

## Value orientation preference of children, adolescents and young adults via quantitative optics

Sirotova Mariana, Droscak Martin

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Faculty of Arts, Department of Pedagogy, Slovakia  
mariana.sirotova@ucm.sk, martin.droscak@ucm.sk

**Abstract:** Value orientation has remained a valid issue of pedagogical theory. Along with other factors value preference significantly influences a human's formation, his/her education and lifelong activity. It is therefore necessary to explore and based on the acquired knowledge to influence the formation of value orientation of children and adolescents also through the educational process of a school and through direct or indirect influence of a teacher. This article presents a quantitative view which subsequently allows for an adequate adjustment of further educational activity of a teacher or a school.

**Key words:** Teacher, children, adolescents, values, value orientation.

### Introduction

In everyday life value orientation of adolescents is reflected in their opinions and attitudes towards themselves and toward their surroundings. It also influences their overall behavior and actions. The area of values and value orientation becomes urgent mainly in connection with an increasing rate of juvenile crime compared with the overall crime rate in a society, decreasing age of persons with socio-pathological behavior in educational environment of schools, in connection with a preference of materialistic and consumeristic way of life and with the crises of family. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of prevention of socio-pathological behavior and to say that this prevention is more effective and economical than an attempt to eliminate or fight against it. Therefore, every school and its educational influence plays an important role in the primary prevention and a teacher's behavior itself and his/her influence becomes a preventive measure that could forgo delinquent development of our children and adolescents also through influencing their value preference and value orientation. "Following elementary moral qualities represent basic moral, universal and thus multicultural values: respect, generosity, compassion, pride, honesty, faithfulness, trust, consideration, solidarity, politeness, humility, tolerance, diligence, mutual help, obedience, friendship, truthfulness, broad-mindedness, decency, responsibility, self-control, ambition, patience, well-disposition, correctness and others (Žilínek, 1997, p. 45). A value orientation can't be changed in a directive way. Teachers must identify themselves with positive values, believe in them and act accordingly. It requires a teacher who is able to present and motivate pupils and students toward respecting and asserting of all-human moral values.

Today, value as a term becomes one of the most complex and at the same time the most problematic notions. It is being continuously discussed in philosophy, psychology, sociology and pedagogy. At present, it is used as a conscious or unconscious category of the thing that is considered desirable in society, in relationships, in family and in education. P. Ondrejko (1998, p. 356) states that value "influences the behavior of an individual or a group as well as the whole societies, it is a source of motivation and preferences of action, mainly in cases of alternative behavior. Value is generally considered a relational category, most often a relationship between a subject and an object."

"The term value orientation principally means a tendency of a personality toward certain value attitudes" (Ondrejko, 1998, p. 197). The value orientation of a personality is reflected mainly in its actions and behavior. Through it we can assume an individual's social role or status, his/her communication competencies, axiological processes and the degree of the development of personal competencies. Value and value orientation are closely connected with the axiological processes of a personality which couldn't be detached from emotions and motivation. Value orientation manifests itself in the basic attributes of behavior: in motivation, readiness to act and in an act manifested in the activity itself.

### Quantitative view of value orientation of children and adolescents

An educational process of any school plays an important role in the formation of value preferences and the value orientation of children and adolescents. If we want to effectively influence the process of its formation it is necessary to know the values that children prefer, the values they consider significant in different stages of their lives. Acquiring knowledge is, however, a complex process and it can be realized by using various methods and procedures. Ch. Peirce (in Chráska, 2007) introduces four basic methods of inquiry. The first is the method of tradition. In our lives there are many facts we consider true only because they were traditionally, arising from a historical concept, considered true in the past. By a frequent reproduction of these "truths" their validity has increased and it is often striking how many people insist they are true despite being exposed to new facts which

contradict the old ones. The second is the method of authority when a person accepts certain facts as true only because they are being presented by a person who he/she considers a reputable authority. Hence, “truths” are facts that are presented by reputable personalities of a society or are generally accepted by the public. Another method of acquiring knowledge is the method of priority where the criteria of true knowledge is its “compliance with the brain” assuming that humans are naturally drawn to the truth. The last is the method of science. If the human knowledge is acquired using scientific approach, we will formulate new facts which are, compared to the previous methods, independent from the personality, opinions and attitudes of the inquirer (the “a priori” method), from the set scientific theories (the method of authority) and from expectations (the method of tradition). Based on the above we can conclude that the inquiry of values and value orientation must also be approached in a scientific way. Pedagogical methodology offers three approaches - inquiry realizations – the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach and the mixed approach – the combination of methods and procedures of both approaches. Based on the issue at hand we chose the quantitative approach as we are interested in the meaning, the position and the role of education in the process of value formation and value orientation of children and adolescents. By using our research we were searching for answers to several questions relating to value preference of children and adolescents, their attitudes toward values and to the detection of the weight of motivational means – incentives aimed at the improvement of performance at socially beneficial work as educational process is reflected in the professional and personal feature of a human. Most of all we were interested in “What values do children, adolescents and young adults prefer these days”?

