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Life Values of Today's Young University Students: Problems of Teacher Education

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Abstract

What makes this research relevant is the changes in the society's and an individual's value space, which affect the young the most, as the youth is more dynamic and sensitive to social changes, to changes in the society's ideology and values. This research is aimed at addressing the problem of transforming the modern teacher education in the context of changes in the young students' life values.

The basic method behind the research is the Schwartz Value Survey, which in this case involved 120 boys and girls aged 19 to 24.

Analysis of the younger generation's values shows that none of the Schwartz-stated universal values is crucial for young people. What is noteworthy is not the hierarchy of values but the universal values being below average on the scale, although Schwartz (1992) considers them the primary drivers of life.

On the one hand, the research results suggest that young people struggle the most to cope with the socio-economic and political changes taking place in the society, as the youth does not yet have a well-established worldview or a stable system of values, which renders many young people to experience apathy and indifference towards themselves and others. On the other hand, traditional methods, measures, and values cannot be used as a proper reference to understand a young person unless their life values, which do not fit the familiar views and belief, are well-represented. One of the major challenges of the modern teacher education is to find ways and approaches to understanding the core values of the youth, to help the youth shape such life values what would fit the modern realities.

Keywords: values, teacher education, life values, the younger generation, young students, youth.

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Introduction

The today's society is prone to globalization, which alters the society's and the individual's value space. Traditional values such as religiosity, deference to the motherland and family, and loyalty to the official authorities are being replaced by directly opposite rational secular values. Each person's personal development is characterized by learning the values of social community and transforming them into personal values (Leontiev, 1997). Values are central to the individual belief system and are the guiding principles of life; as such, they define the behavior and purpose, the status and lifestyle one seeks (Rokeach, 1973). The today's state-of-the-art in Russia is peculiar, as older generations have lived by one system of moral norms, rules, and values, while the younger generation captured the society in the process of establishing new values (Tkachenko & Bersunkaeva, 2017). In these circumstances, lack of a universally accepted ideology means that behavior is modeled after a hierarchy of individual values (Khaibulaeva, 2015).

When considering how a system of values is formed in a modern society, young people are of particular interest, as they are more dynamic and sensitive to social changes, to changes in the society's ideology and values (Herzen, 2012); at the same time, the youth is "one of the most socially vulnerable groups, whose system of values is facing large-scale distortion caused by numerous and diverse factors" (Nemirovskii & Sokolova, 2006). For a young person, morality and its associated worldview is only being established as a stable system of moral ideals and principles, which will gradually transform into a permanent driving force that mediates their behavior, activity, attitudes towards themselves and the surrounding space" (Bozhovich, 1968). Being a university student is associated with the youth, which is a transition from maturation to adulthood.

Students are a "special social category, a specific community of people whose common denominator is university education"; as such, they are characterized by "higher education, high level of motivation to learn, and highest possible social activity while harmoniously combining intellectual and social maturity (Zimnyaya, 2002). University educational space is at the core of social space in any advancing society. Skills and competences it provides must be seen not as a list of format requirements, but as an integrity that reflects a specialist's personality in essence (Mukin, 2017). A university student is on the way to determine themselves as a personality and as a professional; the pivotal role in this process lies with the shaping and development of values as an integral system of internalized personal meanings that reflect the sense of a person's function." In the context of professional university education, on the one hand, "the attitude towards professional or learning environment is being formed on the basis of a person's personal meanings that come from their past experience; on the other hand, education itself affects the person's values and attunes them to a professional vision of their future professional world" (Seryi, 2004). The emergence of core values in the learning process is associated with the development and realization of one's own interests and values, as well as with the values of significant others as being understood in communication and interaction with them. The general mechanism of the emergence of values in education is based on dialogs and advancement of students' reflection skills (Sapogova, 1995). Learning shall stimulate the emergence of moral values; the most important tool of "moral teaching" is the teacher's random comments that convey meanings and relationships far more important than the subject itself (Ollport, 1998).

Although the core values and life meanings of the youth have been well-researched, the emergence of life values as part of the university education is not a sufficiently studied problem. Its

importance, however, shall not be underrated, as the outcomes of university education can be used as a the basis for instilling the life values crucial for the society and pertaining to the sociocultural factors of social development

Research Methods

The research used the following methods: theoretical methods (review of topic-related literature); diagnostic methods (testing); mathematical statistics; and visualization.

The basic method behind the research was the Schwartz Value Survey.

This is a PVQ survey, where each item is limited to one sentence. These sentences describe a person’s goals, aspirations, or desires that imply the importance of this or that value. For instance, “This person cherishes law” describes a conformist, rule-based person. Respondents have to specify the extent, to which this person is similar to them. Respondents’ values are derived from the implicit values of people they consider to be their likes. The response scale comprises 6 alternatives: 0 is not at all like me; 1 is not like me; 2 is a little like me; 3 is somewhat like me; 4 is like me; 5 is very much like me (Schwartz, Butenko, Sedova, & Lipatova, 2012).

Data and Sample

Data was provided by the students of Chelyabinsk State University. Respondents were 120 boys and girls aged 19 to 24, each a student of CSU.

Research Results

The research team calculated descriptive statistics to process the results. Step 1 was to analyze the hierarchy of sample means of the respondents’ life values, see Figure 1 for the histogram.

