's ideas about what appropriate end states are and how to reach them through the regulation of their behaviour.

The National Curriculum of Basic School of the Republic of Estonia (National Curriculum of Basic School. Põhikooli riiklik õppekava, 2011) puts special emphasis on *value competence* – an ability to realize oneself, to know and follow values and norms in society, to collaborate with people in different situations and to accept differences in people. Therefore, it is important that activities would follow values education programmes and be nationally supported.

The successfully launched bullying-prevention programmes as essential part of values education have provided an initial feedback on the acceptance and performance of the project ideas, while also introducing new perspectives on how to use the already existing best practices in everyday situations as efficiently as possible in order to make them an inseparable part of childcare and school culture. This has been greatly supported by bullying-prevention training programmes conducted by Save the Children Denmark and Estonian Union for Child Welfare, which have equipped school personnel with knowledge and teaching aids they can use to implement these ideas. The main objective of the *Free from bullying* programme is to develop a behavioural culture that attaches value to oneself, fellow-pupils and adults, and works through mutual consideration, tolerance and respect. In Denmark, where bullying-prevention programmes based on values education have been operating since 2007, it has been found that achieving success requires (1) efficient anti-bullying teaching aids; (2) parental involvement; (3) intensive involvement of children themselves in the reduction of teasing and bullying and (4) an essential role of educational institutions in creating a bullying-free environment.

This article aims to answer the following question:

*How do pupils involved in the 'Bullying-free School' programme demonstrate their understanding of values such as tolerance, respect, consideration and courage?

School bullying prevention to support values education

In recent decades, the role of values education as a measure to prevent risk behaviour in children has gained an increasingly higher position in the school practice of many countries. For the recent 10–15 years, the focus of childhood studies has been on trying to find opportunities to involve children in the development of social skills through interaction. In many countries efficient bullying-prevention programmes have been launched. One of the best known is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), which is the most researched bullying-prevention programme available today used in many countries. This programme is designed to improve peer relations and make schools safer, more positive places for students to learn and develop. Over the years the efficiency of OBPP has been assessed in schools of the USA, reflecting the status of bullying around the USA (Luxenberg, Limber, & Olweus, 2015; Olweus & Limber, 2010).

A good example is also a research project by researchers of Aarhus University 'Exploring Bullying in School' (eXbus), which is an interdisciplinary research project focused on bullying in schools. Some core findings and analysis so far point at the following: The basic necessity of being part of the community of the school class is essential. eXbus research has also focused on the ways in which experiences of bullying during childhood make their mark on adult life. A regional survey on bullying among 1052 school children has been conducted. The survey results demonstrate how the culture of the school class has a significant impact on the prevalence of bullying (Schott & Sondergaard, 2014).

In spite of the fact that in international studies (PISA, 2012; TALIS, 2009) Estonian schoolchildren stand out for their academic performance, international analyses reveal that the comparison of indicators of subjective well-being and the liking of school puts Estonia at the bottom of the list (Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007). In Estonian schools systematic and consistent values education, which also involves activities related to bullying prevention, is not yet sufficiently established. Even though an overburdened curriculum has been viewed as a major issue in Estonian system of education, it cannot be the main obstacle to the prevention of risk behaviour through the implementation of systematic values education. There are schools that have recognized the importance of values education and are applying it in a well thought-out way. Supported by several projects, an attempt has been made in Estonia to introduce a more values-based school culture by supporting the willingness of pupils and school staff to make the school atmosphere happier and safer. A good example is the implementation of the 'Free from bullying' methodology in many schools all over Estonia (Kiusamisest vabaks! [Free from bullying!], 2013). Recently, following the Finnish example, in several Estonian schools the programme KiVa has been launched, which aims at developing school culture in collaboration with pupils, teachers, parents and the public.

