Schools for well-being? Critical discussions with schoolchildren

Dagmar Kutsar, Kadri Soo and Liis-Marii Mandel

International quantitative studies among children, such as the Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children and the Programme for International Student Assessment have revealed a gap between learning outcomes and children’s subjective well-being across countries. The Children’s Worlds international study showed that liking school decreases from the second to the sixth grade. Compared to other countries the decrease is one of the biggest among schoolchildren in Estonia. The aim of the study is to find in-depth evidence to explain the low level of satisfaction with school life and reasons for the decrease in children liking school in Estonia. The analysis is based on data from eight focus group interviews with 12-year-old children in rural and urban schools. The study showed that children develop negative feelings from various aspects of school life that leads to criticism and a dislike for school. Bullying among children and behavioural shortcomings of teachers (including coping with personal distress) are the key factors that decrease the well-being of many children and cause a dislike of school. An ideal school-for well-being would promote physical, social and mental well-being for both children and teachers.

Keywords: subjective well-being, school environment, school dislike, bullying, children’s perspectives