

STUDENTS' COPING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS AT THE BASIC LEVEL OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS IN ESTONIA

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Abstract

The number of students dropping out from the basic level of comprehensive schools has increased during the last years. The current situation has led to a conclusion that the educational system needs to be reorganized in order to support the formation of constructive students' coping strategies in academic environment. Arising from that the aim of the current study was to find out how students assess their coping at the basic level of different types of schools (4th-9th grades). Because of linguistic and cultural diversity in Estonia, schools can be divided into three groups: Estonian, Russian and bilingual (Estonian-Russian) schools. The results of the study revealed the differences in students' evaluations on grouped indicators characterizing coping at different levels of school. The students of the second level in basic school (4th-6th grades) did not give higher evaluations to their coping and peer relations than the students of the next level. The students of 7th-9th grades gave lower evaluations to other coping components, the indices were worryingly lower. This is the level where dropping out has its highest rate. Therefore it may be said that students' coping strategies are the lowest in the 7th-9th grade, which may be one of the causes of dropping out. There were significant differences in coping, discipline and some other indicators of Estonian, Russian and bilingual school types. According to the results it may be concluded that students' coping strategies grow worse at the third level of basic school and the students of all types of schools have coping problems.

Key words: *students, coping, basic school, different school types.*

Introduction

Estonian society has had great changes during the last two decades. The changes taken place in Estonia after regaining its independence have not been positive neither for society nor educational system. There are about 20,000 people aged 17-49 who have not obtained basic education. Every year about 900-1,500 young people drop out from basic school, in 2003 there were 1,145 of them. Three fourths of dropouts are boys. In most of the cases they drop out in the 7th-9th grade (Haridusfoorum, 2004).

In 2006/2007 849 students dropped out without obtaining basic education before adulthood, which makes 0.7% of the total number of people obtaining basic education (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium, 2008).

The problem is actual and in focus both in Estonia as well as in Europe. In February, 2008 the meeting of European Union „Education, Youth Affairs and Culture” council took place in Brussels. Ministers of education from different European countries took part in it (including from Estonia).

The question of early drop out was discussed. The early drop out is a problem in most European countries and according to the opinion of the council „Education, Youth Affairs and Culture” that connects different ministers of education, the problem must be paid more attention to. The European Union has decided to reduce the average drop out rate (to be less than 10%) in European Union educational system by 2010. In 2006 it was 15.3% (in Estonia 13.2%). Achieving that aim requires great changes.

The main strategies to achieve the aim of reducing drop out rate in Estonia are supporting each child's individuality, early detection of problems and quick implementation of supportive structures. Different steps have been taken in that field already (individual curriculum, the obligation of supportive structures, development meetings with a child and parents etc). Increasing parent-school cooperation might help to reduce the dropping out. Raising the quality of teacher education, in-service training and developing the skill to notice and support pupils with special need have played an important part in the process as well (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium, 2008).

Pupils' small coping skills have led to the situation, where we have to face the fact that in the middle of basic school children find themselves having no options to continue their studies. People without basic education are a burden for the society – they are not able to compete in the labour market and even worse – they may contradict the society with their delinquent behaviour. State control discovered that almost 13% of all 18-55-year-old citizens without basic education were imprisoned or on probation (Põhikoolist, 2003). Therefore a thorough analysis and reorganization of school system is needed in order to support students' coping.

According to ethnical diversity there are three main school types in Estonia: Estonian, Russian and bilingual (Estonian-Russian) schools where students speaking Estonian or Russian as their mother tongue are studying together. The reason for that type of schools is mainly geographical and demographical depending on the local situation.

The main focus of the current study was on students' coping problems at the basic level of different types of schools – the time when most coping problems start.

Theoretical background

The theoretical backbone of the research is based on the viewpoint of mutual influence of individuals and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). School is seen as an environment the students have to adapt to; it is also seen as a community that is described by a certain level of well-being and social climate of its members (Ruus, Veisson...2007), which may be distressing, selective, limiting the development of certain behaviours or abilities, impeding or stimulating, and which can be described by three dimensions: 1) human relationships, 2) the development of personality towards the aim recognized by the community, 3) preserving stability of the community/the change of the system. In accordance with the multidimensional model of developmental environment some parameters of physical environment of schools have been considered as the background factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Ots, 2007).