While fighting risk behaviour (including bullying) in children, prevention is of primary importance, since it is considerably more effective and efficient than dealing with consequences. It cannot be stated that bullying as a social problem is overestimated; it is more likely that it is underestimated as a problem, as many instances of bullying remain unregistered because of the hidden nature of this phenomenon (Olweus, 2004, 2013). Several researchers have emphasized the effect of bullying on the future life of victims. For example, a study that investigated the life of 8-year-old victims of bullying in 10–15 years' time indicated a correlation with psychiatric problems. There was an especially strong correlation with teachers' opinion of children who had been victims of bullying (Ronning et al., 2009). A study exploring 6–9-year-old children's direct and relational bullying and the accompanying behaviour problems revealed that among the interviewed contingent (1639 children) 4.3% of the children were direct bullies, 39.8% victims and 10.2% both bullies and victims. It appears that children who were direct bullies displayed significantly more frequent conduct problems, hyperactivity and aggression compared to the children who were not involved in bullying. Relational bullies and bullies/victims had somewhat fewer behaviour problems than direct bullies, but researchers emphasize that intervention is extremely important in both cases (Woods, Bloofield, & Karstadt, 2000).

Children adjust to the norms of their peer group and compare themselves to others. Friendships have important emotional meaning for children at the given moment of time as well as in their later development. Research shows that sociometric status and friendship have a wider meaning while they exist and in the later development (Hartup, 1996).

Values-related disagreements often concern the choice of values in a specific situation, where it is not possible to simultaneously consider all principles. Joint discussion of disagreements gives each participant an opportunity to be involved, which in turn helps to find a deeper essence and practical meaning of one's views. As bullying prevention is directly linked to the quality of socially acceptable norms of behaviour and social relations, it is important to instil these values in children as early as possible (Hirsjärvi & Huttunen, 1991, p. 51; Mikk, 1997, p. 101; Rokeach, 1973, p. 222; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, pp. 550–562; Ueda, Takenaka, Vancza, & Monostori, 2009, p. 684).

Values education at kindergarten and school does not merely mean noticing values and discussing them. It is crucial to create a developmental environment carrying the agreed values and supporting the holistic development of young personalities. Pupils' value judgements and attitudes are influenced by values manifested in the ways of communication, learning methods, feedback, rules, extracurricular activities, traditions and rituals as well as in the physical environment (Mägi, 2010, p. 96; Mikk, 1997, p. 103; Valk & Lilles, 2008, p. 19). For that reason, systemic values development

at school is required, involving not only staff and pupils but also parents (Hirsjärvi & Huttunen, 1991, p. 47; Rokeach, 1973, p. 222; Valgmaa & Nömm, 2008, p. 29).

The essence and implementation of the programme 'Bullying-free school'

The target group of the 'Bullying-free school' methodology are 7–10-year-old children. It is tied to the National Curriculum of the Basic School of Estonia and aims to support values education at school. In addition, the methodology targets teachers, parents, school psychologists and school managements, to allow them as the adults who surround children to set an example for children with their behaviour and attitudes. The whole programme 'Bullying-free kindergarten and school' relies on basic values and the view that through their actions and behaviour adults are capable of preventing bullying. The goal of the project is to build strong relationships between pupils, and foster mutual tolerance, respect and courage in children.

- Tolerance. Pupils are considerate to others and see strengths in diversity. They treat others as equals.
- Respect. Pupils are considerate to all other children; they are tolerant companions and respect the differences and customs of others.
- Consideration. Pupils show interest, compassion, concern and helpfulness to all children.
- Courage. Pupils have courage to say things and set their boundaries. They are brave and good companions who act against injustice (Bøgeskov, Mygind, & Rasmussen, 2013, p. 3).

The project is about preventing bullying. As there are numerous different definitions of bullying, the project relies on the following characteristics of bullying:

- Bullying as a group phenomenon;
- The systematic nature of rejection: both major and minor behaviours confirm that 'you do not belong';
- The forms of bullying may have a directly insulting or indirectly rejecting effect;
- Bullying takes place in a social community the child is unable to leave (Bøgeskov et al., 2013, p. 45).