To obtain the quantitative view of value preferences, attitudes and motivational factors we chose a method of questionnaire survey. We used standardized questionnaire of J. Vonkomer (2002). The questionnaire is named HO-PO-MO (first two letters of Slovak words hodnota = value, postoj = attitude and motivácia = motivation – translator’s note) and it serves as the means of finding out value orientations, attitudes towards values and performance motivators. It enables detection and deeper understanding of the direction of a personality’s activity. The questionnaire consists of three relatively independent structures. Due to the limited scope of this study we are going to include only the results of the “HO” structure which offers information about preference and value orientation of an individual. It shows the level of: a/ educational value orientation, b/ esthetic value orientation, c/moral value orientation, d/ economic value orientation, e/ social value orientation.

The administration of the HO-PO-MO questionnaire was realized by the members of the organizational team in years 2011 – 2012. To ensure higher return of questionnaires the administration was realized in groups directly in the selected educational institutions. Oral instructions during introduction of the questionnaire as well as the presence of administrators not only improved the return of the questionnaires, but also prevented wrong and incomplete filling of the questionnaires. In total 959 respondents filled the HO-PO-MO questionnaire. Based on the type of questions the respondents were divided into three categories. The first category – children - consists of respondents of elementary schools. The survey was realized in three basic schools and in total 325 questionnaires from pupils of the second level of basic schools were collected. The second category, high school students, consists of students of secondary grammar schools and vocational high schools. In total 321 high school students in all four years of study filled the questionnaires. The last category consists of university students. 321 students in the bachelor level of study studying the Teaching of Academic Subjects returned the questionnaires. Our concentration on future teachers was intentional as this occupation plays an important role in the forming of value orientation of children and young people.

We sorted out the marked responses according to categories and processed them mathematically in order to get answers to the formulated questions. We were mainly interested in the value preference of children, adolescents and university students these days. Through the “HO” part of the questionnaire we obtained information aimed at recognizing the value orientation of children and adolescents. The respondents’ task was to write point values to alternative answers from 1 (the least important) to 5 (the most important). By calculating the average scores we found out which of the 5 categories of values were preferred by the respondents. These were:

Educational values - positive perception of education and knowledge as an important aspect of each individual’s life in existing social conditions and of his/her work and social self-realization that aims at ensuring an adequate quality of life.

Esthetic values – are characterized by the feel for beauty, by positive attitude toward art, by an attempt to develop one’s own abilities of making one’s life and one’s surroundings more beautiful, by development of culture and by conservation of the cultural and historical heritage of a nation.

Moral values – are oriented at an attempt of each individual to do good deeds, to be helpful, cooperative, are characterized by positive character traits, by the preference of fair and equal access of all members of society toward opportunities, by refusing corruption and promoting the dignity for all in everyday contact.

Economic values – represent an attempt to secure an adequate amount of financial means which leads to the fulfillment of material and mental demands; to a certain point there is an obvious preference of materialism and consumerism.

Social values – are connected with an active life in conditions of existing social environment, with an attempt to

deal with arising difficulties and with an interest in an adequate contact with others, with a high social feeling, empathy, altruism and a help to other members of a social environment. In accordance with a Confucius saying that “one picture is worth a thousand words”, we are going to present the collected value preferences in a picture form. Figure 1 shows the value preferences in the first category – the category of children.

