

SAS Research Group: Final Report – Conclusions of SAS

The aim of Safe and Active Schoolday –project (SAS) has been to promote activity and safety of the schooldays in Turku and Tallinn. The common goal of all partners has been to promote students' well-being together. This research has been a part of SAS project during 2010-2012. It's been carried out by research groups from the universities of Turku and Tallinn. The aim of the research has been to examine issues in school life, which are related to SAS project values: Activity of lifestyle, Positive attitude, Safety and Co-operation. The researchers have also evaluated the effectiveness of SAS project.

1 Studies in Turku and Tallinn

The SAS research of the Turku research group consisted of three parts. The first one was a document analysis of the school values and cultures described in state, city and school level curricula. The second one was a survey study for 5th grade students on 2009¹ (n=670) and 5th and 7th grade students on 2011 (n=840). The third one was a qualitative study called "Students' Voice". It consisted of 600 stories written by 5th and 6th grade students. The stories were about break times, schooldays and things they'd like to make better in their habitat.

Tallinn research group conducted 3 studies among school personnel and students (grades 5-9) in 45 Tallinn schools during the time period of June 2010 to January 2011. In detail, 3324 students participated in the break-time study, 2412 students in the main study, and 422 members of schools' personnel in the study of schools' culture and values.

Finally both research groups conducted feedback studies among schools' project teams (and students) in order get their view about the SAS's influences and discuss future plans.

The purpose of this summary is to put together all the common research interest and results of Turku and Tallinn research teams. It's an overview on the similarities and differences of the school cultures in Finland and Estonia. The common themes of Turku and Tallinn were: 1) School values and culture, 2) Break times at school, 3) Students' activity, well-being and safety, and 4) The evaluation of SAS project.

¹ The first students' data (2009) in Turku was gathered before SAS became an Interreg project.

2 SCHOOL VALUES AND CULTURE

2.1 School values on state, city, and school level

State level values

The state values of the Finnish school system are:

- Human rights, equality, democracy
- Preserving the diversity of the nature and the viability of the environment
- Accepting multiculturalism, supporting cultural identity
- Promoting co-operation and responsibility
- Respecting individuality

The state values in Estonian school system are:

- Human rights, equality, democracy (a right for remaining your nationality; a right for freedom and security; freedom of conscience, religion and thought; a right for education)
- The importance of family traditions and cultural identity
- Respect for others (incl. accepting diversities)
- Respect for individuality (a right for three self-actualisation; a right for remain firm in your own beliefs)
- Preserving the diversity of the nature and the viability of the environment

As we can see, Finnish and Estonian values in school system are very similar. In Finland there is just a little bit higher emphasis on co-operation and multiculturalism and in Estonia in family traditions. During the value-survey in Estonia we found that the most important state values for the schools were "Everyone's right for education" and "Family traditions". Less important turned out to be "Right for three self-actualisation" and "Right for remain firm in your own beliefs".

City level values

The school values in Turku city level are:

- Customer orientation, inhabitant orientation
- Ability, creativity
- Sustainable development
- Justice
- Co-operation

The school values in Tallinn city level are:

- Customer orientation (pupils centeredness; possibilities to support each pupil; taking into account pupils different needs and abilities, pupils health and development; pupils socialization to the society; preparing pupils to take future challenges in their educational career (to continue studying); developing pupils into harmonic and many-sided personality; pupils capacity for judgements and responsibility)
- Quality (teachers competency; curricula and school system quality)

- Contemporary, multifaceted, safe and active school environment (incl. activity in school everyday life, developing pupils into ethic and active society members)
- Co-operation, openness (to value others and to be valued by others; openness to international cooperation; toleration to specialties)
- Orientation to success
- Life-long learning

As seen above, then also city level values are similar in Tallinn and Turku. In Finland there is just a little bit higher emphasis on creativity and in justice, in Estonia in orientation to success and in life-long learning. During the value-survey in Estonia, we found, that the most important city values for the schools were "Pupils health and development" and "Safety at school". Less important appeared to be "Pupils orientation to success" and "Openness to international cooperation".

