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School evaluation versus the development of professional competence

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Introduction

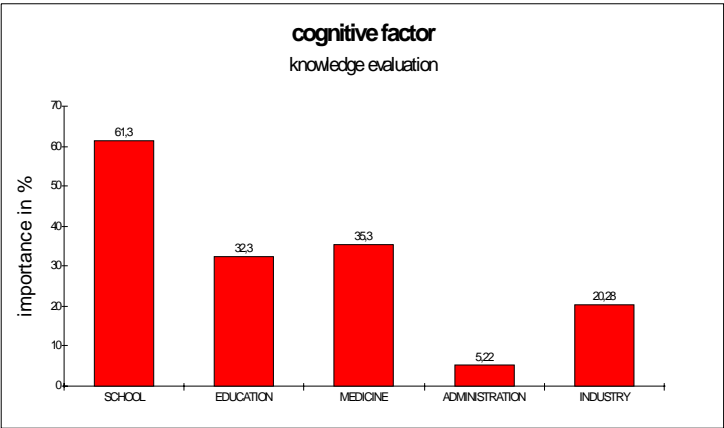
Employers consider various qualities when evaluating their employees. Having certain abilities not only increases the possibility of getting and maintaining a job but also shapes a specific system of values conducive to the development of a feeling of social and professional adequacy. The development of qualities required by employers is a long-term process, and is influenced by a variety of factors including the home environment, the peer group and school. The research reported on in this paper addresses the following questions: To what extent are the features considered by teachers in their evaluation of students valued by employers? Do teachers rate certain abilities of their students as high or low as future employers do? In other words, to what extent are students, at the threshold of their careers, prepared to identify their career needs?

In this research, features of the following three levels were analysed: the cognitive level (knowledge and progress), the emotional and motivational level (involvement, participation and diligence) and the social level (ability to co-operate, organisation of work and independence). These were established and defined during workshops organised for teachers on improvements in the evaluation of students. First, a group of twenty primary school teachers was tested. They were given a list of qualities together with their definitions, then were asked to specify how important, in percentage terms, each individual quality was in the general assessment of a student. The total had to equal 100%. Subsequently, supervisors in some selected professions underwent similar testing. Two of the professions were 'typical of the intelligentsia' and others were connected with administration and industry. The first professional group consisted of twenty school headmasters who were asked to specify the importance of different kinds of abilities taken into consideration in the evaluation of teachers employed in their schools, then there was a group of twenty directors of hospitals or heads of health centres. These were to assess the doctors they supervised. Next there were twenty departmental supervisors of different kinds of offices who were asked to express their opinions concerning clerks. Finally, twenty presidents of large and small companies evaluated the workers they employed. In this way the importance of different qualities considered in the evaluation of students by teachers and in the evaluation of workers by their superiors in the fields of medicine, education, administration and industry was compared. The results are reported below - first the evaluation of consecutive features is compared within each level (cognitive, emotional-motivational and social), and then there is a summary of assessments given by representatives of each profession or job.

The importance of cognitive features in the evaluation of students and employees

The cognitive features presented here are connected with general intellectual abilities. Knowledge is understood to be 'what we know', and the capability of using this knowledge in order to arrive at new solutions. Progress means an increase in the level of performance in relation to the past. The question is, therefore, how important are cognitive qualities at school and in professional life?

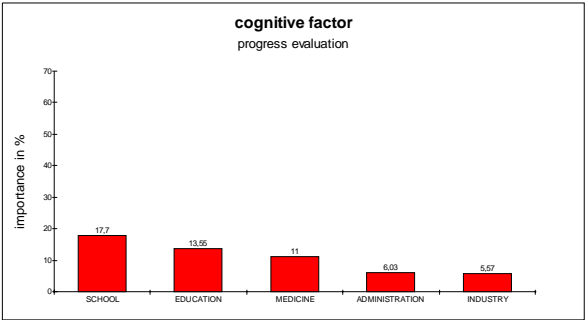
Figure 1: Evaluation of knowledge by teachers and representatives of different professions



As we can see in Figure 1, teachers visibly promote knowledge. All other professions perceive it as almost three times less important. School headmasters recognise the significance of teachers’ knowledge as being half as important as the teachers themselves value in relation to their students. Curiously, knowledge is least valued by heads of administration and most valued, though still half as much as by teachers, by ward heads in hospitals. Coming back to schools, progress making (Figure 2) seems to be equally important as knowledge itself. It is valued by teachers in their students as well as by headmasters in the teachers. As for administration and industry, progress is significantly less important.