During the last decade the pressure on non-Estonian population to enrol their children in Estonian schools has increased. One of the reasons for that is parents' interest to guarantee a better future for their children, to give them opportunity to be successful in the Estonian society, to enrol to Estonian universities, to get a better job etc. Hence, while speaking about traditional Estonian school we mean a school having curricula in Estonian, although by the cultural background of students it is more like a multicultural institution nowadays. There are people from 121 different nations living in Estonia; in Estonian schools there are 3.4% and in Russian schools 1.5% of students whose mother tongue is different from the language used at school. At the same time we have bilingual schools as well – schools that have curricula both in Estonian and Russian. Therefore the microclimate and learning environment of schools are influenced by students from different cultures. Thus, schools in Estonia can be divided into three types: Estonian (or schools having curricula in Estonian), Russian (or schools having curricula in Russian) and bilingual schools (or schools having curricula both in Russian and Estonian).

According to Vygotsky's theory, child's cognitive development is not a spontaneous process; it is influenced by child's experiences obtained from the surrounding cultural environment. Vygotsky

(1978) has stated that individual's psychological development is always a social-cultural process. He stresses that social relationships and the collective surrounding have a remarkable influence on child's thinking and learning. Cultural and historical factors of the society form those factors, where the mutual influence of individuals can be understood.

Learning and development are interdependent and the changes in learning have to precede the constant development (Bruner, 1986; Vygotsky 1978). Learning and development are not the same phenomena, but learning process adequate for child's needs causes development. The importance of environment is essential in child's development. Development is not a spontaneous process, but rather a process closely connected to experiences obtained since the birth. Experiences on the other hand are connected to people surrounding the individual. Child reflects social and cultural reality in his/her knowledge and experiences. The individual is best understood in his/her culture and at his/her historical time. Social environment influences person's way of thinking.

Child learns to solve the problems he/she meets in a certain way (*coping*) (Bruner, 1986) and through this he/she constantly obtains coping strategies according to the surrounding environment and developmental level. Growing needs force to learn new strategies, which are adapted to coping skills and resources obtained at earlier stages of development. School as a learning environment influences child's coping skills and is closely connected to the social-cultural aspect and therefore it is important to find out how it supports students' coping.

Lazarus and Folkman have defined coping as "individual's cognitive and behavioural effort to meet (reduce, minimize, solve, adapt) the internal and external needs emerging in the transaction of personal environment using existing resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Eysenck, 1998; Kallasmaa, 2003).

Important characteristics of the coping process:

- requires effort
- constantly changing process; changes depend on evaluations of efforts
- efforts are made to control the situation
- coping is a learned behaviour – the way a person reacts to a stressful situation (Stroebe, Stroebe, 1995).

The terms connected with the word *coping* are *coping resources* (social, personal and physical factors as parts of the situation), *coping strategies* (concrete plans, actions used to reduce stress) and *style of coping* (habitual or stereotypical way to solve crises). (Rice, 1999).

There are two different coping strategies:

1. Active or primary or problem oriented coping, where the main focus is on the cause of the problem. This strategy may include gathering information about the problem, analyzing the ways of solving it and executing chosen ways, for example: eliminating the direct danger of an activity or looking for a social support;
2. Problem preserving coping that focuses on the regulation of emotions and is often based on using defence mechanisms (denying, avoiding).
3. Problem oriented coping means changing the situation rather than oneself. Strategy directed to an emotional state requires changes in oneself, while the situation remains quite the same. Thus, unpleasantness can be overcome by changing oneself or the environment. Generally people use both of these strategies, but in the beginning the problem directed strategy is used more frequently. After failing to use problem directed strategy the strategy regulating emotions are taken into use. The aim of both strategies is to lose fear (Pulver, 1991; Kallasmaa 2003; Kendall, 1991; Tiko, 1999; Zimbardo, 1992, Feldman, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Johnmarshall, 1992).

