

## **Value Preferences of Gifted Fifth Grade Pupils from Selected Elementary Schools in the Czech Republic**

### **Abstract**

This article presents research on value preferences of eleven-year-old fifth grade pupils. Differences between two groups of gifted pupils were observed – between 71 contemporary pupils and 229 pupils in ELSPAC in the years 2002–03. The identical identification criteria were used in the selection of both groups. By selecting questions from the ELSPAC questionnaires we compared the value preferences data of both of the gifted groups. We were dealing with research questions: which values the gifted prefer in friends, which priorities of life values they have, and which one is the most important for them. No statistically significant differences were found in the comparison of the majority of the values of the two groups. In the evaluation of friends, all the respondents most preferred the item “how you get along” and then “their reliability“. The most significant difference was found in the item “the gain from your friendship with them“ which moved from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> place in 10 years. No statistically significant differences were found in the question of life values between the two groups of gifted children in our data set except for the item “personal property,“ which was more important for the gifted of 2012. The most important value for both of the groups was “family relations“ ahead of the item “health“ and “having friends“.

**Keywords:** *values, value preferences, gifted pupil, ELSPAC, t-test*

## **Theoretical Framework**

Value preferences are one of the most complicated areas of the social science studies, especially when the target group are gifted children who are, according to experts, unusually perceptive of other people's feelings and needs and thus dealing with the issues of ethics, moral and life priorities more than others. (Webb, 2002; Gross, 2011)

If we were to define giftedness, we could find one of the definitions in the Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education which, as one of the key documents in the Czech Republic, defines obligatory principles in education. It characterizes giftedness as a set of abilities enabling an individual to perform better than the average in the population. Gifted pupils' knowledge exceeds the set requirements; they enjoy solving problems, they create their own rules and approaches; they do not like cooperating and being subordinated; they excel in quick orientation, concentration, memory, better motivation for learning (RVP ZV, 2007, p. 112). There are other types of definitions (Porter, 1999): liberal and conservative (they differ in the estimated amount of the gifted in the population), one-dimensional and multidimensional (according to the number of the criteria for identification of giftedness), definitions of potential or demonstrated performance (latent giftedness or manifested performance). Our conception of giftedness in the sense of a high intellectual ability in selected areas of academic abilities, supported by the definitions of demonstrated performance.

Traditional psychological, pedagogical psychological, pedagogical, layman's methods and their combinations may be used for the identification of gifted pupils. One of the forms of the identification of the gifted is a nomination by the teacher who knows the pupils and is able to competently judge their abilities, skills and manifestations during various activities and situations where the repeatedly manifested extraordinary performance of a pupil is the main criterion (Renzulli, Reis, 2004).

The decisive influence on an individual's recognized values is in the hands of family, school and peer groups, which also determine the possibilities and limits of their members' individual development during their socialization (Kraus, 2006). The value preferences transform over the course of life.

## **Value preferences researches**

In the Czech Republic, Osecká (1991), Sak and Saková (2004) conduct long-time research into young people's life priorities. They agree that young people today

tend to be more individualistic and acknowledge values of more materialistic characteristics related to their own perspective, success and freedom. Sak (2000) explores the young Czech people's values using a battery of 17–23 values with a five-level ascending scale of possibilities and calculations of values indexes as weighted arithmetic means. In Sak's study, the young valued *health* the most, *love* in the second place, *peace* in the third place, with *partnership* and *family* following. *God* and *political involvement* placed last. According to Sak and Saková (2004, p. 17), young people are still heading towards liberalism, hedonism, individualism, egoism and materialistic values.

The research into children's value preferences (Bocan [online], 2011) showed that 740 Czech children's most important values are: 1. *having friends*, 2. *having a happy family* and 3. *being successful at school*. The first two values remained the same among the young people aged 13–15, however, the importance of *having enough money* placed third.