School level values

The school values in Turku can be roughly divided in three value clusters:

- **"Humanity, broad-minded world view and willingness to co-operate with others"**. It included values related to tolerance, equality, taking responsibility of oneself, others and nature and also enhancing the school and class atmosphere by own behaviour. Most of these values were presented as a list of good characteristics. It was hard to tell how they would be seen in the real action.
- **"The publicly expressed rules and norms of the school"**. It's typical of these values to emphasize the significance of common rules of acting, behaving and being together in school and its surroundings. Similar to the first mentioned value – entity - these values are also focused on the ways of being together. The difference is that these "rule-based values" are more concrete than the first value entity.
- **"Values about learning, abilities, self-regulation in studying, individual differences in learning"**. This kind of values covers the actual school work. Contrary to the two previous value entities, its focus is on individual level. It seems to be important to teach every student to find their own motivation and way of learning and to think critically.

The school values in Estonia can be roughly divided in four categories:

- **"Customer orientation"**. It includes values about pupils centeredness; possibilities to support each pupil; taking into account pupils different needs and abilities, pupils health and development; pupils socialization to the society; preparing pupils to take future challenges in their educational career (to continue studying); developing pupils into harmonic and many-sided personality; pupils capacity for judgements and responsibility.
- **"Quality, professionalism"**. It includes values such as teachers' competency, curricula and school system quality.
- **"Contemporary, multifaceted, tolerant, safe and active school environment"** (incl. activity in school everyday life).
- **"Co-operation, openness, creativity, caring and positive attitude"**.

School values in Tallinn are very similar to city level values in Tallinn.

2.2 School culture – activity, safety and co-operation in school life

School cultures were analyzed with different methods in Turku and in Tallinn – document analysis was carried out in Turku and two online-surveys in Tallinn.

2.21 School cultures in Turku

The descriptions of the school cultures in the curriculum documents were rather compatible with the main goals of SAS project (Activity, Safety, Co-operation). They could be divided into three categories based on SAS project goals.

a) Activity: The school building and its surroundings support children to be active

- Adequate spaces for common activities and different kinds of school work
- Adequate equipment for arts, sports and information technology
- Positive aspects about school surroundings (closeness to nature, sports activities, closeness to e.g. libraries, swimming halls, field trip places)
- The economic facts – schools have limited resources, can't always get all the equipment and spaces they would like to have.

b) Safety: School rules and limits for students' behavior and activities

- School rules and regulations – usually they are based on the school values
- In some schools, students can participate making the rules
- School expects conformity in students' behaviour, but promotes individuality in learning and working
- The main rules are against school violence and bullying, and behaving in the classroom and school surroundings

c) Co-operation: Common activities during school days

- Working with common themes and events – supporting togetherness and combining different school subjects
- Co-operation between students from different classes, also different aged students
- Co-operation with the families and the community outside school (companies, sports clubs etc.)

2.22 School cultures in Tallinn

The survey was carried out December 2011- February 2012. The main purposes were:

- To gather information about how state and city values are perceived at schools
- To gather information how the main values that schools brought out in the pre-research are related to the reality or everyday life at school

Similar to Turku document analyses, three topics were in focus: **safety, activity and cooperation**. We had 45 schools participating and 422 respondents (on average 8 answers from each school). Among respondents 53% were teachers, 23% were school management, 23% were supporting positions, 1% didn't mark their position. We used 5- point Likert- scale (5-maximum value; 5- minimum value). Cronbach alfa for our subscales was 0,699 -0,932.

Cluster analyses divided results into two categories

"Outside factors" Mean= 4,27 (SD = 0,49)	„Inside factors“ Mean=4,02 (SD = 0,52)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety at school • Atmosphere that supports Active and Safe School-day • Quality of teaching process • Child centeredness • Pupils balanced development • Active and healthy lifestyle • Staff professionalism • Orientation to success • Creativity • Individual approach • Traditions • Activities that value home and family • Contemporary work- and studying environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care • Respect • Cooperation • Openness • Environmental awareness • Integrating pupils to the society • Independence and responsibility

As we see, the score for inside factors was lower. These are values that are harder to practice in everyday school life. It's also important to notice that school management ratings were higher compared to teachers and supporting positions.

Which values appear most at school?

The values that appear most often in everyday school life are Traditions (4,55- points) and Orientation to success (4,42- points). Active and healthy lifestyle scored 4,25- points, Safety at school scored 4,24- points, and cooperation 3,89- points. Cooperation is also the value that scored less with openness (3,92- points).