The teachers and managements of the schools that join the project first participate in a training session where they are given practical advice on how to implement the methodology and teachers' professional competence is developed (Kiusamisest vabaks! [Free from bullying!], 2013). The major role and responsibility of teachers in shaping pupils' values is explained and teachers are provided with ideas how to employ the methodology to support children's development to a maximum effect. The implementation of the methodology is supported by a teddy bear called Buddy Bear and a toolbox with methodological materials. Buddy Bear is the symbol of the whole programme, being a good companion and a friend, and also supporting other project activities with its presence (Bøgeskov et al., 2013, p. 45). At weekly pupils' meetings, which are often called bear meetings, tactile massage exercises are conducted and topic cards are discussed. The principle of the massage handbook is that the one who touches will not hit. For that reason the book lists beneficial factors of massage, teaches how to carry out massage in the classroom and provides texts and songs to accompany the tactile exercises (Johannsen & Jørgensen, 2013, pp. 4–6). Topic cards depict various behavioural situations and at the back of each card there are supporting questions, which aid the discussion of the situation depicted. This is a supportive methodology that is recommended to be used at least once a week.

In Estonian schools the effectiveness of the programme 'Bullying-free school' has not yet been investigated. However, there are the results of a Danish study conducted under supervision of Jan Kampmann, a Professor of Roskilde University. The results of that research, outlined in several reports, reveal that there is general satisfaction with the methodology among teachers and

parents, because they have witnessed the positive effect the project has had on children's communication skills, behaviour and being a good companion (Knudsen, Lindberg, & Kampmann, 2009, pp. 49–73).

Research methodology

Research aim

The objectives of the '*Bullying-free school*' are to build a mutually caring and involving relationship between children and develop a bullying-preventing behavioural culture that fosters a tolerant and respectful attitude towards others (Kiusamisest vabaks! [Free from bullying!], 2013). The aim of this empirical study was to find out how primary school pupils of the pilot schools of '*Bullying-free school*' programme understand basic values of bullying prevention such as *tolerance*, *respect*, *consideration* and *courage*, whether and to what extent pupils are familiar with them.

The selection of methods and rationale

The study was based on the research methodology of the bullying-prevention programme '*Free from bullying*' developed by researchers of Roskilde University, Denmark (Knudsen et al., 2009). The research carried out in Denmark (Lehrmann & Kampmann, 2009) revealed very positive outcomes, including (1) efficient anti-bullying teaching aids and parents' involvement; (2) intensive involvement of children in the reduction of teasing and bullying and (3) an important role of educational institutions in creating a bullying-free environment. The section dealing with bullying prevention in the context of values education of the Danish questionnaire was adapted for this study. As the first step, a teachers' survey was carried out to ascertain how the teachers participating in the project assess pupils' value judgements, and to investigate the ways in which school bullying is manifested, as well as to select a sample of pupils for interviews from the most active schools. This article does not analyse teachers' opinions, but uses them as a valuable background material for analysing pupils' opinions, reflecting teachers' activity in the classes that have joined the programme. It was found that for pupils the most suitable instrument is theme interview, which was conducted in the form of a focus group interview. The described data collection method is suitable because the research deals with behaviour, experience and feelings and generally sensitive topics (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 373; Laherand, 2008, p. 219; Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 11).

As value judgements are an abstract topic and it is hard for children to explain them, it was necessary for the pupils to support and complement each other in a group. In addition, in the process of the discussions it was necessary to open up and speak about various critical behavioural situations. Thus, the researcher gained a more complete overview of the cases, which provided for a more comprehensive analysis later. Semi-structured questions addressed bullying situations, but they were adapted so that the focus was on values rather than bullying. Following the Danish example, an equal number of boys and girls were included in the sample to allow, if necessary, for a gender-based analysis.

The sample

The sample consisted of 60 second-form pupils of the 25 pilot schools participating in the '*Free from bullying*' project. In order to form a sample, a questionnaire was conducted with class teachers in daily contact with pupils, to get a possibly wide feedback on the implementation of the methodology and its usefulness in shaping value judgements. At the time of the study, one or two second-form teachers in each school were using the described methodology. Altogether 35 teachers participated in the survey with one to two respondents from each pilot school. Responses were received from all 25 pilot schools.