An American study (Lubinski, Schmidt, Benbow, 1996) on the values of the gifted explored 203 (109 girls/women and 94 boys/men) gifted individuals' stability of 6 value themes (theoretical, economic, political, esthetic, social, and religious) rated using a four-level scale in the interval of 20 years (1973–1993). The gifted came from common (non-elite) secondary schools and were identified at the age of 13 using a didactic test focusing on mathematical and verbal abilities. Thirteen-year-old girls were found out to prefer *social* themes; twenty years later they preferred esthetic themes. Both sexes' preferences of *political* and *social* themes decreased significantly over the course of time. The men of both time periods preferred *theoretical* themes (searching for the truth) the most.

Another American study (Piiro, 2005) researched the values of gifted students from common secondary schools at the age of 14–17, whose giftedness was identified using a test detecting their creativity, specific academic talents and analytical ability levels. The research was conducted between 1999 and 2002, before the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and after them. The authors used the Rokeach Value Survey including 18 instrumental and 18 terminal values. The terminal values defining the goals of human effort are, e.g., happiness, the world of beauty, social recognition, wisdom, etc. The instrumental values, which are means of achieving goals are, e.g., ambition, self – control, independence, helpfulness, honesty, etc. Using a qualitative analysis of the essays of the gifted about the reasons for their preferences, it was found out that the value preferences of gifted adolescents before and after the terrorist attacks had not changed significantly. The terminal values were: 1. salvation, 2. freedom, 3. self-respect and 16. the world of beauty, 17. social recognition, 18. national security; the instrumental values: 1. love, 2. honesty, 3. imagination.

A Russian analysis comparing the value preferences during the friend selection of two groups of one thousand adolescents aged 14–17 (first group: the gifted: 60%, second group: at-risk youth: 40%) discovered that both groups preferred: the 1. *loyalty*, 2. *communicativity and ability to entertain*, 3. *intelligence*, 4. *responsibility*, 5. *courage* of their friends. The respondents had to choose only three most important values. *Intelligence* was considered to be the most important among the gifted while the at-risk youth preferred their friends' *courage* (Černyšev [online], 2009).

In the Czech Republic, the value preferences of children have been researched by the international survey ELSPAC (European Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood), which has been observing the process of pregnancy, childhood and coming of age of the respondents (via the views of children, their parents and teachers) aiming at identifying the biological, psychological, social and external factors determining the survival and healthy development of an individual (Řulák [online], 2010) since 1991. It was the international survey ELSPAC which was not only an inspiration, but also a source of basic data for our research. Unprocessed data from 2002–2003 about the value preferences of eleven-year-old pupils were selected from the questionnaires and compared with present-day eleven-year-old pupils. The selected pupils matched our designed criteria of giftedness.

## **Method**

The main goal of our quantitative research was to find out present-day value preferences of gifted pupils from the fifth grade of elementary schools and to compare these results with those of the preferences of the gifted determined by ELSPAC between 2002–2003. We were dealing with the following research questions: What values do gifted pupils prefer in their friends? And What are the value preferences of gifted pupils, and which value is the most important?

The **research tools** were 2 questionnaires: 1. *Questionnaire for the teacher U 11* and 2. *Questionnaire for the child E 6*, which were distributed in 2002–2003 and in July 2012. The original ELSPAC questionnaire was used for the purposes of finding out the information from 2002–2003 and for the purposes of finding out the present-day information, a new questionnaire was created by selecting questions from the ELSPAC questionnaire in an unaltered version for consequent comparison of the resulting information. The ELSPAC questionnaire was question originally marked C9 (in the present-day research marked 6): “*What is the most important in friends for you?*” with the following scale of answers: 1 – very important, 2 – important enough, 3 – not important enough, 4 – does not matter at all, was the

key question of the research. Another monitored question was question E 1 (7): *“Different things are important for a person to feel good. Say if and how important are the following things for you:”* with the same four-level scale of possible answers. The last question was question E 2 (8): *“Which of the previous answers a.-n. is the most important of all for you? Use only letters a.-n. Write only one answer.”*

The research sample consisted of gifted eleven-year-old pupils from the fifth grades of Czech elementary schools. The first research sample included 229 gifted pupils from the South Moravian Region (ELSPAC research from 2002–2003), the second research sample included 71 present-day gifted pupils from common elementary schools from the Zlín Region and South Moravian Region.