Coping resources have been divided into two groups: intrapersonal and extrapersonal. Intrapersonal resources are personal traits, abilities and skills, the way one perceives the world. Extrapersonal can be financial resources and social support. Coping resources protect people from stress,

influencing their values and coping process in general. (Cohen, Edwards, 1989; Lazarus, Folkman, 1994; Stroebe, 1995).

Skinner and Wellborn have studied students' coping. In 1997 they carried out a study "Children's coping in academic sphere". The study revealed that students' academic success depends significantly on their opinion about school's demands, how threatening or scaring they are in their opinion; to what extent they see them as a challenge and opportunity to demonstrate their potential and skills (Skinner, Wellborn, 1997:388).

Coping at school is one of the indicators of love for learning – whether learning is a pleasant or displeasing activity, which in turn determines whether a student graduates on time or not. But the furthest and most important aim connected with learning is revealed in student's positive cognitive, social and personal development or impeding of development. (Skinner; Wellborn, 1997:408).

Students who have a positive attitude towards learning and school are more flexible and adapt easily, because they are more self-confident, emotionally less disturbed and manage their resources better than others. And on the contrary – the greater is the feeling of insecurity, the more student experiences threats and fear at school, the more likely he/she uses and will use non-constructive coping strategies. In other words – the more constructive are the strategies student generally uses, the better are the achievements and his/her optimism about the future increases, which in turn activates the ascending spiral of development (Skinner; Wellborn, 1997:408; Lazarus, Folkman, 1984; 34, 168, 169).

Coping at school

Student's coping is seen as a psychological mechanism that describes person's activeness towards environment. It is an adaptive activity involving effort, a process having a purpose and certain results. It is a mechanism supporting child's adaptation to the demands of the school, achieving at least satisfying academic results (Ruus, Veisson... 2007).

Coping at school means meeting the demands of the school, fulfilling both behavioural and learning normatives successfully. A student is considered to be successful at school when his/her academic achievement is high. Academic success (1990) is a capability to endeavour. It is expressed in student's academic progress as well as in general cognitive development (learning skills, the level of logical thinking and creative abilities). Academic success has been described as the result of synergy of student's psychological wholeness, personality and the surrounding environment (Sukamägi, 1994).

In general student's coping at school can be divided into two parts: academic and social coping. More attention has been paid to academic coping, which results and characteristics are very well seen to students, parents and teachers. Recently there has been a shift towards the importance of social coping that is closely connected with the academic one. Students' social competency and adequate self-esteem help them to successfully cope at school.

Social coping involves adaptation with the environment and self-regulation skills (capability to assess the situation, coping strategies, analyze surrounding environment and oneself, correct one's behaviour, way of thinking, willpower and emotions) (Kallasmaa, 2003).

School as a learning and developmental environment is the factor having the most significant influence. Children whose cultural world-view, values etc differ greatly from the 'general' ones, have to face adaptation problems that have been found to have an effect on coping.

Methodology of Research

The purpose of the study was to find out students' evaluations to their coping in different school levels and in Estonian, Russian and bilingual (Estonian-Russian) schools.

Instrument

The first phase of the study of the project "School as developmental environment and students' coping" was carried out during the years 2004-2007. 3048 students from grades 7-9 filled out self-

report questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of 75 questions and embraced different aspects, like: 1) typical coping strategies in the academic environment that students attach to themselves; 2) questions about academic success and meeting the demands of the school (marks, school attendance/cutting classes, homework); 3) students' self-esteem concerning psychological and physical wellbeing; 4) students' future optimism/pessimism; 5) students' evaluations about different characteristics of school climate; 6) background factors, including students interests (Ruus, Veisson...2007).

Sample

The sample consisted of 65 schools from different regions of Estonia. The sample was composed considering different types of comprehensive schools: schools having different levels of academic success, rural and urban schools, Estonian, Russian and bilingual (Estonian-Russian) schools.

