

## Future-Orientation of Comprehensive, Upper Secondary and Vocational School Students

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*SUMMARY: The aim of the study was to interpret future-orientation of Finnish students. Data were gathered by questionnaire in spring 1993. Future-orientation was operationalized into a) motivational, b) planning and c) evaluative factors. In this paper some findings concerning perceived contextual contribution to future-orientation will be presented. The contexts considered were 1) with friends at school, 2) with friends outside school, 3) at home, 4) discussion concerning studies and occupation at school; with teachers, on lessons and with guidance counselors, 5) mass media; magazines/books/TV and 6) family discussion at school. Differences in contextual contribution to future-orientation were found according to age, track of education and sex.*

### **I. Future-Orientation**

There has been explicit interest *future-orientation* in cognitive theory (Nurmi, 1991, 1992) and action theory (Klaczynski & Reese, 1991) and implicitly in socialization theory (Hurrelman, 1988) and developmental psychology (Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel, 1981). The term future-orientation refers to the psychological concept or scheme, of one's own future and/or the future of one's context. In our Western culture, planning, delay of gratification and other future-oriented behaviours are highly valued and serve as means for social adjustment, success and upward mobility (Trommsdorff, Burger & Fuchsle, 1982, 169). Especially adolescents are confronted with external pressure in form of expectations concerning developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1953 ; Oerter, 1986; Nurmi, 1992). The three developmental tasks considered in this paper are future studies, occupation and family. All are considered highly significant when asking adolescents about their anticipated futures.

## 2. Contexts for development

The significant others of adolescents are found in various settings; the family, school and peer groups. The influence of these are well documented while mass media effect is less investigated (Fine, Mortimer & Roberts, 1990, 239). Peer groups operate both in schools and leisure time and consist of several peer cultures (Brown, 1990). The adolescents in this study consist of two age-groups of students from three school types; comprehensive school (9:th grade), upper secondary school ("gymnasium", "lukio", 3:rd grade/12:th schoolyear) and vocational school (3:rd grade/12:th schoolyear on the specific lines; electric, computer and automation mechanics, hairdresser, clothing technicians, and cooks). All students prepare for transition from one form of studies to another, or to work. Savolainen (1993) suggest that the actual choice of further studies, and implicitly choice of occupation, takes place earlier than at the moment of transition. The choice rather reflects cultural patterns than rationality. Poole and Cooney (1987, 147-148) propose that educational institutions should deal with adolescents who are "living for the moment" by helping them plan for the future. Adolescents must learn that they are not passive victims of trends but can choose, control and create important parts of their future. But, which is the perceived educational contribution to future plans in relation to other contexts? More explicitly

*What is the perceived contextual contribution, in form of discussion, to future-orientation of students in relation to sex, track and study-orientation?*

## 3. Sample and method

A sample (N=454) of Swedish speaking comprehensive school, upper secondary and vocational school students was chosen from four regions. The students were 15 and 18 years of age. A questionnaire based on previous pilot studies was distributed by vocational guidance counselors or by teachers in classroom situations. 3 x 8 items measuring contextual contribution to future-orientation was included. Contextual contribution was operationalized into degree of discussion and/or thinking about future studies, occupation and family life. Subjects indicated on five-paced Likert-type scales (0 = I haven't discussed/thought of at all, 4 = I have discussed/thought of very much) the degree of discussion and/or thinking with significant others in eight different situations. 1) with friends at school, 2) with friends in leisure time, 3) with teachers, 4) in lessons, 5) at home (with siblings/mother/ father), 6) with guidance counselor, 7) when I have read magazines/books, and 8) when I have watched television. Observing means only, indicates that students most frequently think of studies, occupation comes next and least of family. Friends and the home context contribute most, then school and least mass media, 6) with guidance counsellors, 7) when I have read magazines/books, and 8) when I have watched television. Observing means only, indicates that students

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**Table 1.** Degree of discussion/thinking concerning future studies, occupation and family in different contexts. (Means (0-4) and standard deviation)