Gifted pupils are those who were evaluated by the teacher in questionnaire U 11 in all the selected abilities on the five-level scale only with value 1. It was question B1: *“How would you evaluate the abilities of the monitored child in comparison with average abilities of a child of the same age? a) reading abilities, b) literal abilities, c) mathematical abilities, d) general knowledge and awareness”* with the five-level scale of answers: 1 – very good, 2 – good, 3 – not very good, 4 – bad, 5 – nonexistent. A gifted pupil is also one who was evaluated on the four-level scale only with value 1 in question B2: *“How, in your opinion, is the child’s school performance influenced by: a) abilities, b) the child’s effort, c) difficulty of the task, d) chance,”* with the four-level scale of answers: 1 – a lot, 2 – quite a lot, 3 – little, 4 – hardly at all. The pupils’ giftedness was evaluated by their class teachers, who spend most of their time at school and are usually familiar with the pupils’ performance. The method of nomination by the class teacher was used for the selection of the group of gifted pupils.

- The research group from the period of 2002–2003: 229 eleven-year-old gifted pupils (105 boys and 124 girls). According to our criteria, 259 gifted pupils (13.4% of 1927) were selected from the 1927 ELSPAC children (2002–2003), however, 30 children had to be excluded for not having answered most of the questions.
- The research group from 2012: 71 eleven-year-old gifted pupils (32 boys and 39 girls) nominated by teachers from the total of 861 children (8.25% of 861) in July 2012.

The characteristics concordance is maintained in both research groups – the gifted pupils were selected according to the same criteria, the pupils came from the common (nonspecialized) elementary school grades. The selection of pupils from the identical regions was attempted.

## Results

For the purpose of clarity, the data were recoded before their evaluation – the possible answers 1–4 were assigned reversed numerical values. The bigger the average (index), the more important is the resultant position of the individual values.

**Table 1.** Evaluation of question C 9 (6): “What is the most important in friends for you?”

Values (important in friends)	Gifted pupils from fifth grades			
	2012		2002–03	
	Mean	Position	Mean	Position
m) How you understand each other	3.606	1.	3.751	1.
p) Their reliability	3.310	2.	3.415	2.
o) How able they are to defend other people	2.775	3.	2.703	4.
r) How entertaining they are	2.690	4.	2.777	3.
q) What you may gain by befriending them	2.606	5.	1.878	15.
k) Things you have in common	2.577	6.	2.699	5.
s) What they talk about, i.e. what topics	2.521	7.	2.585	6.
h) Their family (how they accept you, how they behave)	2.408	8.	2.524	7.
c) Their hobbies and interests	2.211	9.	2.284	10.
t) How they talk (i.e. way of speech)	2.197	10.	2.410	8.
n) How they can stand up to other people	2.169	11.	2.231	11.
u) What your parents think of them	2.070	12.	2.332	9.
b) Their age	2.014	13.	2.044	13.
j) Their place of living (e.g. distance, attractiveness)	2.000	14.	1.751	16.
d) Their abilities and talent, what they can do	1.873	15.	2.100	12.
l) What other people think of them	1.718	16.	1.956	14.
f) What grade they are in	1.662	17.	1.690	18.
a) Their appearance	1.592	18.	1.616	20.
g) Their marks at school	1.549	19.	1.725	17.
e) How popular they are	1.451	20.	1.664	19.
i) Wealth and social status of their family	1.366	21.	1.376	21.

Our research hypotheses were confirmed in the software program Statistica 10 with Student’s t-test comparing the arithmetic means (indexes) of two groups of data collected from two different groups of respondents.

**Hypothesis 1:**

**1H:** The group of gifted pupils from the the period of 2002–2003 preferred different values in their friends from those of the group of gifted pupils from 2012 (question C9/6).