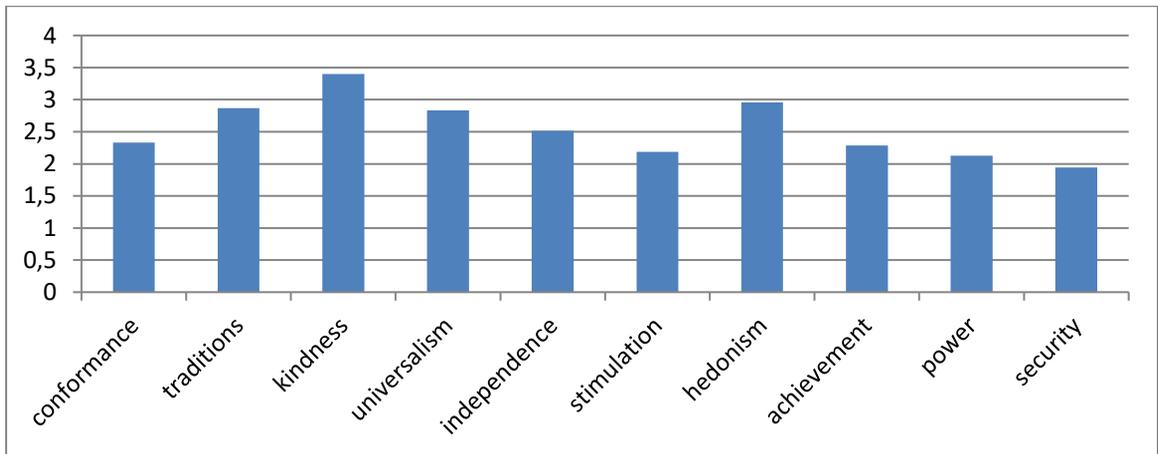


Figure 1. Hierarchy of students’ life values

Analysis of the hierarchy of the sample means shows that kindness (M=3.40), hedonism (M=2.95), and traditions (M=2.86) are of high value for young students. This means they seek to preserve the well-being of people they are personally in touch with (usefulness, loyalty, indulgence, honesty,

responsibility, friendship, mature love). However, the today's students also value pleasure and enjoyment in life. It is important for them to gain respect, to recognize the customs and ideas existing in the culture, and to follow those. Security ($M=1.94$), power ($M=2.12$), and stimulation ($M=2.18$) rank the lowest. This means that for young university students, security and dominance over people and resources, as well as personal success and desire for novelty are not as important.

Step 2 consisted in compiling descriptive statistics on the young students' life values, see Table 1 for the results.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of life values

Life values	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	Asymmetry	Kurtosis
conformance	2.3302	.872483	.761	.765	.540
traditions	2.8655	1.12271	1.260	.475	.409
kindness	3.4002	.90959	.827	.897	1.379
universalism	2.8319	1.33324	1.778	.729	.372
independence	2.5133	1.12629	1.269	.863	.577
stimulation	2.1868	.90697	.823	1.184	1.272
hedonism	2.9556	.95490	.912	.890	.762
achievement	2.2841	.94223	.888	.592	.256
power	2.1275	1.02313	1.047	1.117	1.290
security	1.9412	.97431	.949	1.262	1.709

Analysis of the younger generation's sample means of values shows that none of the Schwartz-stated universal values is crucial for young people. What is noteworthy is not the hierarchy of values but all the values being below the medium point on a 6-point scale. Schwartz (1992) considers these values as the drivers of life. He defines values as "learned" needs that are culture-, environment-, mentality-, and society-specific.

Questions for Discussion

Modern youth's values being low across the board suggests a few things. Perhaps young people struggle the most to cope with the socio-economic and political changes taking place in the society, as the youth does not yet have a well-established worldview or a stable system of values, which renders many young people to experience apathy and indifference towards themselves and others. It might also be the case that traditional methods, measures, and values cannot be used as a proper reference to understand a young person, as their life values, which do not fit the familiar views and belief, are not yet well-represented. This makes it even more challenging for the modern teacher education to find ways and approaches to understanding the core values of the youth, to help the youth shape such life values what would fit the modern realities. This research is to intended to address the problem of transforming the modern teacher education in the context of changes in the young students' life values. Education is a complex social phenomenon that has both tangible and mental components. It is the mental aspect where

modern Russian education is fundamentally malfunctioning: it has lost its traditional ability to convey cultural, social, moral, and value models and codes. In today's Russia, the education system cannot even decide what it wants to convey to the future generations. Its inability to convey core values is boosted by its commercial nature, which makes value- and morals-related things unprofitable. Another contributing factor is the extreme bureaucratization, which either formalizes such message of values to an absurd while losing its essence, or excludes values from teaching practices whatsoever. The today's student, whom the mutated system of values drives to get a diploma rather than knowledge, follows the path of least resistance. What further entrenches this trend is the commercialization of education and the "demographic pit", forcing universities to fight for each student while lowering the entrance threshold ever more. Besides, the today's Russian education is inclined towards humanities and social studies; as a result, even institutes of technology and science faculties introduce humanities as majors while science courses are being cut and simplified.

Afanasyeva (2009) believes that Russian education cannot be efficient without strong positive linkage to the mental aspects of society: culture, morality, and values—and the latter must be healthy. Unless morality is recovered and social ideals and values are restored, any attempt to solve the problems of Russian education will be in vain.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the problem stated herein is of extreme importance; at any time, the youth is the core resource a nation has to reach prosperity; young people's values is what defines the fate of the nation. The challenge of the modern teacher education is to find ways and approaches to understanding the core values of the youth, to help the youth shape such life values what would fit the modern realities.

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