An analysis of the responses aided in finding the schools where semi-structured interviews were carried out with six pupils of two second forms. The selection was based on the responding teachers' weekly values education lessons and their satisfaction with the project methodology. On that basis, schools with two teachers actively applying the methodology were selected to allow for the comparison of results within a school. The random sample was formed of the second-form pupils of five schools, where in the parallel forms the described methodology was actively used and where there were six pupils who were prepared to participate in the focus group interviews. Interviews took place in groups where pupils supported each other and complemented each other's responses. As traditionally there are 5–10 people in a focus group, in keeping with that an even number of six members were chosen for each group, keeping the numbers of boys and girls even (3 and 3) (Ho, 2006, p. 1; Laherand, 2008, p. 220). The small number of group members was due to time restrictions prescribed by the length of a lesson (45 minutes) and the attention span of second-form students. The researchers also wanted to avoid unnecessary repetition of responses and loss of motivation in pupils.

Research procedure

The focus group interviews with pupils were conducted on the agreed school days from November to December 2014. Only pupils and the interviewer participated in the interview. Following the example of the Danish study, the focus group interview started with a drawing task, where pupils had 15 minutes to draw 'A good companion' on a white A4 sheet in coloured pencils. The aim of the drawing task was to analyse not the pictures, but pupils' explanations of their pictures, clarifying what they had drawn and whom they consider a good companion; that is, the initial drawing session was needed to tune in to the topic (Knudsen et al., 2009). This was followed by a 30-minute interview. During the interviews sound recording was used to document data, because capturing the verbal expression was of great importance. Sound recording was chosen above video recording for the reason that video may have diminished people's willingness to participate in the interview (Gillham, 2000, p. 84). Interviews were analysed by the traditional techniques of qualitative research, conducting a content analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 212; Wilkinson, 2006, p. 185). A horizontal or cross-case analysis was used to allow a comparison of all interviews and identify connections and recurrent responses. The analysed results were synthesized and on their basis conclusions were drawn on the development of pupils' value judgements by means of the methodology of 'Bullying-free school'. It was ascertained to what extent pupils are aware of and can apply the basic values such as tolerance, respect, consideration and courage in their daily life. Pupils were informed at the beginning of the interview that the whole interview would be recorded. All interviews lasted 45 minutes, after which pupils continued their normal school day.

Findings

Pupils' drawing of a good companion

The analysis of the basic values began with a drawing task where pupils drew a good companion and explained what they had drawn in the course of a conversation. By characterizing more specific and more general good companions, pupils were able to explain what a good friend should be like and how he or she should behave.

The facial expressions of the people drawn were generally happy, only some pictures did not allow an identification of the emotion. All descriptions depicted a pleasant person or a person in a positive role.

Most frequently children drew their friends, on some occasions their sisters or brothers and their mother. The explanations of the depiction of their friends differed. Below are some examples:

She's a very good friend, because it's fun to play with her and she understands things (school 2, group 1, G2); Because always when there's something serious and we have to do it, we do it together (school 3, group 1, B2).

Generally a same-sex companion was considered a good friend, justifying that *he/she is very normal* or *I just like him/her*. Repeatedly *consideration* as a value was highlighted, because a good companion was thought to be one who helps and whom one can rely on.

Pupils drew their siblings and mother less frequently, but boys and girls both did it, emphasizing the help and support they receive from their family member. For example: *I've drawn my mother, because when I come home from school, she invites me to eat. And when she is unhappy, I help her* (school 3, group 2, B1). If usually the benefit the child gains from a good friend was revealed, in this case also the other side was shown, how to contribute to the good of the good companion and support him/her.

Boys and girls alike depicted more abstract people when they did not have anyone specific they could draw or they wanted to express a certain behavioural role, characteristic of a good companion:

This person offers his seat to an elderly person on a bus (school 2, group 2, B3); A good doctor who helps everybody (school 2, group 2, B1).

Although behavioural situations were depicted in each group, in one of the groups this approach was recurrent, because they had done a similar task with their teacher in the class. The feature that was most frequently pointed out was helping. Thus, even when characterizing a good companion in a more general way, a *caring* person was considered a good companion.