	Studies		Occupation		Family	
1) with friends at school	2.48	(1.11)	2.26	(1.14)	1.70	(1.33)
2) with friends in leisure time	1.88	(1.15)	1.83	(1.21)	1.67	(1.30)
3) with teachers	1.42	(1.07)	1.10	(1.00)	0.36	(0.67)
4) in lessons	1.22	(1.00)	1.01	(0.95)	0.51	(0.80)
5) at home (with siblings/mother/father	3.12	(0.99)	3.05	(0.97)	1.72	(1.26)
6) with guidance counsellors	1.79	(1.26)	1.50	(1.20)	0.30	(0.67)
7) when I have read magazines/books	1.32	(1.20)	1.36	(1.21)	1.08	(1.18)
8) when I have watched television	1.02	(1.12)	1.14	(1.18)	1.08	(1.20)

#### 4. Perceived contextual influence

To isolate contextual variables a factor analysis (Orthogonal- varimax) was performed. Six cleancut factors were extracted and transformed into variable-sums; 1) with friends at school, 2) with friends outside school, 3) at home, 4) discussion concerning studies and occupation at school; with teachers, on lessons and with guidance counselors, 5) mass media; magazines/books/TV and 6) family discussion at school. In a second order factor analysis measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), school achievement (4 - 10), age (15 - 21) and work experience (none - more than 13 months) were included.

**Table 2.** Second order factor analysis of contextual measures and background variables.

	F1	F2	F3	Comm.
1) at school with friends	.762			.595
2) with friends outside school	.641	.336		.549
3) home discussion	.629		-.311	.492
4) school discussion	.601	-.467		.588
5) mass media	.573			.399
6) family disc. at school	.497	-.375		.399
7) self-esteem		.394	-.494	.414
8) school achievement			.833	.706
9) age		.804		.658
10) work experience		.703		.507

The second factor, although not cleancut, indicates that as age and work experience increase, the self-esteem and discussion with friends increases while school discussion decreases and is unrelated to school achievement. This finding is coherent with earlier findings, which imply that parental influence decreases while peer and friend influences increases. The third factor is a result of forcing items loading on factors with low eigenvalues together. Self-esteem and school achievement are usually positively related to each other.

## 5. School and massmedia

The relation between contextual effects were investigated by 6 (choice of educational track or work) x 2 (sex) ANOVAs. Comprehensive school students choose between vocational or upper secondary school. Upper secondary students choose between vocational studies or university. Vocational school students can study further or enter work life. Student choosing military service, "a year abroad", or not choosing at all were excluded from this analysis.

**Table 3.** Schooldiscussion sums and mass media sums (means 0 - 24) in relation to choice of track and sex.

Choice of track:		Comprehensive		Upper Sec		Vocational		Effect:
		voc.sch.	upp.sec	voc.sch.	univ.	studies	work	
School	Boys	10,07	8,49	4,43	6,63	7,54	8,00	Choice of track***
	Girls	11,18	9,55	6,37	6,63	6,33	8,60	
Mass media	Boys	3,72	5,23	9,14	10,21	5,20	8,67	Choice of track ***
	Girls	5,96	7,33	10,32	11,30	4,00	8,10	

## 6. Conclusions

### Girls vs. boys

Girls have significantly higher degree of discussion than boys. This implies that girls gather more information, or have a higher need to discuss (Kosonen, 1983).

### Comprehensive school students:

High degree of discussion with teachers, in lessons and with guidance counselors. Girls have higher mass media consumption than boys, especially those choosing upper secondary school. Students choosing vocational school discuss more at school than students choosing upper secondary school. This implies that the choice of education in grade nine, is more a choice of occupation.

### Upper Secondary school students:

Upper secondary students have the highest mass media consumption, but lowest degree of discussion with teachers, in lessons and with guidance counselors. Boys who choose vocational school discuss less at school than girls choosing vocational studies and students choosing university studies. High degree of discussion with friends at school and at home were found. Boys discuss more with friends at school than with friends outside school.

### Vocational school students:

Vocational school students discuss study and occupational plans moderately at lessons, with teachers and guidance counselors. Those going to work discuss more and consume more mass media than those who plan further studies. Students discuss more with friends outside school than at school. Boys have higher mass media consumption than girls.

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