- **1H<sub>0</sub>:** Friend value indexes of the group of the gifted from 2002–2003 are the same as those of the group of the gifted from 2012.
- **1H<sub>A</sub>:** Friend value indexes of the group of the gifted from 2002–2003 are statistically significantly different from those of the friend value indexes of the group of gifted from 2012.

The testing of Hypothesis 1 proved that the friend value indexes show statistically significant differences between both groups of gifted pupils: abilities, popularity, place of living, other people's opinions, mutual understanding, possibility of gain, your parents' opinions. Thus, we reject 1H<sub>0</sub> and accept 1H<sub>A</sub>. 1H<sub>0</sub> is valid with other hypotheses – there is no difference between both groups' preferences.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of question E1 (7): "Different things are important for a person to feel good. Say if and how important the following things are for you:"

Values	Gifted pupils from fifth grades			
	1–2012 (n = 71)		2–2002–03 (n = 229)	
	Mean	Position	Mean	Position
e) Family relationships	3.817	1.	3.886	1.
f) Health	3.718	2.	3.769	2.
c) Having friends	3.577	3.	3.703	3.
d) Relations with friends	3.535	4.	3.489	4.
a) School results and grades	3.380	5.	3.319	5.
g) Hobbies and interests	3.211	6.	3.183	6.
n) Sport	3.127	7.	3.127	7.
b) Relations with teachers	2.789	8.	2.900	9.
l) Travelling (trips, holidays)	2.761	9.	2.904	8.
k) Home and family wealth	2.732	10.	2.742	10.
m) Personal property (e.g. bike, PC, etc)	2.606	11.	2.336	13.
h) Appearance (body, skin, etc.)	2.465	12.	2.594	11.
i) Clothes	2.408	13.	2.572	12.
j) Money	2.127	14.	2.144	14.

**Hypothesis 2:**

**2H:** The group of gifted pupils from the period of 2002–2003 preferred values different from those of the group of gifted pupils from 2012 (question E1/7).

- **2H0:** Value indexes of the group of the gifted from 2002–2003 are the same as those of the group of the gifted from 2012.
- **2HA:** Value indexes of the group of the gifted from 2002–2003 are statistically significantly different from the friend value indexes of the group of the gifted from 2012.

The testing of hypothesis 2 shows that only the indexes of value – personal property, show a statistically significant difference between both groups of gifted pupils. At this point, we reject 2H0 and accept  $2H_A$  about the difference between the two groups. All the other items showed no difference, thus accepting 2H0.

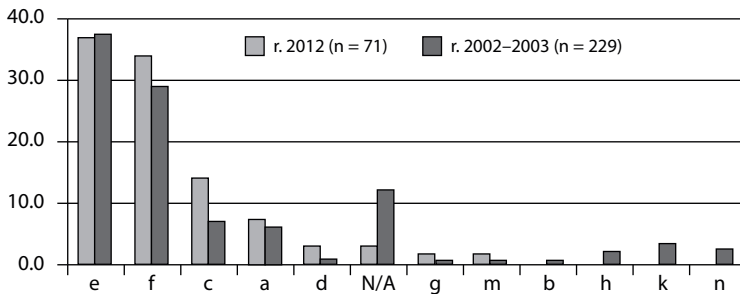
**Table 3.** Evaluation of question 8. (E 2): “Which of the previous answers a.-n. is the most important of all for you? Use only letters a.-n. Write only one answer.”

The most important value	Gifted pupils from fifth grades					
	1–2012 (n = 71)			2–2002 (n = 229)		
	Position	Frequency	%	Position	Frequency	%
e) Family relations	1.	26	36.6	1.	85	37.1
f) Health	2.	24	33.8	2.	66	28.8
c) Having friends	3.	10	14.1	3.	16	7.0
a) School results	4.	5	7.1	4.	14	6.1
d) Relations with friends	5.	2	2.8	8.	2	0.9
g) Hobbies and interests	6.–7.	1	1.4	9.–11.	1	0.4
m) Personal property	6.–7.	1	1.4	9.–11.	1	0.4
k) Home and family wealth	–	–	–	5.	7	3.1
n) Sport	–	–	–	6.	5	2.2
h) Appearance	–	–	–	7.	4	1.8
b) Relations with teachers	–	–	–	9.–11.	1	0.4

The most important value for gifted pupils from both groups was e) *Family relations*, f) *Health* in the second place and c) *Having friends* in the third place.