The idea of a good companion was also extended to a pet or a play character, whereas it was considered important that a good companion would provide a good and secure company. For example, the mascot of the 'Free from bullying' project Buddy Bear was mentioned as a good companion by three girls, who explained, 'he is always there when I'm sad'. It appeared that they usually did something exciting together with the Bear and it had always the role of a helper and comforter.

When it was necessary to generally characterize a good companion, children most frequently mentioned features such as goodness, friendliness, helpfulness, honesty, respect, cheerfulness, willingness to help and comfort. As an explanation, they often gave specific examples of their whole family, friends and other close people being good companions. It was also easier for children to explain a term by using an opposite:

The one who isn't easily offended (school 2, group 1, G2); She never lies (school 4, group 1, G1); She doesn't bully, she doesn't pick on me, she doesn't do anything bad (school 5, group 1, G3) .

Generalization established that a good companion should not be arrogant or cruel, a gossip, a hitter, a bully, a liar, one who picks on others, uses foul language, nags, makes faces or shows off. Children often described specific situations from their own experience; on several occasions pushing and giving empty promises were mentioned. In the examples they gave, pupils sometimes used an opportunity to point out weaknesses in their class or interview group (names have been changed):

Ronald, because he doesn't pay attention in the lessons and fools around (school 5, group 1, B2); Martin, our classmate does it, he picks on others (school 1, group 1, B2) .

The notion of a good companion and its opposite were explained in a clear and understandable way in all focus groups and there were no differences observed in the response frequency and knowledge between boys and girls. In general, it appeared that the characteristic features of a good companion are first of all consideration, but also tolerance and respect, and a good companion can definitely not be a person who is disrespectful and intolerant. In conclusion, we can state that drawing a good companion was an understandable activity for children and they were able to give a generalized explanation of their work.

Basic value: tolerance

Among the four basic values, children found it most difficult to define tolerance. The responses in more than half of the groups were extremely laconic or unclear (except school 1; school 2, group 2; school 4, group 1). In the majority of the focus groups, instead of tolerance children explained intolerance and the concept often remained unclear:

When someone bullies you or picks on you and when you can't take it any more (school 5, group 1, G2), then this is tolerance; The thing when one child doesn't like the other, then this is it (school 4, group 2, B2) .

However, there were focus groups that were able to interpret tolerance more clearly, especially on the occasions when the formulation of the question was not abstract but concerned specific companions. It was considered important for the companion to be respectful and caring, polite and kind, and always willing to allow others to join the play. Often a tolerant companion was described through negative patterns of behaviour; that is, it was claimed that he/she does not hit, bully or insult. Overall, in the groups children's responses complemented each other, and a general consensus was that one has to always be tolerant with the others, then everybody will be friendly with each other. Children understood that if they do not behave well, others would not want to be together with them. In this way, they mirrored a need for tolerance through their own self, not through the feelings of the others.

Although tolerance was mainly viewed as an important and necessary value, in one focus group (school 5, group 1) half of the pupils expressed an opinion that one does not have to be tolerant, justifying their point of view by saying that if one does not want to, one does not have to be tolerant of others. In the process of the interviews it also became evident that there were pupils in the classes concerned who had been deliberately excluded from other pupils' company, and there were both rejecters and the rejected in the focus groups.

I'm not included, because I'm weak and slow and nobody seems to like me very much (school 3, group 1, B2); I'm not wanted because my name is so weird that I get teased all the time (school 5, group 2, B3) .

Pupils who had been often rejected were aware of their shortcomings and therefore able to justify and explain other pupils' behaviour. Cases where children had been excluded because of their physical or mental qualities or their ability were not rare. The children in the focus groups and the concerned classes who were systematically rejected were mainly boys, and the main reason was aggressiveness manifested in hitting or bullying others. In the focus groups, some pupils justified their intolerance as follows:

There are several children who are alone, because one of them hits others, the other is so stupid (school 5, group 1, G1); There's one boy in our class we don't tolerate because he starts crying whenever someone even slightly touches him, he screams his head off (school 2, group 1, G2).