Values at everyday school-life compared to the importance of values

When we compare gap between importance ratings and ratings to how assessed values appear in everyday school life, then we see, that the biggest gap describes Cooperation (-55). There is a noticeable gap also between Safety at school (-37) and Active and healthy lifestyle (-17). It means that all three (Cooperation, Safety at school, Active and healthy lifestyle) are areas for development, when we take into account the importance ratings. But we shouldn't forget that most of the ratings are above 4- points, which is a very good result.

General conclusion of Tallinn value study

- On the whole values at everyday school-life match well with state and city educational system values.
- The importance of school values is assessed higher than they really appear at everyday-life at school.
- School-life activity and safety is often seen as a problem, but on school everyday life cooperation needs even more attention (cooperation between teachers, school management and supporting positions).
- School management ratings are higher than teachers' ratings and ratings of supporting positions in almost all criteria.
- When comparing the assessments of importance, then school safety (4,61 points) is assessed as most important, then comes cooperation (4,44 points) and then activity and healthy at school-life (4,44 points).

3 BREAK TIMES AT SCHOOLS: ACTIVITY AND WELL-BEING

3.1 General background of break times

In Estonia students have generally 45-minutes classes alternating with 10-15-minutes breaks. Lunch breaks vary from 20 to 30 minutes. In Finland, the structure of the school day is rather similar as in Estonia. Generally there are 45 minute lessons and 15 minute breaks, but there are some differences between schools. For example, teachers can put together two lessons of a same subject, so that the students will have a 30 minute break.

In Tallinn, until now students have spent most of their breaks inside the school building. Finnish children spend their breaks mostly outside, in the school surroundings. One of the aims of SAS project has been to promote the possibilities for activities in school surroundings. On the same time, break time safety has been an important issue for the project.

3.2 Break times activities, positive and negative aspects, and students' suggestions

During the break times Estonian students are most likely to be engaged in social interaction or just relax individually (eating, sitting etc). Besides, they love physical activities like running, ball-games etc, specially younger children. In Finland, physical activities are an important part of kids' breaks as well. They are mostly group activities and very rarely individual activities. Boys are more keen to playing ball games like football and basketball, girls favor other kinds of activities like running and skipping. Both genders like to play different kinds of group games with rules. Social interaction is an important part of break times, and most kids don't seem to enjoy spending their breaks alone.

The most annoying aspects for Estonian students turned out to be noisy and bustling school environment, and physical violence (if present). Students wished to experience joyful and friendly communication and to have more possibilities to be engaged in interactive actions. For Finnish students, the most negative aspects about breaks are a bit different because of spending breaks outside. Two of the most negative aspects about breaks are being rejected by others and being a victim of bullying and violence.

Estonian students made several suggestions for turning break times more active and safe. For example, they found that break times should comprise more physical activities, both regulated and non-regulated, inside and outside (games, dancing, bicycling, skate-boarding etc). A number of students emphasized older students' role in taking care of younger students by organizing games and competitions, reading books, and just playing with them. In Finland, students seemed to wish for more options for break time activities as well. Some students wanted to stay inside, maybe using the school gym or library. Based on their break time stories, it'd be good to arrange possibilities to spend time alone as well. Many students seemed to feel embarrassed to be alone on the break, and not having anything to do or anyone to hang out with. It would also be good to have sufficient amount of break time supervisors, who should be alert about bullying behaviour and other negative interaction between students. Organized break time games help everyone to get along.

4 STUDENTS' ACTIVITY, WELL-BEING, AND FEEL OF SAFETY

4.1 After-school activity

Estonian kids are most likely to participate in an organized activity (e.g., music school, sports trainings), chat online with friends, and watch TV after their school-day. Still, compared to girls, boys prefer to spend more time in internet and watch TV. Girls' interests are more related to socializing and participation of organized activities, also, they are more likely to value in-school action programs. Finnish study showed that students' most common free time activities after school were spending time at home with their family, hanging out with friends both inside and outside, and spending time watching TV, using computer or playing console games. A little less than 10 % of Finnish students spent screen time more than 4 hours a day. Plentiful screen time was connected with negative experiences about school and social relations. 75 % of Finnish students had a regular, organized hobby. 25 % participate one or two times a week, also 25 % three to four times a week, and the rest more than five times a week. Regular hobbies seemed to be connected with high self-esteem and positive school experiences.