We can conclude that school glorifies intellectual abilities. Teachers, by promoting those qualities, develop in their students the belief that these are the key features leading to success.

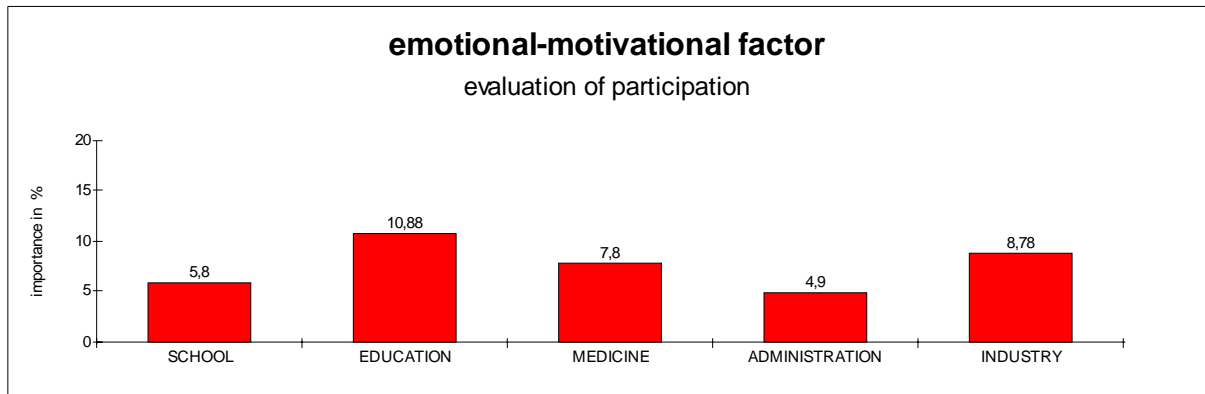
Figure 2: Evaluation of progress by teachers and representatives of different professions



The importance of emotional and motivational factors in the evaluation of students and employees

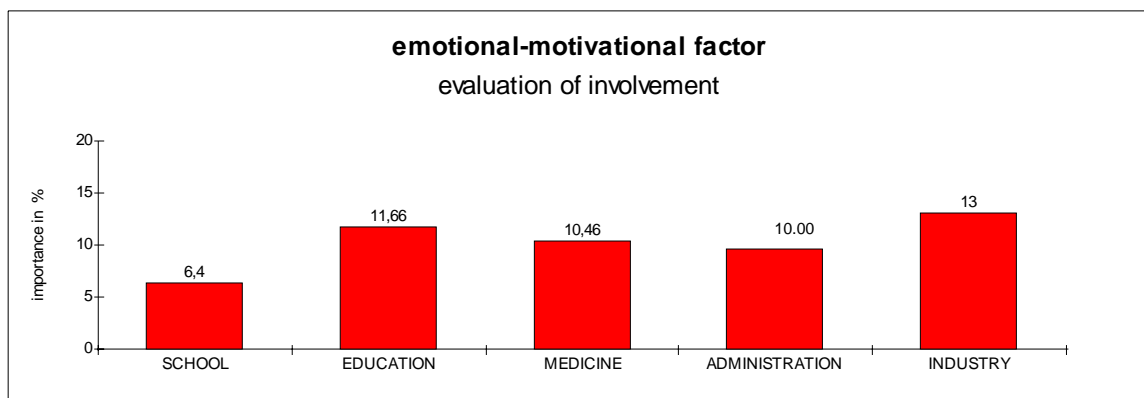
This category has been created in a slightly artificial way and concerns those abilities connected with the attitude towards work. Such an attitude is based on motivation, emotional involvement and personality. The participants in the test evaluated the following three factors: participation, involvement and diligence. Participation means initiative and the will to act. Involvement is associated with the motivation to work, execution of it without reproofs and orders, and also the willingness to take on extra work. Diligence is understood as precision, adherence to rules and regulations in force in a given environment, and the exact performance of one's duties.

