

Students' spiritual values in the environment of non-formal education

Elīna Skutele¹ Mg. paed.; Anita Aizsila² Dr. paed.
Latvia University of Agriculture, Latvia^{1,2}
elina.skutele@gmail.com¹; aizsila@llu.lv²

Abstract: Material values have a great influence on modern society, although sustainable society can exist only if it has balanced value system. Future society will consist of nowadays students therefore the aim of the research is analyzed and evaluated students' spiritual values in the environment of non-formal education. Respondents of the research were 4 students and 4 teachers. Research methods were semi-structured interviews and content analysis. In the result of the research was found students' understanding of spiritual values providing a platform for future researches of interaction between students and spiritual values in the daily life.

Keywords: environment of non-formal education, sustainable society, value system.

Introduction

Material values have great influence on modern society although sustainable society can exist only if it is aware of the importance of spiritual values. Future society will consist of nowadays students therefore solutions must be found to help them order their value system. In the environment of non-formal education (for example in the environment of literary musical events) students and teachers can interact as equals – it provides positive conditions to reveal spiritual values.

Latvian teacher and first collector and arranger of song melodies Jānis Cīmze (1814-1881) believed that *in the education of the soul special role is to songs an music therefore teacher must be musically educated* (Rudzītis, Aizsila, 2001, 13). It was believed that sophisticated person must be competent in the arts.

As E. Sparanger pointed in the analysis of values must be considered both object and subject of the value – what is valuable and to whom (Sparanger, 1928/1930). Sparanger developed universal classification of the values arranging them in six types where every type of values complied with certain cultural area.

The outstanding teacher author of the “General Pedagogy” (in original language – Latvian „Vispārīgā paidagōģija”) J. A. Students explains that values are not changing but opinion of them is. Values and ethical standards stay as they were before but changes living conditions, historical course (Students, 1933/1998). Consequently spiritual values exist in every time changes only ability to see them.

G. Allport (Allport, 2002) acknowledges that values are prior and special. They have an energizing power to encourage for action. Values of the person are interconnected and ranked in levels by the importance. Structure of the hierarchy characterizes disposition of the personality, direction of the interests, dominating tendency of motivation. Subjective values are crucial in every process of personality's motivation because the interests and the values determines lifestyle of the person (Karpova, 1994).

In previous researches spiritual values are studied from the psychological point of view partly showing importance in the pedagogy. Authors of the research studies spiritual values in the environment of non-formal education - in literary musical events analysing and evaluating what kind of values students possess. The beginning of the research for the authors was collaborating when Elīna Skutele wrote her master thesis in the leading of Anita Aizsila. Research is still continuing.

The aim of the research was analysed and evaluated students' spiritual values in the environment of non-formal education.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the research is in pedagogically philosophical paradigm according to the basic idea of the research. The structure of the research unites the practical and the action approach and the analytical approach during the interviews and pedagogical observation.

As the most important concepts in this research are considered concepts of pedagogy (Karpova, 1994; Rudzītis, Aizsila, 2001; Students, 1933/1998) and spiritual values (Allport, 2002; Sparanger, 1928/1930).

Research took place in the Kalnciems Secondary School (school in rural area surrounded by the forest, an old building with historical and cultural value). Respondents were students from 9th till 12th class and teachers. Literally musical events are not compulsory – there comes only those who want to.

Methods used in the research are: analysis and evaluation of theoretical sources, empirical data acquisition methods. The interviews were made as it is shown in the scheme in the Figure 1.



Figure 1. Phases of qualitative research
(after Riessman, 1993, 10, Kroplis, Raščevska, 2002/2004, 59)

Phases of qualitative research:

- attention – students take part in literally musical events and evaluate what they do there;
- telling and writing down – semi-structured interviews;
- work with data – content analysis;
- reading – publication of the research results;
- validation – research is validated in the process of reviewing.

Interviews with all students (participants of the literary musical events) took place outside the classrooms in relaxed atmosphere and pleasant weather. All respondents agreed taping the conversation and using data in the research. The interviews were held as conversations in equal positions, encouraging respondents to ask questions as well when it was important to them.

Interviews were semi-structured in order to make conversations as natural as possible. Answers of the respondents in relaxed atmosphere would rather be a valuable research material than answers received in laboratory-like conditions.