4.2 Emotional and social well-being

As expected, most of the kids who participated in the Estonian study had positive self-esteem (73%), did not feel lonely or felt a little (92%), and were likely to be cooperative (78,7%) and empathic toward others (77,5%). However, there were kids who had problems in emotional well-being (high loneliness – 8%, lower self-esteem – 27%, poor social competency - 21%). In Finland it seemed that about 7 -10 % of students suffered from different kinds of social and emotional problems. They felt lonely and had a low self-esteem and social competence. A little less than 20% of students didn't have good friends on the same class. They seemed to have more negative experiences about school and class atmosphere than the others.

Estonian results revealed that those feeling themselves lonely tended to spend more time in internet, reported less engagement in co-actions, and were not that active in terms of hobbies. It revealed that children with higher self-esteem value more co-activities with their classmates as well as with other students, find school atmosphere to be more enjoyable, and have warmer and more trustful relations with teachers. According to the results, the quality of relationships seemed to be clearly related to students' positive orientation toward school both in Estonia and Finland: those having higher social competence and better relationships with peers and teachers had more positive attitudes toward their school, were more interested in studying, and valued participation of those activities which could make school life more active and safe.

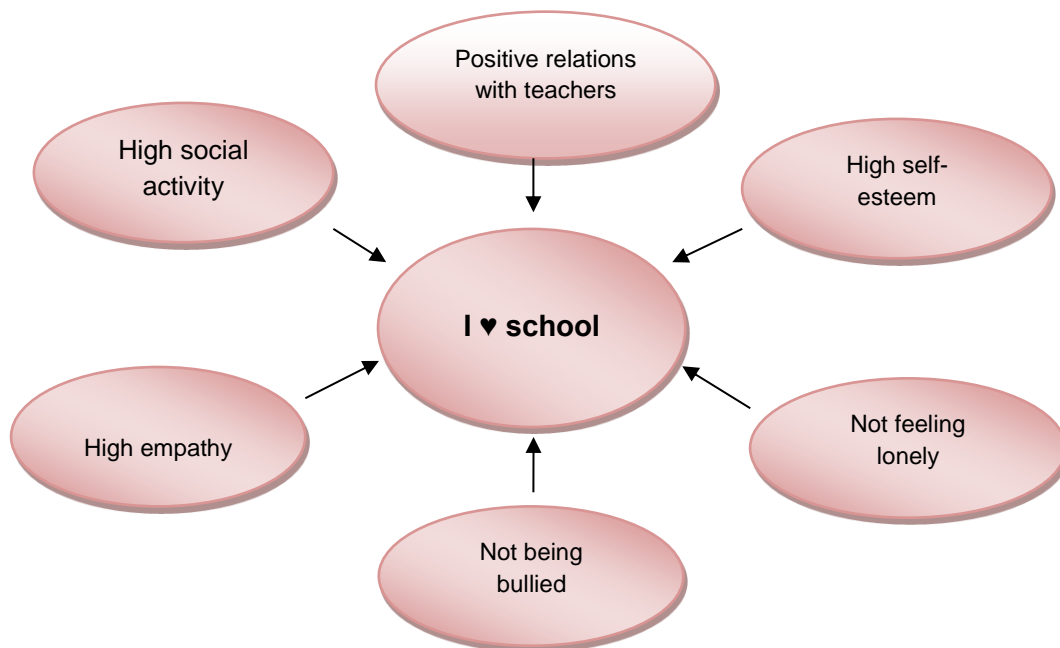


Figure 1. Psychological and social aspects related to positive orientation toward school both in Estonia and Finland.

Ideas for promoting school day activity and safety:

- Support the least active students to find a hobby. After school activities have an important role in this.
- Co-operate with students' families to decrease the amount of daily screen time. Teach the children about smart playing and surfing on the Internet.
- Offer all students opportunities to succeed and get positive feedback.
- Offer students possibilities to discuss alone with school personnel when needed.
- Support the feeling of togetherness inside school and class communities. Make sure everyone has friends and can get along with common activities.

5 THE SAS PROJECT – EVALUATION AND BEST PRACTICES

In Finland, the feedback information was collected the SAS project teachers in two meetings in 2010 (33 teachers) and 2012 (45 teachers). They were asked about the realization on SAS project goals in the everyday life of their school. They were also asked about the best practices they've had in their school. In Estonia, the feedback was collected also twice: 1) June 2011 - questionnaire for SAS project teachers; 2) May 2012 – focus group interviews among teachers and students in 18 schools.