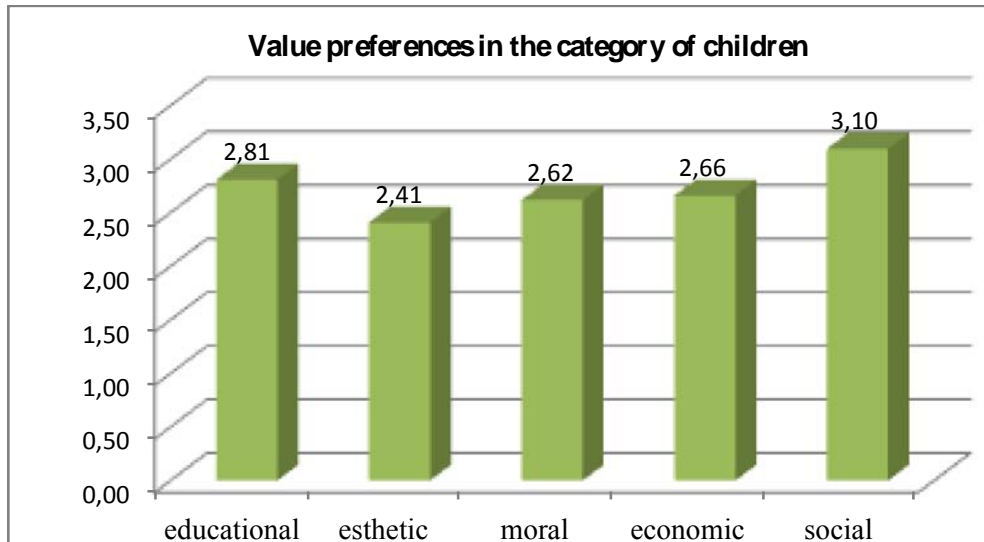


Figure 1: Value preferences in the category of children

The above figure shows that children prefer social values (3.10). We think that this preference is strongly influenced by the period of childhood when after “leaving” the family and entering the school environment children seek and enter into interpersonal relationships – friendships which are characterized mostly by a common activity. For older children (6. – 9. grade of elementary school) sharing common activity satisfies their need of belonging to a group and cooperating in a group. The preference of social values is also caused by a positive identification of a child with an authority – parent, teacher, other adult. We, of course, suppose that these authorities present the importance of social values in a human life. The second dominant category in the value preferences is the category of educational values (2.81). The importance of these values rises mainly when children realize the value of the educational process and its results presented in a final evaluation and in a monitoring process, but also when they reach higher levels of education as well as when they are motivated by parents who are interested in their children’s better professional future. Less preferred are economic, moral and esthetic values. Although we have expected the moral and esthetic values scoring higher even in this age group, we think that this is a result of a currently preferred need of attaining as high a standard of economic security for families and individuals as possible.

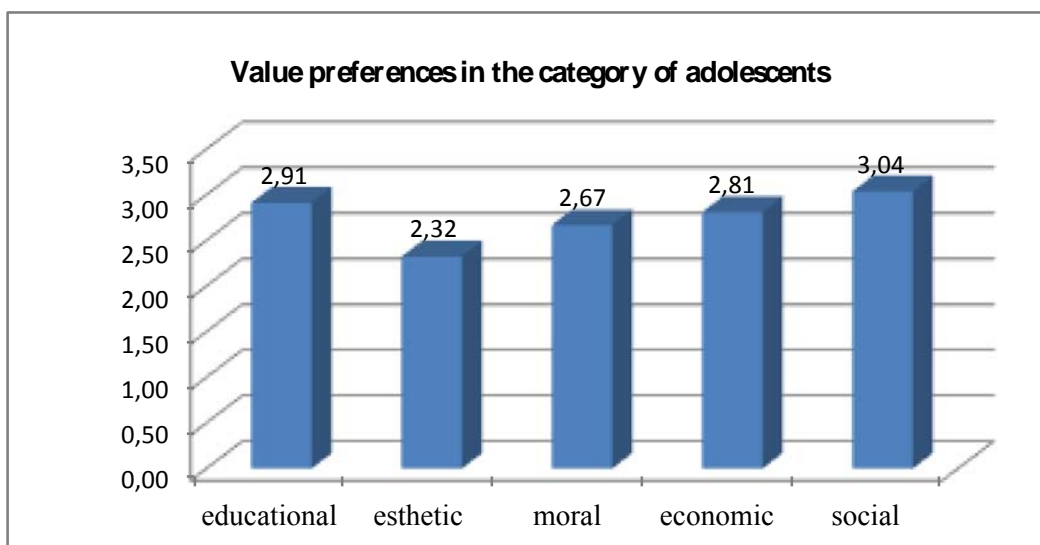
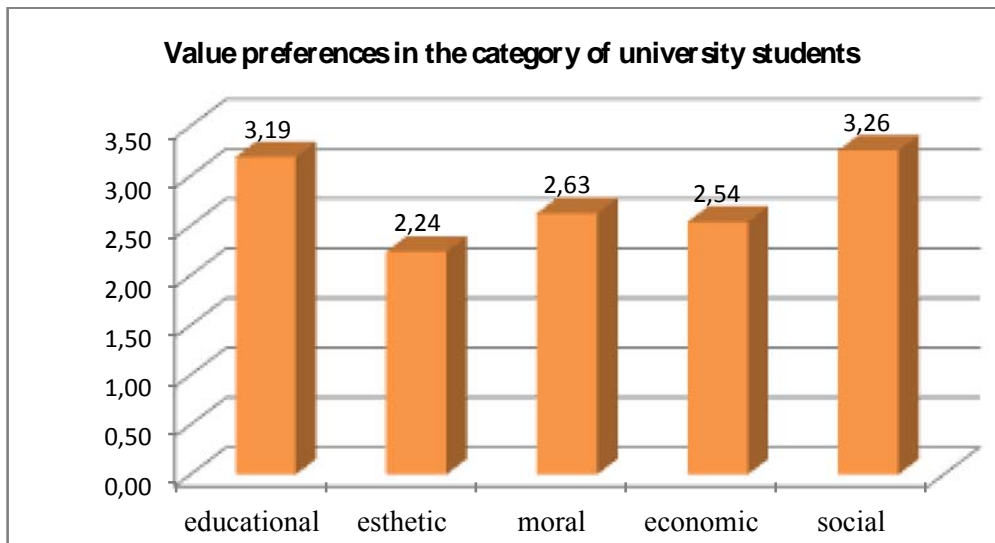