Girls were better at explaining why some children become excluded. They clarified that the disturbing factors are hitting, stupidity, frequent crying, fooling around and poor hygiene.

Even though pupils generally understood what a tolerant companion is like and why tolerance is necessary, there were still several children who themselves displayed intolerance of their fellow-pupils. The most distinct was school 5, where in both parallel forms rejection was frequent and in the focus group there was a clear distinction between the rejecters and the rejected.

Basic value: respect

Children most frequently explained the concept of respect through different behavioural situations and attached value to it on similar grounds to the concept of tolerance – otherwise nobody wants to be friends with you and you are not respected either. A common thread running through children's opinions when explaining their understanding of respect was benevolence towards other people. Girls were able to contribute more on the topic of respect, whereas boys had more examples of people who one has to respect. They mentioned not only peers and friends, but also parents and teachers. As people deserving respect often the teacher and the headmaster were described, although often respect was interpreted as obedience and subjection, because otherwise it may lead to a bad outcome.

In spite of the fact that children generally understood the need for mutual respect, in all groups it was unanimously stated that there are a pupil or some pupils who have been offended. In all schools

involved in the study there was at least one group where a specific child or specific children were offended on a regular basis. The justifications given were accusing in nature:

One boy gets offended a lot, because nobody wants to play with him, he's fat (school 2, group 2, G1); One girl is bullied because she cries and throws tantrums (school 2, group 1, G1) .

Basic value: consideration

The value *consideration* was more clearly understood by pupils and explaining this word did not cause any difficulty for them. To define the concept children did not rely on negative opposite, which was the case when trying to characterize *tolerance* and *respect* as values. More generally, *consideration* was understood as helping, protecting and obligingness. It was expressed in various helping situations, mainly on occasions when one had fallen and been hurt. Children also described other situations, for example:

When your friend comes to visit and you're eating, you'd offer your friend some food too, she may be hungry (school 2, group 2, G1); Your mother is considerate when she doesn't let you go and play outdoors with your neighbours when you're ill; B: When you want the other person to do well (school 5, group 1, G2)

It was pointed out that noticing, sharing one's food and even looking after another person's health through prohibition can be *consideration*, not to mention general kindness towards people.

All groups unanimously characterized a considerate person as a helper, comforter and the person who never lets anyone down. Children were able to see the need for this basic value through a wider perspective; for example, one girl's thought was: *If there's no consideration, I don't know whether friendships could exist at all (school 1, group 1, G1)*. It was generally typical of children to assess the need for certain values on the basis of their own well-being and security, but in the case of *consideration* on a couple of occasions it was pointed out that it is needed to ensure that no one would suffer.

Some boys mentioned, though, that one should not always try to be considerate at any cost, because sometimes it is necessary to let people try and cope on their own, and one should not attempt to try and do everything for one's peers:

You don't have to help the others all the time, sometimes they can cope on their own (school 5, group 1, B2); You can't be considerate all the time, because it's impossible to always fulfil everyone's wishes (school 3, group 1, B1) .

Although the concept of *consideration* was understandable to all children, differences occurred in the manifestation of this value in real-life behavioural situations between different interview groups. Namely, if in some classes children were only comforted from time to time (school 1, group 1; school 4, group 1, school 5, group 1) and comforting was mainly considered necessary only when someone was crying, in two of the classes it was a well thought-out activity their teacher had recommended:

First you ask what's happened and then you hug them, for example, or if you've got some sweets, you can offer them some sweets (school 1, group 1, G2); When this girl was crying, I took the big bear to her to comfort her (school 3, group 1, G1) .

In these groups pupils knew how to comfort a fellow-pupil, because in addition to their personal support they also tried to involve the Buddy Bear or share their sweets to cheer up the other child.

According to the pupils' replies, in bullying situations comforting does not often happen; it was mentioned on several occasions that in these situations the main comforter is the teacher (school 2, group 2; school 5, group 2). Children justified the lack of comforting by saying that instead they either confront the bullies or if the victim is a badly behaving child, most of the pupils do not even want to support him/her.