Figure 3: Evaluation of participation by teachers and representatives of different professions



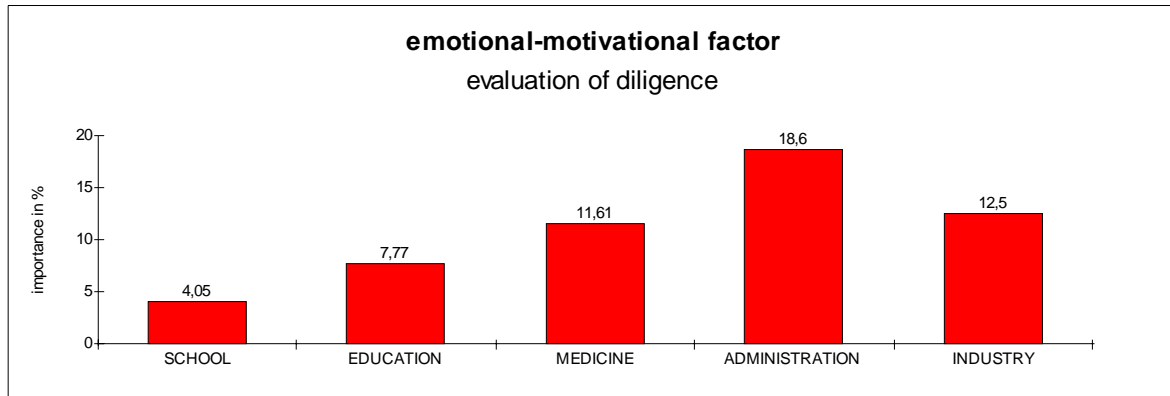
As we can see in Figure 3, participation, though required at school, is less valued there than in the jobs tested. Interestingly, headmasters value participation twice as much in the case of teachers as in the case of students. The level of importance assigned to involvement (Figure 4) is similar for all jobs with the exception of teachers, who give it little value. Similarly, diligence (Figure 5) is least valued at school, whereas in administration it is valued over four times as much and for industrial workers and doctors the importance of this feature is rated three times higher than it is in the case of students.

Figure 4: Evaluation of involvement by teachers and representatives of different professions



The emotional and motivational qualities were perceived as significant by supervisors in all the professions tested, but teachers gave these features only half as much importance.

Figure 5: Evaluation of diligence by teachers and representatives of different professions



The importance of social factors in the evaluation of students and employees

The social factor, which has also been isolated in a slightly artificial way, includes those features that are connected with interpersonal skills and the ability to cope with one’s own work. Three qualities were listed for the evaluation: organisation of work, independence and the ability to co-operate. Organisation of work means the ability to plan one’s own work, to gather suitable tools and to maintain order within one’s work. Independence is the ability to cope with one’s own duties and the ability to take decisions. Co-operation is connected with the ability to establish good relationships with colleagues, constructive group work and a respect for the opinions of others.

The organisational aspect of work is visibly rated very low in schools. Supervisors in different professions perceive it as several times more important. Similarly, independence is marginal at school but quite significant in other professions. The ability to co-operate, though it almost does not count at school, is perceived as one of the fundamental qualities of a good worker.

As we can see in Figures 6, 7 and 8, social abilities are of minimal importance at school. As for the other professions, these abilities form a basis for them - employer’s value them in some cases many times higher than teachers do.

Figure 6: Evaluation of organisation of work by teachers and representatives of different professions

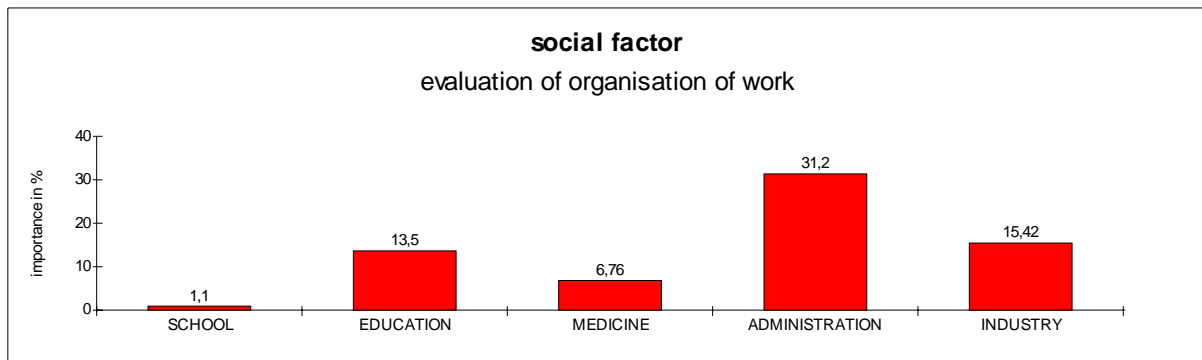


Figure 7: Evaluation of independence by teachers and representatives of different professions

