

THE SELECTIONAL MECHANISMS OF SCHOOL HEALTH PROMOTION

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Education for a healthy way of life is set as an aim in the pedagogical programmes of the educational institutes, thus health represents a value in the teachers' minds. The interpretation of health is complex, therefore our health is influenced by our physical, mental and social state alike. It follows from this that in the course of school health promotion, taking all these factors into consideration, besides the elimination of health-damaging attitudes, an emphasis must be laid upon such personality development which contributes to the preservation of the individual's mental health as well. However, in several cases this aim is not attained due to hidden mechanisms working at schools, the contents conveyed by the hidden curriculum do not support the formation a health promoting inner environment of the institute, consequently they result in the weakening of the students' mental health.

Keywords: "hidden curriculum", health promotion, mental health

Factors determining the effectiveness of school health education

Educational institutions play an important role in supporting the notion that health should represent a value in the individual's mentality and attitudes, that health -promoting habits could be established which find shape in their lifestyle. Therefore education for a healthy lifestyle is set as an aim in the pedagogical programs of the institutions, the attainment of which is influenced by several factors. They are the following:

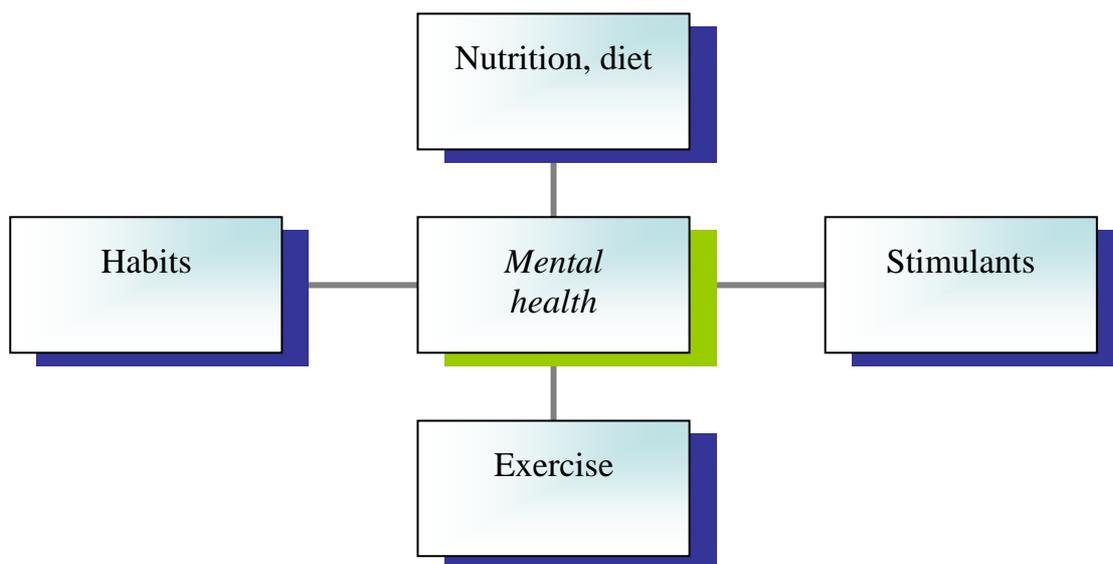
- Family socialization, during which the child acquires different norms, values, rules and roles, and at the same time it affects their attitudes.
- Secondary socialization happens in different scenes. Among school-age children their peers are of special importance.
- In Hungary, from the academic year of 2004/05 the Law of Public Education obliges schools to draw up and carry out a health promotion program. The pedagogical program regulates the educational content in details, which depends on the conception of health.
- The latent selectional mechanisms working at the school may overwrite the basic principles established in the pedagogical program, therefore some may benefit from school health education, but some may not.

The aims of school health education

The primary aim of school health education is to establish health culture, whose components are health and lifestyle. As the conception of health greatly depends on what supporting values health is embedded with in the individual's scale of values, one of the most important tasks of institutional health education is to explore and reinforce those supporting values, consequently facilitating the formation of a health-conscious attitude.

The health-contents conveyed within the frame of school health education are embedded in the syllabuses of the different subjects. As a result the image formed of health is split into parts, the different health-contents do not combine, making health education unable to touch the whole personality. Students will have knowledge about what to do and what not to do in order to maintain their health but this knowledge will prove insufficient if they do not develop an inner control to prefer health-promoting attitudes and to refuse health-damaging habits in the interest of health maintenance. The formation of this inner control is only possible if we take into consideration the mental dimension of health, which is able to integrate the different partial contents of health. Because of this the maintenance and improvement of mental health is not negligible during school health education.