Basic value: courage

Pupils most frequently highlighted the concept of *courage* and activities in which it is manifested, and it was obvious that *courage* was a well-known value in all focus groups, which pupils deliberately

try to cultivate. In all groups children were able to give a versatile description of the concept of courage, they told about daily acts of courage as well as daredevil challenges. Pupils explained that courage is when one is not afraid of anything and faces one's fears. As acts of courage, children also mentioned answering in the lesson, interacting with adults and performing on the stage. They explained that an act of courage could be not only an activity, but also an act of admitting to having done something. Pupils thought that helping someone in mental or physical bullying situations or interfering in an unsuitable situation is also an act of courage.

According to the pupils, a brave companion is a person who is prepared to protect everybody and to stand up for oneself or others.

T: It's the one who says: don't be afraid, we're together (school 3, group 2, B2) .

All pupils admitted that courage is necessary, but there were several pupils who were able to distinguish between real courage and courage associated with a wrongful act or foolhardiness:

You don't always have to, because if you're told to jump out of the window, you mustn't do it (school 3, group 2, B2); When the others are about to do something bad, I won't join them (school 2, group 2, B2); When they're jumping on a trampoline and doing tricks and you don't dare, you don't have to do it (school 2, group 2, B1) .

Girls emphasized that it is necessary to protect others and if a need arises, go to the rescue and help the fellow-pupil. Boys, however, had a more introspective perspective and on several occasions they expressed their opinion that courage is more likely needed not to be called a coward and not to be bullied because of that.

In the end, children were asked to think whether and how they had tried to hinder someone bullying them or their fellow-pupils. In each group real-life situations emerged, illustrating their fight against bullying. Pupils had used words to try to stop bullying and they had experienced that it had helped. One boy, however, had a negative experience of trying to stop bullies but not succeeding. Boys and girls in all groups described situations where they had stood up for others:

A little boy was bullied and then I said, don't do it, and they stopped (school 4, group 1, B1); Once boys were having a fight and I interfered (school 5, group 1, B2) .

Pupils usually tried to prevent verbal bullying by telling the bullies to stop it, but children, both boys and girls, reported having physically interfered when there were boys having a fight. For the majority of the pupils, a positive solution to the bullying situation served as motivation to act boldly.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how pupils understand the basic values in the 'Free from bullying' programme and how these values are reflected in their everyday life. Bullying-prevention programmes are essential part of values education, which also introduce new perspectives on how to use the best practices in everyday situations as efficiently as possible in order to make them an inseparable part of childcare and school culture. The established set is not permanent; values may change and alternate over time (Hirsjärvi & Huttunen, 1991, p. 51; Mikk, 1997, p. 101; Rokeach, 1973, p. 222; Ueda et al., 2009, p. 684). Thus, the findings cannot be viewed as pupils' rigid opinions, because hopefully their values and assessments are still in the process of development. However, the existing values have influenced people's behaviour and will continue to do so either directly or indirectly, because value judgements and attitudes are manifested through inner beliefs (Hirsjärvi & Huttunen, 1991, p. 47; Rokeach, 1973, p. 222; Valgmaa & Nömm, 2008, p. 29).

The majority of the pupils involved in the study attached value to the basic values recognized in society, and acknowledged the necessity of tolerance, respect, consideration and courage, frequently adding to this selection honesty, friendliness, kindness and benevolence. At the same time it occurred that pupils had acquired value judgements, but had not yet fully realized their meaning and extent.

It also appeared that value judgements and the right behaviour are often considered necessary merely in order to avoid punishment. This is indicative of the pre-conventional level and

often observed in preschool children. Stages of development are generalizations and should not be used for drawing serious conclusions at this point, because there were a significant number of pupils who mentioned inner satisfaction as their justification for the right behaviour. There were also pupils who thought of the well-being of others, which represents an even higher stage. The simple pattern of the understanding of value judgements was confirmed by the fact that children often tried to use bans and prohibitions to explain inner beliefs and values. They mainly focused on how one should not behave rather than what would be the right model.