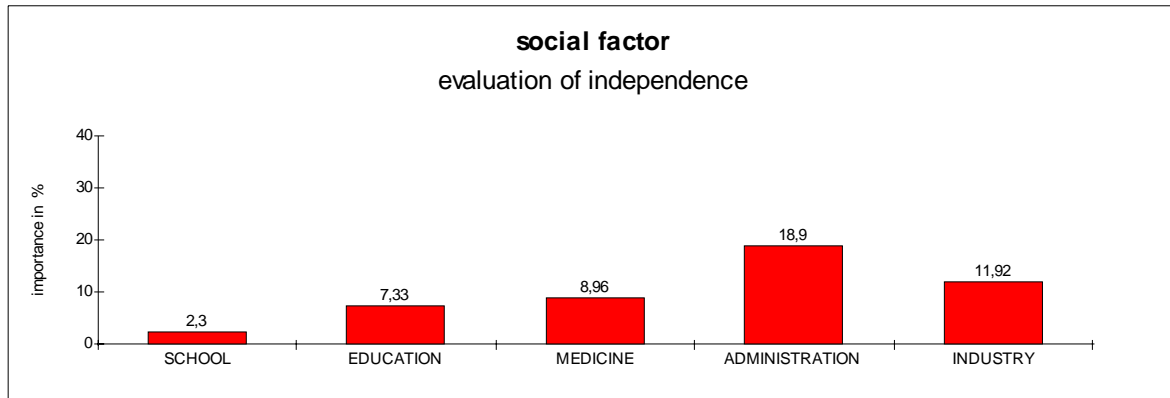
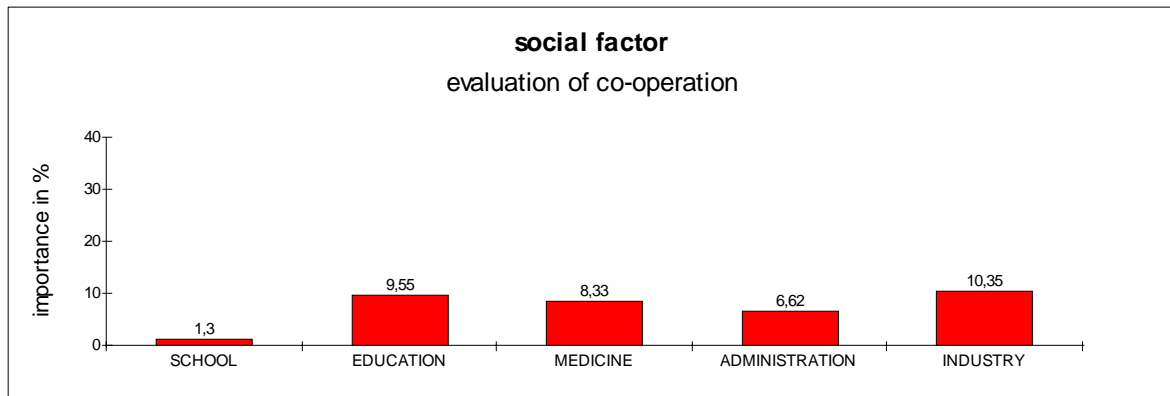


Figure 8: Evaluation of the ability to co-operate by teachers and representatives of different professions



Conclusion

The evaluation of students is not merely limited to an assessment of their functioning at school. It also trains young people to think about the kinds of behaviour and features that are important in achieving success at work. A Polish student gets the impression that knowledge is a guarantee of success. Consequently, he or she expects that in future the development of intellectual abilities will result in the approval of superiors and will guarantee promotion. The interpersonal competence connected with knowledge, for example the ability to work in a group, the constructive forming of ideas and tolerance for the opinions of others, receives marginal attention in Polish schools. For several years students undergo training that results in the extinguishing of these abilities.