**Figure 1.** Graph comparing the resultant priorities lists of gifted pupils' most important values



111 out of 300 children surveyed chose option e) Family relations. 2 pupils (2.8%) in 2002 and 27 pupils (11.8%) in 2002-2003 left the question unanswered (“N/A”).

**Summary of the research results**

Statistically significant differences in the question of the gifted children’s preferred values in friends were discovered between the groups of the gifted from 2002-2003 and from 2012 in seven items, i.e., 1/3 out of the total number of 21 values. The most significant difference was registered in the item “*what you can gain by befriending them*”, which was in the 15<sup>th</sup> place in the group of the gifted from 2002-2003, while it was in the 5<sup>th</sup> place in the 2012 group, which testifies to the significant shift in the preference of the material values in present-day children.

The item “*how you understand each other*” was in the identical first place in both groups when evaluating friends, as was “*their reliability*” in the second place. The last, 21<sup>st</sup> place, was identical in both groups – it was the item “*wealth and social status of their family.*”

Regarding value preferences, there were no statistically significant differences, except for the value of “*personal property*”, between the groups of the gifted from 2002-2003 and 2012. It was found out that private property was more important for the group of the gifted from 2012. The most important values in our research groups were identical, i.e., “*Family relations*”, “*Health*” in the second place and “*Having friends*” in the third place.

The most significant differences in the eleven-year-old gifted children’s value preferences registered testify to the shift in the preference of personal property

and expecting personal gain from friendship. No statistically significant differences were found in most items of the monitored value preferences.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education states that one of the outcomes of the Educational category Human and his world is: “*Pupils reach the knowledge that health is the most precious value in human life.*” (RVP ZV, 2007, p. 38). The results of our research show that the eleven-year-old gifted pupils value “*family relations*” more than “*health*”. Prudký (2009, p. 287), too, states that in the present-day society of the Czech Republic, “*family*” is in the first place of the list of value priorities.

The results of our research prove the aforementioned conclusions of Osecká, Sak and Saková that young people today are more individualistically and materialistically focused on their own success.

The winning triad of the eleven-year-olds’ most important values reported by our research also confirms the results of Bocan’s research, which states that children of this age value friends, family the most and also school results, which placed fifth in our research.

We are also aware that the results are valid only for this research group and they cannot be generalised. The results of the research are also problematic to compare with similar studies as each of them is based on different factors affecting the value orientation of children. For instance, Kraus (2006) divides the value-affecting factors into endogenous (inner) and exogenous (outer), with exogenous factors being the critical ones: material conditions, influence of social and educational institutions (family, school, media) and social political-economic influences. According to Piirto (2005), the values are critically influenced by age, education, intelligence and subjective social inclusion. Showing how children’s value preferences are affected by their level of giftedness, which is also conceived very differently in the aforementioned studies, is thus very difficult.

Our research was limited mainly by the phase of identification and selection of the gifted children. We are aware that the class teachers nominated only the pupils with manifested giftedness, which was also evaluated subjectively.

The aim of our research was to compare the value preferences of the present-day children with the children from 2002–2003. In the consequent research it is possible to compare these value preferences with the group of children who were not

nominated to the group of the gifted. Furthermore, it is possible, e.g., to compare the answers according to gender, or to describe the aforementioned factors' influence on the change of children's value orientation.

Children's and youth's value system testifies to the condition of values in society, their reality and reproduction, but mainly to the subjective social potential mutually affecting future development of society (Sak and Saková, 2004, p. 4). The topic of values is only a fringe topic in the pedagogical disciplines. Teachers are not usually familiar with the values of their pupils and they encounter difficulty in finding the direction in which they should shape pupils. Apart from children's family members, it is the teachers who may be the most significant factors in shaping pupils' personalities and their value systems.

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