Chart 1. Content – components of the notion of health



Factors influencing mental health at school

Mental health is unconsciously influenced by effects that students experience during the direct classroom teaching-learning process and outside class at school.

Besides conveying the educational content established in the official curriculum, the school unintentionally imparts rules of behaviour corresponding with the given institution's scale of values and norms, the requirements concerning the attitude to authority, the hidden educational effects outside the intentional education, which is comprehensively termed "hidden curriculum".

Examination of the "hidden curriculum"

The term "hidden curriculum" comes from Snyder's book published in 1971 - although it is as old as school system education. In Hungary the research of the topic is related to Szabó László Tamás (1988) who analyzed in his writings how pedagogical aims set by society appear in the latent mechanisms of the school. The contents conveyed by the "hidden curriculum" can be explored on the basis of the school's inner environment, which is known as the socio-psychological system of effects.

I am searching for answers to the following questions:

- Is there a connection between the "hidden curriculum" working at school and the students' attitude to health?
- Does the "hidden curriculum" influence the effectiveness of school health promotion?

The aim of my research:

- The exploration of the latent selectional mechanisms which contribute to the establishment of the schools' health – promoting inner environment
- The examination of the factors through the working of which the students' healthy mental development is not secured

Method of research

The examination of the hidden curriculum is primarily done with qualitative methods. However, in my present paper I am going to show the preliminary results gained with quantitative methods that I used in my pilot studies to explore the differences between the hidden curricula of two secondary schools in the town of Kaposvár. I wished to survey the differences between the inner environments of the two schools. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistical methods, taking the value of $p < 0.05$ significant. In the following I will show the illustrations where there is a significant difference between the hidden curricula of the two secondary schools. In school 'A' performance-orientation is a priority, while in school 'B' the interpersonal relations are emphasized.

Results and discussion

In any organization written and unwritten rules prescribe what behaviour is expected from its members. It is not otherwise at the educational institutions either. The school regulations contain the official requirements but besides those the students have to acquire other rules as well, such as the ability of delay of reaction and the fulfilment of needs, for example. The violation of the rules is usually followed by punitive sanctions. The students at school 'B' consider the school regulations significantly more appropriate (CI¹: [0,55-0,75]), the students at school 'A' take part in the formation of the rules to a lesser degree (CI: [0,34-0,55]).

¹CI: Confidence intervals

Chart 2. School regulations are appropriate

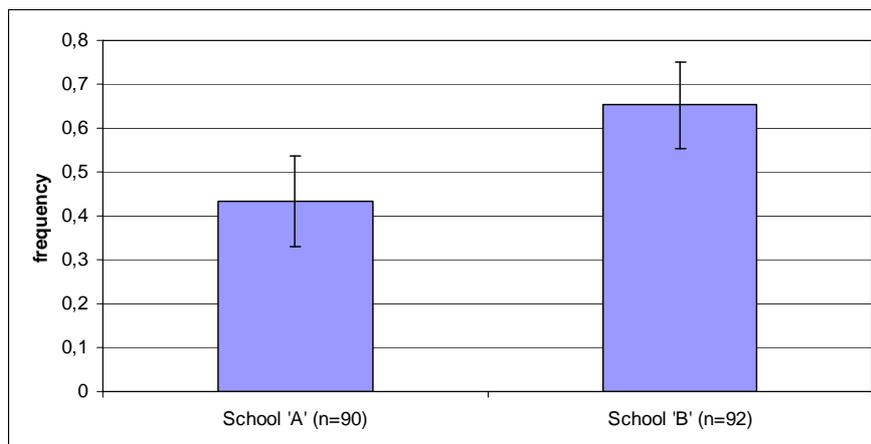
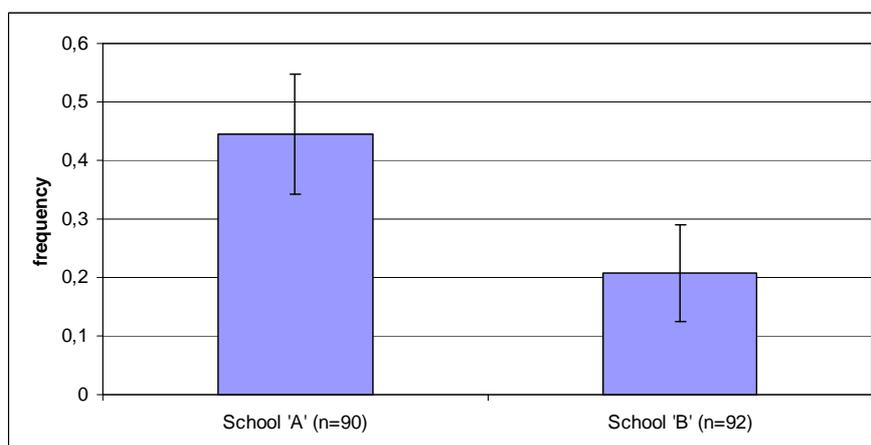