In the beginning of the conversation respondents were informed that questions will be asked for the research of the literary musical events. There was not mentioned the term “spiritual values” in order not to cause an effect on the responses. There were 4 respondents from the group of students and 4 respondents from the group of teachers. In the interviews were 5 key questions and additional questions if necessary. Conversations were taped with the permission of respondents in order to carry out transcription and content analysis of the text.

It was easier to create relaxed atmosphere in the interviews of the students. After the first question they perceived conversation style and answered freely. It was more difficult to receive relaxed answers from the teachers especially after the agreement to tape the conversations. Although all respondents were informed that data will be anonymous respondents from the group of teachers reacted to questions as a test not data extraction form. It made more difficult to work with the data with content analysis method where important are accidentally said words and respondents’ style of speaking.

During the transcription every respondent's expression style was respected. The pauses, tone changes and accidentally said words were marked. Name of each respondent was coded and the real name was kept apart from the data obtained. Transcriptions occurred the same day interviews were held in order to gain qualitative data (taking into account the human factor – doing transcription the same day researcher can remember more details from the original conversation). In addition to transcription of the talked words there was a detailed description of the environment, mood of both researcher and respondent and relationship between researcher and respondent.

Through the content analysis environmental conditions (external – weather conditions, social – mutual relationship, psychological – mood of the researcher and respondent) and data received during the transcription (both text and notes on conversation) were taken into consideration.

During the content analysis different respondent answers on one question were compared and correlations were searched in one respondent's answers on all questions. Key words that represent the answer best were searched. Were searched synonyms and adjectives respondents used to emphasize importance of their answers and accidentally said words that point to initial response that respondent changes while talking.

Obtained data is sorted in a table putting together shortened answers of the respondents to the same question. Below the data is the analysis. Notes and comments on the conversation (pauses, laughter etc.) are written in italic. Words and phrases that distinctly characterize the answer are underlined. Use of jargon is given in quotation marks.

Data with the answers of students (Table 1) are given in original language – in Latvian with short review translation. The analysis is in English.

Respondents **D**, **I** and **K** are female, but respondent **M** is male. The order of the answers complies with the order of interviews (namely: 1. – **D**, 2. – **I**, 3. – **M**, 4. – **K**). It is possible to see differences in the last interview because the last respondent heard previous respondent's answers. All interviews – conversations took place outdoors in warm and pleasant weather conditions after the lessons at the end of the day.

Table 2

How do you understand the words “spiritual values”?			
Answers of students			
D	I	M	K
Spiritual values are that what is closest, <u>most important in life</u> to a person. For some it's family, for some maybe art. Depends from the person.	Of course the mind. I choose my friends by their values – what is <u>important</u> for them, how one <u>see the life</u> . I don't choose friends because they have a lot of money or “cool” car, but because of that how one looks at the life, what is important for one.	Spiritual values? (<i>long pause, laughter</i>) Wait! Say something for example. (<i>interviewer refuses</i>) It could be patience, wisdom that you have. Your thoughts. I don't know.	Spiritual values are ones personality, knowledge, wisdom (<i>pause</i>). Spiritual values are ability to communicate with others? Or what we can percept and do. Communication.
Analysis			
First two respondents (D and I) choose the word “important”. Respondent I continue that spiritual values show how person looks at the life. Respondent D mentions two values: „family” and „art” to some extent opposing them. Second two respondents (M and K) focus on values within the person: patience, wisdom. Respondent K refers to communication with other people and personality as values.			

Data with the answers of teachers (Table 2) are given in original language – in Latvian with short review translation. The analysis is in English.

All respondents work with children and youth. All of them are female. Respondent **R** is a teacher, representative of formal education. Respondent **A** is a teacher who works in a non-formal education too. Respondent **S** is a representative of non-formal education who works in international level. Respondent **P** works in cultural sphere and has an education of teacher but does not work in formal education institution.

The order of the answers complies with the order of interviews (namely: 1. – **R**, 2. – **A**, 3. – **S**, 4. – **P**). All respondents were interviewed at the end of the work day in their offices – personally closest room in their place of work.