In 2008 the second stage of the study was carried out, where 534 students from grades 4-6 participated. They were selected randomly from among 9 schools of the sample of the first study. All together 3582 students participated in this study. According to the study language 3582 students were divided in the following way: Estonian – 2160, Russian - 806 and bilingual – 616 students.

Procedure

Questionnaires with a scale from 1 to 4 were used by the members of the research group or persons instructed by them. The question-block about coping consisted of 36 statements requiring the respondent to decide to what extent the statements describe his/her typical coping strategies. The scale-points 1 and 2 described whether the respondent perceived any failure as a threat and used non-constructive coping strategies, using scale-points 3 and 4 meant that respondent perceived a stressful situation as a challenge and used constructive coping strategies.

Statistical analyses

For analysing the results of this study we used 13 aggregated characteristics or indexes, which were composed according to the statistical analyses of the first stage of the study. The names of the indexes can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

The indexes were completed as follows:

1. Reliability Analysis of the components, where Cronbach's alpha ($>0,72$) was used for choosing suitable components for index composition;
2. Factor analysis of suitable components for estimating factor weights in Varimax Rotation;
3. Index values (sums) were calculated, where each component was multiplied to the factor weight ($>0,3$) from the rotated matrix.

Note: Coping was calculated as an arithmetic mean of all the 36 questions of the given section. Calculated indexes were in a range between 1-45. In further statistical analysis, namely in comparison of the average indexes by school types and language (ANOVA), standardised values of the index were used. Drawings also contain standardised averages of the index values. Data processing was performed with SPSS 14.0. Drawings were drawn with MS Excel.

Results of Research

Students' evaluations of coping components at different levels of basic school

We did not find significant differences between second and third school levels in coping and peer relations. The results of the study revealed that students' evaluations of their coping at school and of

school as a coping environment did not differ significantly by the means of standardized values at different levels of basic school. Students of the second level of basic school (grades 4-6) evaluated academic success (learning, marks) higher. It may be due to the study habits that have been formed in primary school and home support help to sustain a higher attitude towards learning. Psychological wellbeing was evaluated higher than physiological. The grouped index of optimism was also higher at that level. The relationships between teachers and students were described as good and so was the professionalism of teachers. The innovativeness of school and its system of values got a higher evaluation as well. The variables that had the lowest evaluation were coping, relationships with peers/classmates, as well as discipline and order (Figure 1).

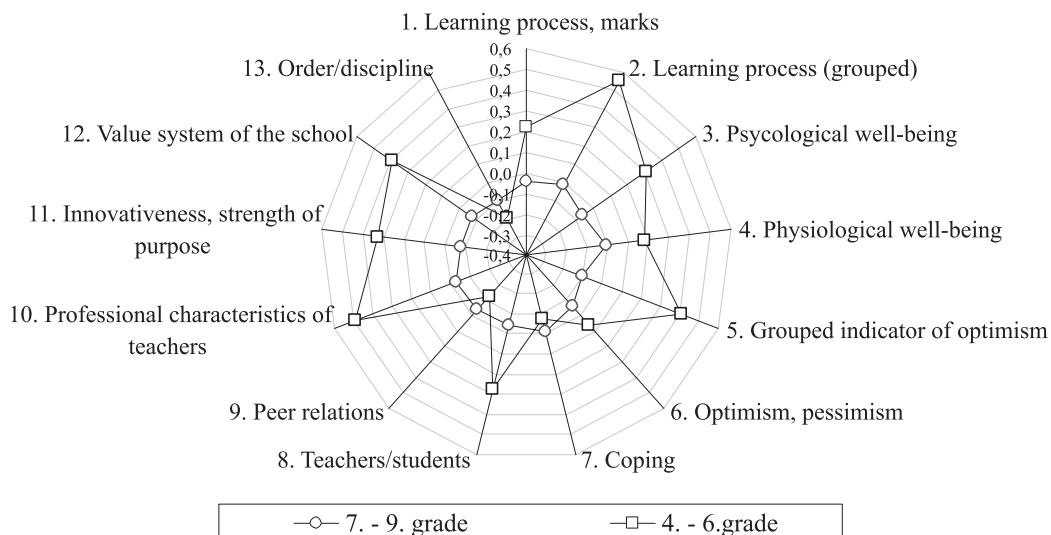


Figure 1. The means of 13 standardized values of students' aggregated characteristics.