Figure 9: Evaluation of different levels according to teachers

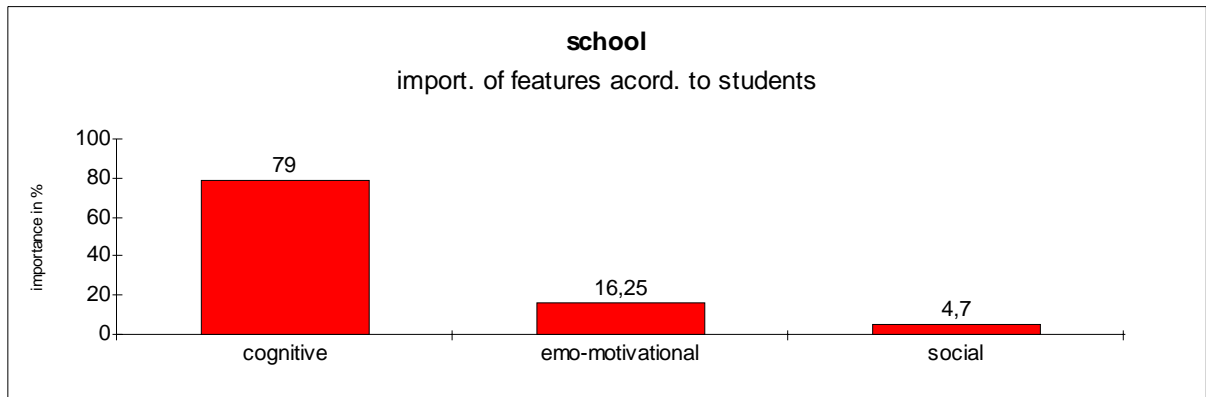


Figure 10: Evaluation of different levels according to headteachers

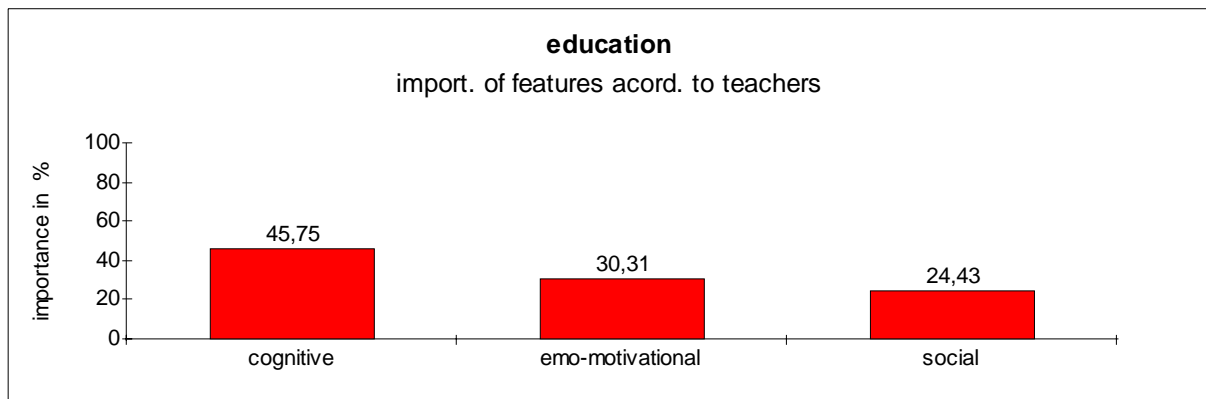


Figure 11: Evaluation of different levels according to heads of hospitals and health centres