Chart 3. Students do not participate in forming regulations



A part of the research of the hidden curriculum is the exploration of the interpersonal relations. One aspect of this is the teacher-student relationship. On the basis of the results it can be stated that the students of school 'B' emphasize the teachers' helpfulness and patience (CI:[0,37-0,58]), while at school 'A' the strict treatment of the form-master is underlined (CI:[0,37-0,58]).

Chart 4. Helpful, patient teaching staff

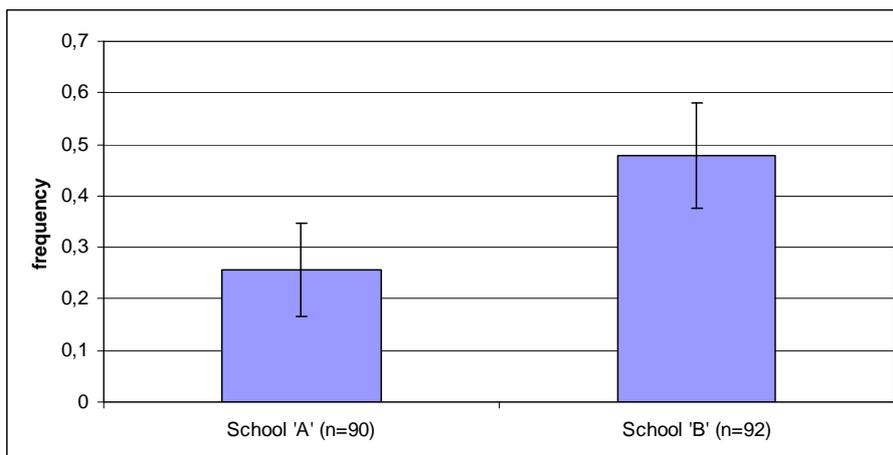
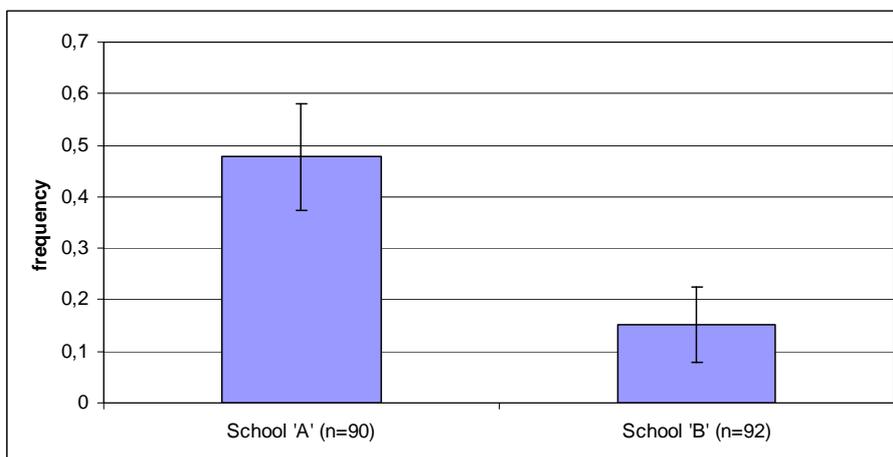


Chart 5. Strict treatment by form-master



Concerning the study results, among the present priorities performance-orientation is more characteristic of school 'A' (CI:[0,38-0,59]). Therefore it is not surprising that school activity as a source of pleasure is characteristic of the students of the other school (CI:[0,32-0,52]).