When defining values, pupils tended to give explanations using opposites. General knowledge about consideration and courage was very good and resembled the views of the project, which attaches importance to compassion, helpfulness and confronting injustice (Bøgeskov et al., 2013, p. 3). It was more difficult for children to explain the concept of respect and the most problematic proved to be to define tolerance. Poorer knowledge about respect and tolerance is understandable to some extent, because these two basic values are similar in nature, and therefore, even the handbook of the 'Bullying-free school' explains respect through tolerance. Thus it was also difficult for pupils to explain these two concepts, but it does not mean that they did not understand the essence of these values. Their awareness of tolerance, respect, consideration and courage was proved by their descriptions of the relevant behavioural situations.

Pupils knew what would be the right way of behaviour. In their descriptions there were examples of the manifestation of tolerance, respect, consideration and also courage. Courage was used to protect oneself and others from injustice; consideration was expressed through sharing things with others, helping and comforting. The applications of tolerance and respect were illustrated by examples of accepting other children and benevolent attitude. In spite of that, many situations were described that represented the lack of tolerance and respect. Namely, children mentioned several behavioural situations where they had rejected or teased their fellow-pupils. Children were frank and even if they had previously acknowledged the need for a certain value, their tales and their own behaviour did not always confirm it.

While assessing the support of the 'Bullying-free school' methodology to the shaping of value judgements in pupils through a bullying-prevention programme, it appeared that children were able to discuss the relevant values and on many occasions these values were also reflected in the real-life behavioural situations. At the same time, it is generally known that in addition to school, values education also happens at home and in the surrounding environment, which makes it difficult to evaluate the 'pure' effect of the programme. Similarly, this methodology is not the only influence at school, because pupils also acquire values from the example set by their teachers and fellow-pupils, as well as textbooks (Mägi, 2010, p. 96; Mikk, 1997, p. 103).

The weakness of the methodology of this study is that it does not allow us to more exactly ascertain the efficiency of the 'Bullying-free school' programme, because there are no studies on children's value attitudes prior to the launching of the programme. Thus, it is not possible to compare children's value judgements before and after joining the programme. However, the study revealed that in the classes where pupils were more familiar with the project and where the methodology had been more actively used, children had much better knowledge of the basic values and noticeably fewer bullying situations occurred in their class. Although the sample included schools where teachers claimed they were active users of the 'Free from bullying' methodology, significant differences between schools and classes occurred. Namely, in the schools actually not very actively applying the 'Bullying-free school' methodology, the number of problem situations was higher. This was expressed by the examples given by the pupils as well as their behaviour. It was also noticeable that teachers who applied the 'Bullying-free school' methodology to a small degree did not notice all the nuances of relationships between their pupils, but it is the teachers' duty to creatively and consistently deal with the quality of relationships between pupils while involving the whole class in this activity.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how pupils of Estonian schools involved in the programme 'Bullying-free school' understand the basic values of the programme, what effect their participation in the programme has had on the development of their values and how this is manifested in their daily life.

The project 'Bullying-free school' focuses on four basic values: *tolerance*, *consideration*, *courage* and *respect*. All these values may be perceived as abstract and also objective, but in either case their development into beliefs happens stage by stage.

We may claim that Estonian pupils whose teachers had implemented the 'Bullying-free school' project methodology had basic knowledge about values, and they were able to describe how tolerance, respect, consideration and courage can be applied in the real-life situations. It appeared that generally, at the knowledge level, pupils knew how to behave; however, the described values had not always become part of their daily behaviour. Pupils from the classes where the methodology had been used on a weekly basis displayed higher awareness. Therefore, it was clearly confirmed that the implementation of the programme 'Bullying-free school' had had a positive effect on the development of value judgements in pupils. The findings of this study can be used to further develop the project 'Bullying-free school' in Estonia, because the positive effect of the methodology on pupils' value judgements was proved. Nevertheless, it is necessary to think through how to improve teachers' awareness and motivate them to more actively apply the methodology.

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