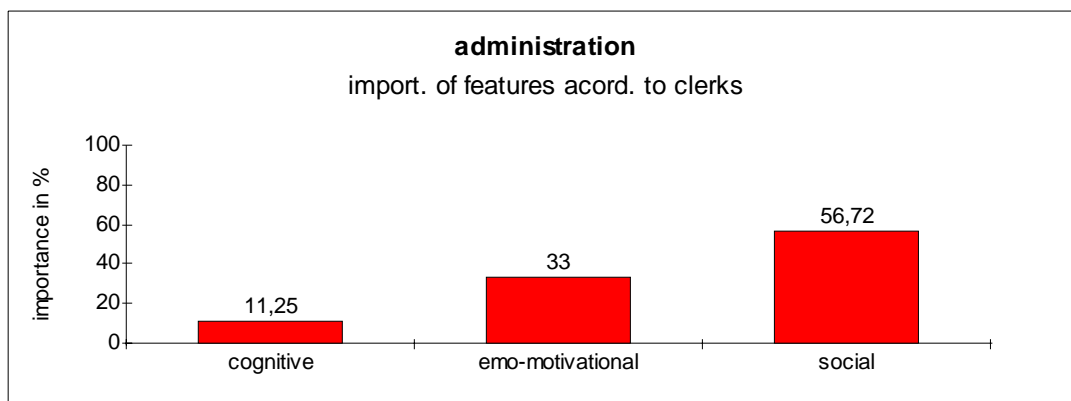


Figure 12: Evaluation of different levels according to office supervisors

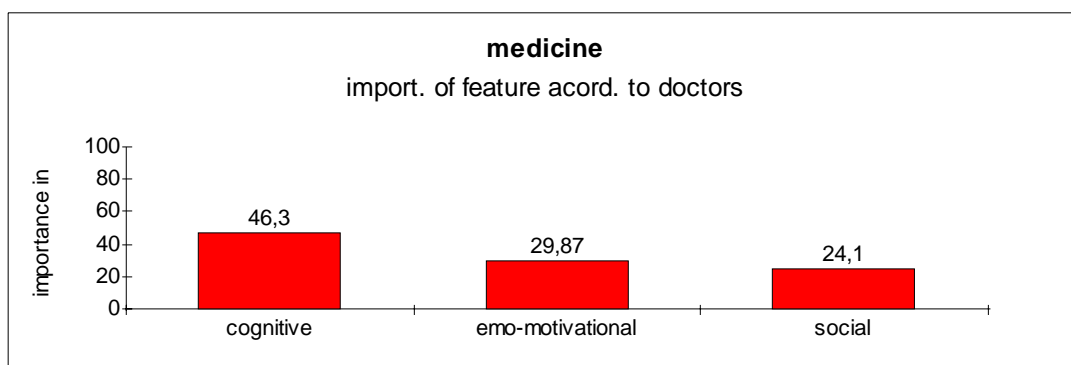
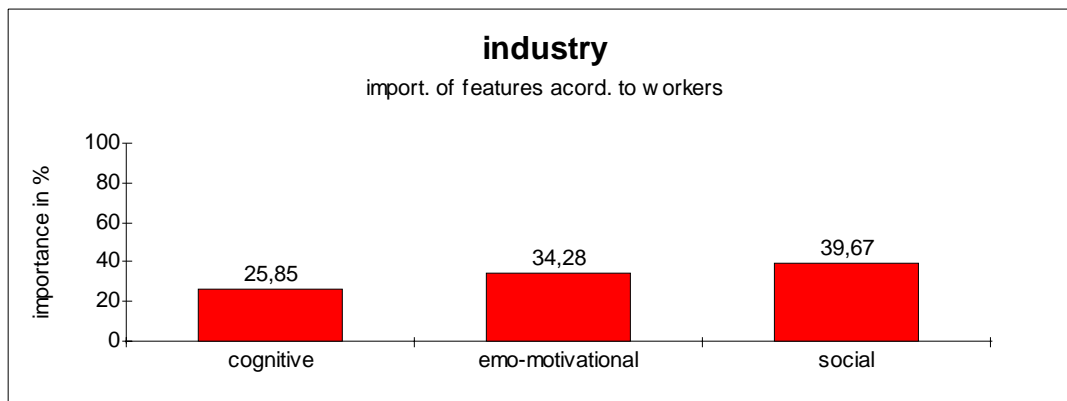


Figure 13: Evaluation from different levels according to supervisors of production plant



The research suggests (Figures 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13) that the evaluation criteria of the teachers differ from those of the employers. The latter value social competence above all - the feature that seems to be particularly desirable in administration and industry. In the professional areas 'typical of the intelligentsia' such as medicine or pedagogy, knowledge, so much promoted at school, is only half as important.

It is interesting to observe how large the differences between the evaluation of students by their teachers and the evaluation of teachers by their superiors are. The latter value knowledge almost as highly as personal competence. Teachers, on the other hand, regard competence a few times less important than cognitive abilities.

It seems that school is a kind of island in the Polish reality. The system of values that the students acquire at school is in force only there and ceases to be of any importance the moment they leave school. This situation might be a cause of the frustration that so many young people suffer. They feel underestimated by their superiors despite the fact that they are engaged in expanding their knowledge and trying to achieve. At the same time their friends, who did not succeed at school, enjoy success in their professional lives.

The question arises here: how conducive is the shaping of such a system of values to the development in young people of the feeling of being a member of the professional society of a united Europe? Will the Polish school be an island in the European reality as it is now in our own work reality? Will it be thus incompatible with the European reality? The European identity should be endowed with certain attitudes and values. Therefore, it would be interesting to carry out a comparative research in other European countries. In considering the creation of a sense of European unity, it would be worth, apart from the modification of school syllabuses, to change the attitudes of teachers towards education - what it is and what it leads to.