Chart 6. Students with very good and excellent results

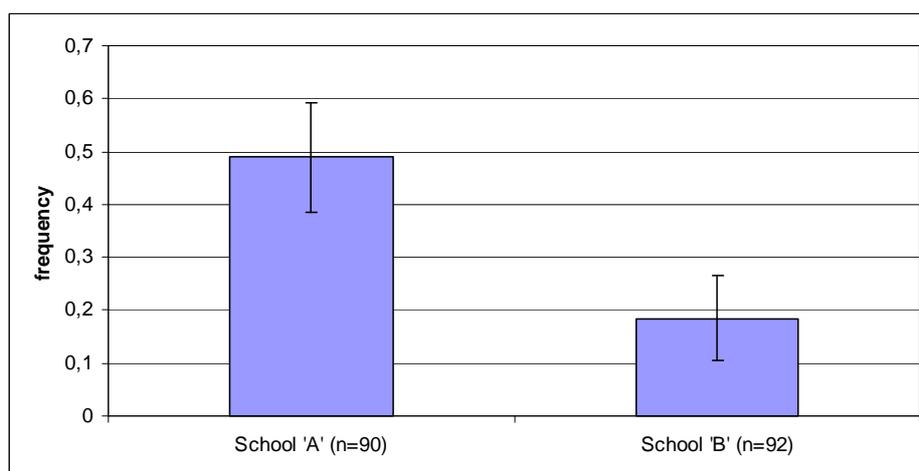
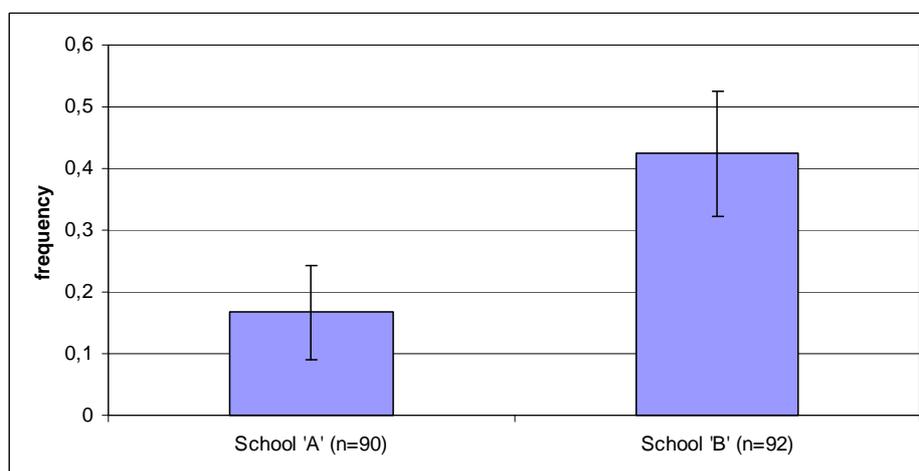


Chart 7. School work and activity as a source of pleasure



"Hidden curriculum" and school health education

At the educational institutions the teachers and the students conveying different health-values form the school's inner environment in different ways, and as a result either an inner environment conveying health as a value can be produced or, quite the contrary, the conception of health as representing value cannot succeed.

If school life is burdened with stress and conflicts, the student struggles with isolation and exclusion, the school's inner environment cannot function as a health-promoting system.

The hidden mechanisms through the working of which the healthy mental development of the students is not secured result in maladaptive behaviour related to the weakening of mental health. The self-destructive attitudes among the students –smoking, alcohol- and drug consumption, physical and verbal aggression, anxiety, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, all call attention to the problems hidden under the surface.

If teachers and students make their requirements toward each other clear and behave accordingly, and if they feel comfortable at the institution, the health-promoting school environment is given.

Szabó László Tamás (1988) determines *education through instruction* as a further possible field of research of the hidden curriculum, which, according to the above, can be connected with the examinations exploring students' mental health. One aim of *education through instruction* is to establish the student's optimal health-culture by means of health-promotion as defined in the pedagogical program. The official curriculum and the pedagogical program determines the contents to be taught to the students in order to attain that goal, but it is the hidden curriculum that determines how this information changes into knowledge, how this knowledge gets built in the student's way of thinking, how it appears in their lifestyle.

The exploration of the latent selectional mechanisms contributing to the establishment of the school's health-promoting inner environment help the educational institution to function as a health-promoting school where the students' mental development is secured.

Reference

SZABÓ László Tamás (1988): "*A rejtett tanterv*". Magvető, Budapest.