Figure 2: Value preferences in the category of adolescents

When compared with the value preferences of children we see a strong similarity. Adolescents also prefer social values (3.04) and educational values (2.91). Through relationships with their peers people in this age group satisfy certain basic psychological needs. These are the need of stimulation, orientation and meaningful learning as well as the need of emotional security and the need for knowledge. Therefore we think that the results of our survey were strongly influenced by the developing period of adolescence, but also by a positive influence of certain educational factors, mainly the personality of a teacher. The fact that educational values scored high is also probably caused (mainly in the final year of high school) by the increased feeling of importance of getting better education as a means of attaining higher professional role and social prestige, especially by continuing the education process at a university. The order of the other value categories is also a result of the influence of the surrounding society which displays a clear preference of materialism and consumerism mainly in media but also in human relations.



**Figure 2:** Value preferences in the category of university students

In contrast with the two previous categories in the category of university students we can see a shift in the preference of moral norms which score higher than the economic and esthetic values. Social and educational values reached the first and the second place, but with a smaller difference between them. The preference of social values is on one hand connected with the fulfillment of social needs by forming relationships and finding one's own identity in a new social environment, where its members themselves are in new roles in which they need to perform and satisfy certain expectations connected to these roles. These expectations then result in the preference of educational values as the new role of a university student is a role of a studying and developing personality on its way to a professional readiness and future occupation. Similarly, we can assume that the preference of educational values is to a certain point connected with the motivation for the chosen subject of study. The choice of this particular study program also foretells the other value preferences, mainly the shift in the position of the moral values. Because we gave the questionnaire to future teachers it seems obvious that these individuals would prefer moral values to economic ones. It has become a generally accepted knowledge that teachers' inadequate financial reward makes it difficult for these professionals to secure a high standard of living. The preference of moral values should be perceived as a positive sign as it leads to a higher standard of educational process and thus to a positive influence on the value formation of pupils.

### Conclusion

An important finding resulting from the analysis of the value preferences is the fact that the values representing a humanistic and democratic orientation of a young person's personality (social, educational and moral values) scored highest in our survey. It is thus apparent that families and schools educate children and the young along the lines of democracy and humanism. We should however ask questions like why is juvenile crime on the rise or why are certain social-pathological behaviors (bullying, drug addiction, aggression etc.) becoming more common in our schools? The answer isn't a simple one, but we think that there is a strong influence of the media, information-communication technologies, unfairness and disrespect of human life which children often encounter in a social environment and a failure of communication and interpersonal relationships. It is also possible that respondents answered in a way which they thought was expected of them and thus presented their views in a rather distorted

way. Nevertheless, what remains an important fact is that the orientation of young people to social, educational and moral values is an asset for the whole society and its development.

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