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# SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF PROSPECTIVE AND PRACTICING TEACHERS OF "IDEAL STUDENT" TRAIT SYSTEMS AND VALUE SYSTEMS

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**Abstract:** Two systems: the professional "ideal student" trait system and the personal value system, as perceived by prospective and practicing teachers, are presented as constructs of the belief system. Conclusions are drawn from a meta-analysis of five samples. The structure of the two multivariate systems confirmed the bipolar continuum value model of Schwartz (1992): conservation versus openness to change and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. Although the constructs were similar, their content priorities were different, focusing professionally on academic traits and personally on interpersonal values.

## BACKGROUND

The aims of this paper are to compare the trait system structure of the ideal student, as perceived by prospective and practicing teachers, to their value system structure; and compare the rank order of the trait system and the value system. The assumption underlying this study is that the "ideal student" trait system, as perceived by prospective and practicing teachers, represents an operational definition of teachers' educational goals (Maslovary & Iran, 1997), and that this perception is influenced by their personal and social belief system (Maslovary, in press) as well as ideological educational theories and policies at a given time (Benyamini & Limor, 1995).

Richardson (1996) views beliefs as part of a group of constructs that define and describe the structure and content of mental states believed to drive one's actions. Teachers' belief systems greatly influence the way teachers function in the classroom (Anderson, 1996; Richardson, 1996). The definition of teachers' beliefs with regard to pedagogical concepts has, in recent years, constituted a subject of worldwide research as part of an attempt to examine teachers' professional development (Brumald, Hardman, & Leat, 1995; Oppewal, 1993).

## Teachers' Perceptions of the Ideal Student

Teachers' perceptions of the ideal student system reflect their professional beliefs and educational goals. Benyamini and Limor (1995) claim that teachers' notions of student traits represent their expectations and are influenced by pedagogical ideology and defined by educational standards. They found that traits of ideal students, as perceived by teachers, fell into three content categories: cognitive-academic, social, and emotional-personal, generally in that order of importance. Maslovary (in press) found that in Israel, teachers in religious state schools integrated academic and religious goals throughout their scale of priorities. Other studies revealed variation in the perception of educational goals by teaching discipline. Other studies revealed variation in the perception of educational goals by teaching discipline (Almozino, 1996; Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1993) and Levy (1991) found differences among teachers between lower-order cognitive goals and higher-order ones. Perceptions of ideal student traits, which constitute teachers' professional educational goals, represent one aspect of their belief system. A second aspect is the teachers' value system, which reflects their personal values.

Teachers' personal value systems in this study relate to value system theory as presented by Schwartz and colleagues. Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) generated a conceptual definition of values that incorporates five formal features. Values (1) are concepts or beliefs, (2) pertain to desirable end states or behaviors, (3) transcend specific situations, (4) guide selection of evaluation of behavior and events, and (5) are ordered by relative importance. In addition, the primary content aspect of a value is the type of goal or motivational concern that it expresses. Ten distinct motivational types of values, called higher-order value types, were derived from universal human values, and organized on two bipolar continua. One continuum runs from "openness to-change" at one pole to "conservation" at the other; the other runs from "self-transcendence" at one pole to "self-enhancement" at the other. The structure generated from the theory specifies dynamic relations among the motivational domains of values (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995). Two other studies confirmed the findings of Schwartz and colleagues (1990, 1992, 1995). Maslovary (1997) used the methodology of Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) in a study of high school teachers and found a rader structure, on which the same two bipolar continua partitioned the space. Maslovary (in preparation) analyzed the structure of the value system of state religious elementary school teachers using SSA. The resulting map shows a rader with similar bipolar partitioning of space, with one continuum running from "conservation" to "openness to change", and other from "self-transcendence" to "self-enhancement". Similar relationships among the structures of value, attitude and behavior systems have been found by a number of researchers (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Tal, 1996).

## METHOD

### Research Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences in the rank order of the ideal high school student traits as compared to the value system of teachers?
2. What are the constructs of the ideal high school student trait system as perceived by prospective and practicing teachers as compared to the value system of teachers?
3. Is the theory presented in the mapping sentence (Figure 1) confirmed?

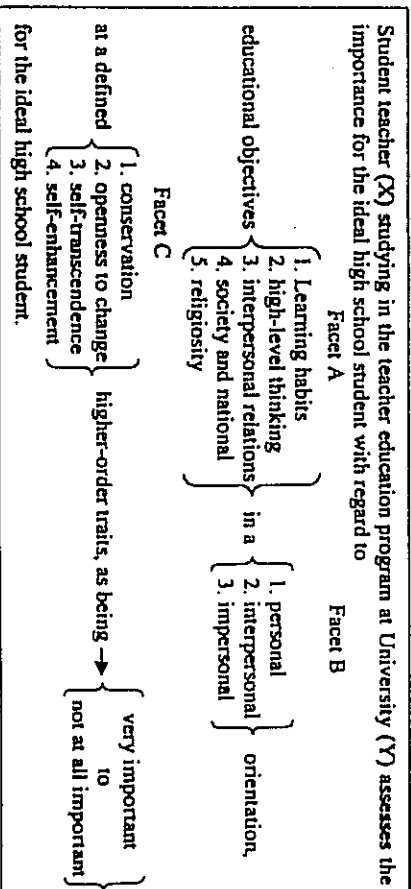


Figure 1. Mapping sentence - The ideal high school student as perceived by prospective and practicing teachers