5.1 Activity of lifestyle

After school activities are an important part of an active school day. In Finnish teachers' opinion, the amount of different after school activities has increased during these last few years, and they've become a regular part of the schooldays. Estonian teachers emphasized students' well-organized activity which has been progressed remarkably during the project. Also, quite a few of Tallinn schools started to move break times outside which is a great move (esp for large city schools) that students value a lot.

The break time activities have been developed a lot, and teachers are satisfied with its results. For Tallinn schools the SAS project supported their own values and matched well with other projects which enhance active and caring school life. Both Finnish and Estonian teachers were happy with break time equipment provided by SAS project. However, for some schools the choice of equipment was still limited and not always based on their real needs. If in Finland only some schools found that organized break time activities were successful (older students were "educated" to organize activities for other students), then in Tallinn this turned out to be one of the most valued aspects. Teachers and students were satisfied with older students' initiative in organizing games and activities for younger kids. Students benefitted from taking sense of responsibility for organizing, and younger kids felt happy. Only some schools' teachers (both in Estonia and Finland) thought it hadn't worked very well and students weren't interested in organizing activities.

In Turku, the activities were mainly planned, organized and coordinated by project teachers. In some schools, almost the whole personnel has been involved in it, in other schools it's been only few teachers'

responsibility. The after school activities were organized by teachers (by their own interests), a club or organization outside school personnel, or the city of Turku. Also student parliament was seen important in increasing school day activities. In Tallinn, the activities were initially planned and organized by project teachers but then older students took responsibility for coordinating several activities.

5.2 Safety

In Finland, school safety was a result of five different components according to the project teachers. The first one was to have clear school rules, which everybody knows and which are supervised. The second one was adults' presence and supervision also outside the lessons. Especially break time supervision was seen important. The third one was zero tolerance for bullying behaviour, and ways to intervene. The fourth one was the togetherness between students, for example older students taking care of the younger ones. The fifth one was physical safety and safety education (what to do in an emergency, how to act in traffic etc.)

In Estonia, from the perspective of safety, the focus was mainly set on children emotional well-being and positive interactions. Schools have supported childrens' self-esteem by giving them chance to (a) take responsibility in organizing activities and be active agencies, and (b) systematically practice social skills which leads to positive feedback from peers and teachers, feel of safety and other positive outcomes.

5.3 Co-operation

Finnish teachers saw student parliament as an important organ in increasing students' participation in common things at school. It was seen as a way for the children to be heard and make a difference.

Happenings, feasts, theme days and –weeks were also seen as an important way to promote co-operation and togetherness. The teachers estimated, that students have also some possibilities to effect on the contents of these happenings. In planning common activities, some schools have used the "Idea Imuri" (a tool provided by SAS project). It's an easy way to collect everyone's thoughts, ideas and opinions and make them visible.

The teachers thought it's up to each persons' own activity, how much they work to promote co-operation and togetherness within school community. Teachers also wish that students and their families could participate this kind of work.

In Tallinn, both teachers and students highlighted improved relationships between children which is nicely recognisable not only in the communication between classmates and peers but also between older and younger students. Likewise, teachers pointed out that thanks to the SAS project students-teachers relations have changed toward more trustful attitude. Students found that they have got more familiar with teachers, especially with primary school teachers who are their active partners in organizing activities for younger kids.

5.4 Best practices

In Finland:

- After school activities have increased and become a more stable part of the school day.
- Some of the activities are allocated for the least active children – they are invited to come along.
- There are more organized break time activities than before (older students organize the activities for others). In some schools, there are also more optional ways to spend the breaks.
- Different kinds of equipments for the breaks, restoring school surroundings and making them more activating.
- There are more adults supervising break times, they use yellow vests to be better noticed.
- The different kinds of using the “Idea Imuri” (a tool provided by SAS project) – in planning something with the class, in the student parliaments, in teacher meetings.

In Estonia:

- Break times are more active due to the variety of equipments – sports games, board games etc
- There is more fun and cooperation during break times – organized activities, peace-room (possibility to spend time in quite atmosphere),
- Game-leaders / play-masters – older students take care of youngers, playing with them, reading, talking etc to them.
- More break time activities outside
- Competitions and other events organized by participation and initiative of students