
The Formation of Children's Values in School: A Study on Value Development Among Primary School Children in Switzerland and the United Kingdom

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Summary of the research plan

This project will illuminate how primary schools shape children's personal value development, by employing a longitudinal design in Switzerland along with a comparative cross-sectional study in the UK. The project builds on our experience and successful joint projects in classroom research and human value development. The project will set the foundations for theory building on formation of values in the school context. This knowledge is essential for providing evidence-based guidance for values education in schools.

The *formation of children's values in primary school* is at the core of school curricula and educational frameworks in Europe, and more specifically in Switzerland (Lehrplan 21) and the UK (Department of Education, 2014). *Values* express broad goals (kindness, curiosity) that are important to a person in life, and they are linked to behaviour (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Maio, 2010). *Primary schools* are expected to develop children's understanding of their own and others' values, children's ability to express their own values and pursue behaviours that help achieving them. In most recent years there has been a steep increase of publications, including the first special section on value development from childhood to early adulthood (Döring, Daniel, & Knafo-Noam, 2016) and research which highlights the impact of the family context (Makarova, Herzog, Weber, & Frommelt, 2018) and value-based educational goals on children's value development (Döring, Makarova, Herzog, & Bardi, 2017). However, the field is still surprisingly under-researched, and there is a lack of evidence of how children's values develop and how they are formed in primary school. The proposed *four-year collaborative project (Switzerland and UK)* will help fill this research gap by proposing the *socio-ecological model of value formation in school* (Figure 2) and investigating the *formation of children's values longitudinally*. The project is going to answer the question: **How do key variables of the micro-, meso-, and macro-school-system affect children's values over time?** by focussing on two research objectives:

Objective 1: *To research children's value priorities and behaviours in the school context in Switzerland and the UK*

We will investigate children's values in the microsystem (proximal processes within classrooms), the mesosystem (investigating the effect of school climate), and the macrosystem (investigating the effect of educational policies and national curricula in each country). To meet this objective a cross-sectional study in grade 1 in Switzerland (n=1000 children, 40 school classes) and the UK (n=500, 20 school classes) will be conducted, with a focus on proximal processes within the classroom, collecting data from pupils and their class teacher. The cross-national comparison will generate knowledge on effects of national value-related curricula on children's value priorities and behaviours generating an empirical evidence on implementation of value education in both countries, Switzerland and the UK.

Objective 2: *To investigate developmental trajectories of children's value priorities in primary school*

We will additionally investigate trajectories over time, hence investigating effects in the chronosystem. A two-year longitudinal study with four points of measurements (grades 1 to 3) will be launched in Switzerland, which will identify trajectories of value development in school – being the first such study. Identifying proximal key factors that affect children's formation of values in classrooms and studying their impact will significantly advance theory building on value development.

The *project team* brings together unique strengths in relevant research areas (assessment of children's values, value change, value development in childhood, the relationship between values and behaviour, social inclusion in classrooms, pupil-teacher relationship), *world-leading research* and *well-established networks* with schools, teacher training institutions, educational authorities, and scientists for dissemination of findings. The findings from this project will be published in leading international journals with a focus on open science. The findings will be publicised worldwide through networks and values research centres, and disseminated widely to teachers, school principals, politicians, and the wider public.