The lower social coping or relationships between students can be explained by low social competency of students. This in turn causes different coping problems and is one of the causes of lower order and discipline. Peer relations play an important part in basic school. School is a place to meet one's friends and to communicate. The communication problems are still seen healthier than the problems connected with learning. Social incompetence, ineptitude to communicate, to solve problems, to seek for help in case of problems, may lead to the overall low level of students' coping skills. Students feel they are left alone with their problems; to assert themselves and to catch attention they start using different ways that in most of the cases lead to the problems with school order and discipline.

Students know the measures and actions for coping with academic or learning problems (e.g. after getting a bad mark you have to retake the test, there are possibilities for study-support etc.) and besides teachers inform them about that, but in case of social problems the only help is a school psychologist. There has been very little talk about the possibilities to develop social competency, the main stress and attention has been paid to academic achievement, which is somewhat influenced by the society in general – as schools have been evaluated according to average marks and the results of state exams. Thus, we have to face a situation, where students' social incompetence lowers academic achievement and may lead to dropping out of school.

The grades 4-6 form a transition period: primary school is over and student has to adapt to new subjects, teachers, new demands. Subject based teaching process, diminishing support of a class-teacher and growing need for independence and responsibility are not easy to adapt to, it takes time to get used to them. But not all students can manage. This is also one of the reasons why there are so many social problems at that level of basic school. Students have to solve their own coping problems

and if they lack necessary skills, conflicts and problems both at academic and social level emerge.

At the third level of basic school (grades 7-9) (Figure 1) students' evaluation components are significantly lower in all characteristics compared to the previous level. All of these characteristics are lower. The lowest indices were about psychological well-being, optimism, strength of purpose and order/discipline. The fact that should make all stakeholders responsible for the development of education worried. According to the national statistics the dropout rate is the highest at that level. Students' evaluations reveal that most of their problems are connected to their well-being and they find the situation being rather hopeless. The problems arisen at the previous level (social non-coping) have deepened and there are lower evaluations of psychological well-being. The grouped indices of the learning process have higher values. It describes the importance of social coping, well-being and the need to feel secure at school. The absence of psychological well-being influences academic success and causes communication problems at different levels. The lower indicators of optimism let us infer that students cannot cope with their problems. The ineptitude to control the situations and cope with difficulties make students feel hopeless and the next step from that is dropping out.

The difference between students of the second and the third level of school was statistically significant in almost every aggregated characteristic, except for coping and peer relations. It means that in all these characteristics younger students in this study have stronger attitudes than older students (Table1).

Table 1. The statistically significant differences between mean values of standardized values of students' aggregated characteristics on different school levels.

	Means		t-test		
	7 th -9 th grade (N=3048)	4 th -6 th grade (N=534)	df	t	p-value
1. Learning process, marks	-0,041	0,222	3525	-5.491	0.000
2. Learning process (aggregated characteristics)	-0,009	0,550	3511	-12.208	0.000
3. Psychological well-being	-0,065	0,307	3361	-7.566	0.000
4. Physiological well-being	-0,009	0,178	3451	-3.853	0.000
5. Grouped indicator of optimism	-0,111	0,409	3571	-10.759	0.000
6. Optimism, pessimism	-0,068	0,059	3558	-2,648	0.008
7. Coping	-0,019	-0,080	3536	1.285	0.199
8. Teachers/students	-0,054	0,273	3460	-6.650	0.000
9. Peer relations	-0,047	-0,131	3038	1.636	0.102
10. Professional characteristics of teachers	-0,036	0,495	3462	-11.193	0.000
11. Innovativeness, strength of purpose	-0,085	0,331	3457	-8.660	0.000
12. Value system of the school	-0,073	0,390	3245	-9.169	0.000
13. Order/discipline	-0,101	-0,201	3467	2.078	0.038