Table 2

**Do you see a connection between spiritual values and
environment of literary-musical events?**

Answers of teachers			
R (formal)	A (formal / non-formal)	S (non-formal)	P (culture)
Spiritual values are already in the scenario. It is not like in the everyday school life. It is a free environment where you can <u>creatively express</u> yourself. The most important thing is a free environment where one can talk <u>freely, surely talk</u> . There are no frames. At first they are afraid, but then one start to speak, then other. Then they open themselves and <u>freely express their thoughts and feelings</u> .	I think there is a connection. It depends how <u>openly one</u> speaks. The environment motivates to <u>speak openly</u> and talk about all <u>thoughts</u> so these events reveal spiritual values. Maybe events help the students to <u>compare</u> things, to <u>think</u> what are mine and what are thoughts of the others.	Spiritual values are an inner resource and literary musical events are impulses that help to <u>grow the values</u> . You never know when student will open up and ones value will grow bigger.	How it could not be? How can you make something with literature, poetry and music without the spiritual values? All of them are spiritual values. Person lives not only from bread, but from that what you can <u>perceive from the world, from someone other</u> . In my opinion a tree is a spiritual value too. It all comes together and you can't divide it into pieces.
Analysis Respondents by consensus admit the connection between spiritual values and environment of literary musical events. There is a risk that form of the question would promote a positive answer but reasoned answers lead to think that connection really exists (reasons are underlined in the text). Respondent A emphasizes the free environment where students can speak surely. In different words she repeatedly emphasizes the positive influence of free environment. It indicates that it is believable that respondent would like to try a new experience in different kind of education she has used to. Respondent B highlights the freedom of possibility express yourself. She points out on possibility that some of the students who are not ready to open themselves it wouldn't give as much as to others. Respondent C expands the thought of spiritual values as inner resource that can be grown and developed in leading of a teacher. Respondent D rhetorically asks how there could be no connection if there are so many spiritual values from different kind of arts. Respondent emphasizes that person need something more than satisfaction of physiological needs and spiritual values are more.			

Results and discussion

Comparing the data from interviews it is visible that students' responses are much freer in the expression style answering the questions. In the answers of teachers is visible a will to answer as precise and detailed as possible trying to give a new information to interviewer. It points to a professional peculiarity to be ready to answer to unexpected questions giving the most useful answer.

Mentioned peculiarity in the form of the answers affects the content of the answer as well. Answers of the students are more general including family, friends, arts, personal characteristics and social interaction. Answers of the teachers are focused on the research emphasizing the connection between spiritual values and literary-musical events while students are thinking about themselves and their friends and generalize their thoughts.

Analysis of one question gives the view of all research. In the other questions were similar correlations. Answers of the teachers were directed somewhere while answers of the students were directly to the question without trying to say something else.

In the future researches it would be interesting to expand the studies of this particular peculiarity comparing the principle of generating the answers for student and grownup (teacher or representatives of other professions).

In the research of spiritual values semi-structured interview gives a rich data material to start with. After selection of important data for the research and data analysis in the answers of students the wide range of mentioned spiritual values are visible. In some cases spiritual values are contrasted with the material values. In the answers of teachers there are less personal opinions but looking at issue from the side position putting forward the students and their values.

In the future researches it is important to study the change of understanding what spiritual values are in one generation and between different generations comparing them. Results of the research shows that respondents are aware of spiritual values but their understanding of them may change with time. Furthermore in future researches must be studied how students recognize the spiritual values in daily life – if they see their mentioned values in the real life.

And the most important question that can serve as main idea for the future researches – which values are most important in our society and to what extend spiritual values are included. Finding an answer to this question will also give the understanding of development of the society and level of the cultural advancement.

Conclusions

Spiritual values are important but difficultly measurable. For research useful can be text analysing methods as content analysis.

The results of the research provide a basis to further research giving a possibility to creators of future society – students – to analyse their and the society's value system and order it giving an important place to spiritual values.

- Free answers of respondents indicate the trust to interviewer and compliance of the method conducting a research where respondents are represented by students.
- Different answers of two groups of the respondents – students and teachers – show the differences between generations, influence of the profession (teachers' tendency to explain) and suggests a new direction of the research emphasizing the differences between generations.
- Data obtained in the research shows that students recognize wide range of the spiritual values so theoretically their value system is balanced accepting the spiritual values. But it could indicate that students give the answer they are waited to or they know it theoretically but are not able to implement in the life. The conclusions lead to plan further research looking for an option to measure interaction between students and spiritual values in the daily life.

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