Remarkable difference between the characteristics at these two levels shows, how important it is for schools to maintain students' higher attitude in the 7th to 9th grades as well. It also shows the necessity to actively introduce social coping strategies at an early stage of school already (starting from primary classes). This enables students with skills that support their well-being and self-confidence at the next level of school and helps to overcome the problems both in the social and academic field

Differences of standardized values of Estonian, Russian and bilingual (Estonian + Russian study language) schools

According to ANOVA, significant differences were found between students' evaluations of coping characteristics in schools with different study languages (Estonian, Russian and bilingual), whereas they were highest in Estonian and lowest in Russian speaking schools. Psychological and physiological well-being were significantly higher in Russian and lower in Estonian schools. Innovativeness, strength of purpose, values of school and teachers-students relations were also valued significantly higher in Russian speaking schools. There were also significant differences in case of order and discipline, which was lowest in bilingual schools. We did not find significant differences in students' evaluations about learning, optimism-pessimism and peer relations. Professional characteristics of teachers were significantly higher evaluated in bilingual than in Estonian and Russian schools (Figure 2).

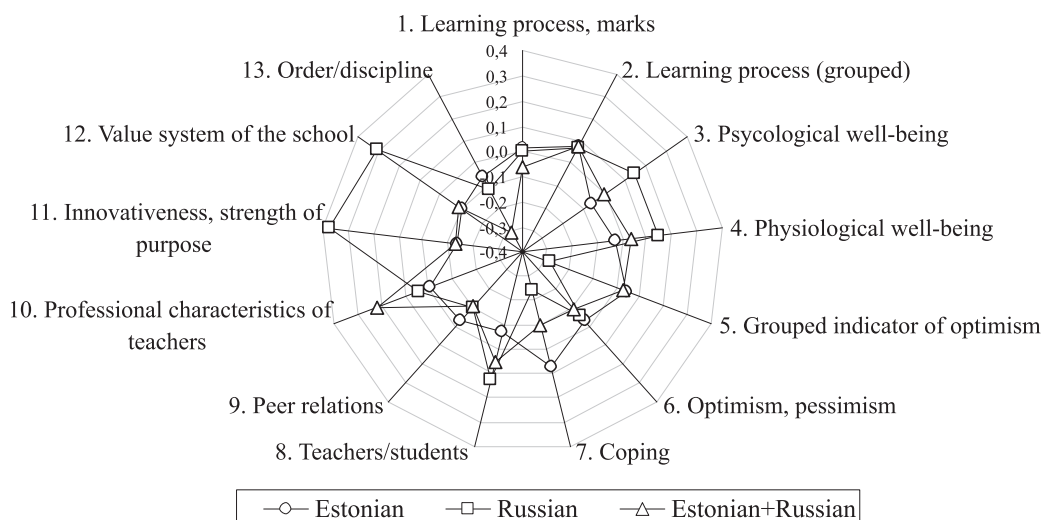


Figure 2. The means of 13 standardized values of students' coping by the language of the school.

The lowest evaluations in Russian schools were given to coping and future optimism (the components of these evaluations were the lowest compared to other schools). On one hand it may be due to the pressure Russian students feel: to be successful in their future lives they have to be very successful in their studies (especially in learning Estonian language as speaking Estonian is one of the most important prerequisites for getting a good education and a good job) and therefore even the smallest failure is perceived as non-coping by Russian students. Parents also expect their children to cope well at school in order to be successful in the Estonian society and so they put a lot of pressure on children with their demands and control. The constant worry about coping in their future lives diminishes optimism.

In Russian schools the indices were highest in case of psychological and physiological well-being, which shows that students of Russian schools feel themselves well and safe at school. Students' relationships with teachers had higher indices. Students of Russian schools also value the professional skills of their teachers very highly. It can be explained by cultural differences as well: in Russian culture the teacher at school has always been an authority and this tradition has still been carried on and sustained over the years. Many Russian teachers have obtained their education during the Soviet times and they represent values and attitudes of different Russian pedagogical schools.

The differences between Estonian and bilingual (Estonian and Russian) schools were not significant. However, some differences should still be stressed: students of Estonian schools gave a higher evaluation to coping (while the Russian and bilingual schools gave a lower one). The index of order and discipline was the lowest in bilingual schools i.e. these schools have the severest problems with discipline. The reason for that may lie in cultural differences: students with different cultural backgrounds perceive the behavioural norms and demands of the school differently; temperamental differences play their part as well and have a great influence on peer relations – all these aspects influence discipline at school. At the same time the relationships between students and teachers had the highest indicators in bilingual schools (comparing to Estonia and Russian schools). Students in these schools value teachers and evaluate higher student-teacher relationships. Therefore it may be said that although peer relations are problematic in bilingual schools, children do respect their teachers.

The difference in psychological and physiological well-being was statistically significant between Estonian, Russian and bilingual schools (the results were highest among students from Russian schools). Russian schools are much more pessimistic compared to their peers in Estonian and bilingual schools. There were statistically significant differences between most coping indicators in different types of schools (Table 2). Students of Estonian schools evaluated their coping higher compared to other schools. It can be explained by higher degree of liberalism in Estonian schools – therefore they perceive their coping problems differently and they do not take every failure as a threat of non-coping (as Russian students do). School climate is the best in Russian schools. One of the underlying reasons for that may be the authoritarian teaching system, which sets certain boundaries and rules, and children feel more confident and secure in such an environment. The most difficult situation about order and discipline is in bilingual schools, where the subjects are taught both in Estonian and Russian.

Table 2. The statistically significant differences of standardized unified indicators of coping by different types of schools (ANOVA)

	Means			ANOVA, p-value
	Estonian N=2160	Russian N=806	Estonian+ Russian N=616	
1. Learning process, marks	0,015	-0,003	-0,061	0.263
2. Learning process (aggregated characteristic)	0,074	0,068	0,077	0.985
3. Psychological well-being	-0,071	0,148	-0,005	0.000
4. Physiological well-being	-0,033	0,143	0,038	0.000
5. Grouped indicator of optimism	0,042	-0,284	0,026	0.000
6. Optimism, pessimism	-0,033	-0,058	-0,098	0.370
7. Coping	0,073	-0,240	-0,102	0.000
8. Teachers/students	-0,069	0,123	0,048	0.000
9. Peer relations	-0,030	-0,103	-0,108	0.139
10. Professional characteristics of teachers	-0,008	0,044	0,216	0.000
11. Innovativeness, strength of purpose	-0,141	0,376	-0,134	0.000
12. Value system of the school	-0,099	0,304	-0,086	0.000
13. Order/discipline	-0,060	-0,120	-0,308	0.000

Table 3. T-test. The statistically significant differences of standardized unified indicators of coping by different types of schools.

	Means			t-test, Estonian/ Russian			t-test, Estonian/ Bilingual			t-test, Russian/ Bilingual		
	Esto- nian N= 2160	Rus- sian N=806	Bilingual N=616	df	t	p	df	t	p	df	t	p
1. Learning process, marks	0,015	-0,003	-0,061	2922	0,43	0,665	2728	1,59	0,112	1398	1,10	0,271
2. Learning process (aggregated characteristic)	0,074	0,068	0,077	2909	0,13	0,893	2719	-0,07	0,943	1392	-0,17	0,869
3. Psycho-logical well-being	-0,071	0,148	-0,005	2790	-5,72	0,000	2617	-1,42	0,156	1313	2,52	0,012
4. Physiologi- cal well-being	-0,033	0,143	0,038	2864	-4,15	0,000	2673	-1,51	0,132	1363	1,88	0,061
5. Grouped indicator of optimism	0,042	-0,284	0,026	2957	7,73	0,000	2767	0,36	0,718	1416	-4,87	0,000
6. Optimism, pessimism	-0,033	-0,058	-0,098	2948	0,59	0,554	2758	1,44	0,149	1408	0,68	0,495
7. Coping	0,073	-0,240	-0,102	2933	7,65	0,000	2737	3,79	0,000	1400	-2,46	0,014
8. Teachers/ students	-0,069	0,123	0,048	2871	-4,54	0,000	2679	-2,50	0,012	1368	1,27	0,204
9. Peer rela- tions	-0,030	-0,103	-0,108	2511	1,557	0,120	2388	1,57	0,117	1175	0,09	0,924
10. Pro- fessional characteristics of teachers	-0,008	0,044	0,216	2875	-1,24	0,216	2693	-4,83	0,000	1354	-2,99	0,003
11. Innova- tiveness, strength of purpose	-0,141	0,376	-0,134	2872	-12,6	0,000	2687	-0,17	0,868	1353	9,12	0,000
12. Value system of the school	-0,099	0,304	-0,086	2704	-9,25	0,000	2519	-0,26	0,793	1265	6,42	0,000
13. Order/ discipline	-0,060	-0,120	-0,308	2874	1,41	0,159	2695	5,47	0,000	1363	3,31	0,001

The most significant differences could be observed between Russian and other types of schools (Table 3). The differences were not so significant between Estonian and bilingual (Estonian and Russian) schools. As the value systems and school culture are not so different in Estonian and bilingual schools the differences are smaller as well. Although the differences by school type are high, the

differences by the levels of basic school were not so significant. Students' evaluations of coping are generally low (in all types of school) which forms a good basis for dropping-out problems. Students do not master coping skills and cannot use different coping strategies that would support them to cope successfully with social and academic problems.

Discussion

We did not find significant differences in coping on different school levels, but we found significant differences of coping between different language users (Estonian, Russian and bilingual). We did not find significant differences in peer relations of different school levels as well in different cultural contexts (Estonian, Russian and bilingual). In general, Estonians cope on higher level. Learning is evaluated higher in younger classes, but there are no cultural differences.

Estonian education is standing at the crossroad. The mission of educational reforms is to reorganize the educational system in a way that it would meet each child's educational needs according to their level of development, skills and abilities. Every person has to get the necessary knowledge and skills to cope successfully in our society. Sustainable model of education stresses the educative role of schools directed on behavioural changes rather than passing on the knowledge. A remarkable number of parents think it is school's responsibility to develop their children and to teach them coping strategies. But the process cannot be one-sided. Students spend more time at school nowadays, even after classes as there are not enough alternatives to spend one's free time. On the other hand as the current study reveals, school creates psychological discomfort and a feeling of failure. Students' coping skills are insufficient and they express their uncertainty through disruptive behaviour: brutality, cruelty, inconsideration and discipline problems. There is a need for a support-network that would help students in case of problems and meet the needs of children. Has school become the place where only knowledge is passed on? Or has school become the place where students do not feel well and which they try to skip as often as possible? Or is the purpose of school to support the formation of dignified citizens? What are the values and skills school should teach? Answers to these questions should be looked for in the whole society. Students should be involved in problem solving process as well. What kind of school would they like to attend to? Young people have their own vision. The task of adults is to involve all stakeholders in an active discussion, estimating all the ways for a solution in order to make school the best place to be, the place where children would love to go (even at basic school level). Estonia cannot allow a situation where the most valuable resource – human capital – is wasted, although it is always much more comfortable to ignore problems. Rather chaotic attention has been paid to different types of school. Students' coping problems can be observed at every level of basic school. Students should be involved in discussions about education more actively as they are now. There is also the need for a common information space that would unify the teachers of different types of schools. Education needs forums and educational publications (that could also be accessed in Russian on Internet). Although there is a requirement for teachers to speak Estonian, the reality is somewhat different and information is better understood in one's mother tongue. Using media in spreading the information widens the possibilities to involve all stakeholders.

Parent education is another area, which should receive more attention. Parent involvement supports child's educational development and also helps to improve child's coping skills. The experiences of other countries (Denmark, Belgium and Germany) have proven the positive influence of parental involvement.

Active and determined cooperation support the reform of education towards desired goals, considering students' interests first and foremost. Education cannot be valued in the society, when obtaining education is an extremely painful process and children are ready to give it up and close the door to a better future. Therefore, it is important to expand the problem discussion and to find possible solutions that would help our children to cope at school and graduate it successfully.

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