

CONDITIONS FOR THE CLASS TEACHERS' WORK IN AFFECTING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR PUPILS

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Abstract: *The article conveys the results of a survey into the conditions of primary and secondary class teachers' work aiming at identifying how the class teachers reflect the degree of strenuousness of their job, where they perceive the core of strenuousness, and how they view current financial reward for the class teacher's job. The article makes use of the data out of which some have previously been published within the 'School and Health for the 21 Century' project at Brno Masaryk University Faculty of Education (Project MSM002162421).*

Keywords: *class teacher, legislative sources, degree of educational strenuousness, healthy development factors, financial reward*

The class teacher's work at any level of school education is not only substantiated, but it also has some peculiarities resulting from both educational and psychological characteristics of the pupil at certain age, and the level of his/her individual mental, physical, and social maturity. In this respect, the class teacher is considered the factor having huge possibilities for affecting healthy development of every pupil and the school class. From the school stage point of view, natural penetration and integration of upbringing, educational, and socializing activities is quite specific. In some ways, such influence can be understood as a basic model in which specific conditions for upbringing enable the class teacher affect both the pupil's personality and social development in a well-balanced way (see Střelec – Krátká, 2006).

The first issue on which we have focused our attention starts with the question: 'Who is the class teacher and which duties does he/she have to tackle?'

The education dictionary characterizes the class teacher as a specialist, who 'manages the organization of the class and leads education of a group of pupils in the class, coordinates the educational activities of all the teachers giving lessons in the class, cooperates with parents, keeps the in-class documentation, and performs administration duties in his/her class' (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 2001, p. 253). Traditionally, as J. A. Ko-

menský in his *Didactica Magna* states, the main responsibility for all events in the class should be assigned to one particular teacher. Komenský thus anticipated significance of the class teacher, though he had never used the term of class teacher. A less encouraging fact is that despite the century-proved positive experience, we have not had an official, self-contained document declaring the status and duties of the class teacher in current Czech school. The Czech Ministry of Education (CME) only expresses their stance on the role and work of the class teacher by means of partial information in several guidelines and instructions, which address all the teachers in general and not the class teacher in particular. So far, the specific class-teacher's duties have been determined locally and constitute, more or less, a part of a particular school internal documentation.

The CME 48/2005 regulation on 'Primary Education and the Issues of Compulsory School Attendance' in section 17 *characterizes the class teacher as 'educator appointed by the school principal ensuring specific tasks resulting from the school principal assignment*. The CME 10007/98-26 instruction on 'Safety and Health Protection in Regional School Work' mentions that the class teacher should instruct the pupils about the safety behaviour basic rules, school rules and regulations, behaviour on public roads, fire safety and protection rules, harm of alcohol and tobacco, etc. The CME 72/2005 regulation on 'The Provision of Consultancy Services in Schools and School Consultancy Facilities' indicates that the class teacher should cooperate with a school counsellor, school prevention mentor, and/or school psychologist, special needs educator, etc. Other recommendations on the class teacher's work can be found in 10194/2002-14 CME instruction on the 'Common Procedures in Excusing and Releasing Pupils from the Classes, Truancy Prevention and Sanctions', in 28275/2000-22 CME instruction on 'Prevention and Tackling Bullying in Schools'. Besides, the school authorities and, to an appropriate extent class teachers as well as, shall learn the other documents, e.g.:

- 14 423/1999-22 CME instruction on the 'Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance,' (5/1999 CME Bulletin).
- CME 25 884/2003-24 (CME Bulletin 11/2003) 'Pre-School, School, and School Facilities Cooperation with the Czech Police on the child's and youth's crime prevention and investigation'.
- CME 11691/2004-24 (CME Bulletin 6/20004) 'Rules for Parents and Children on Safer Use of the Internet'.
- CME 10 844/2005-24 Social and Pathological Phenomena Prevention Strategy in School Children and Youth in 2005–2008'.
- CME 37 014/2005 instruction (CME Bulletin 2/2006) on 'Safety and Health Protection of School Children, Pupils, and Students'.
- CME 20 006/2007-51 instruction (CME Bulletin 11/2007) on 'Social and Pathological Phenomena Primal Prevention in School Children, Pupils, and Students'.

If we take a closer look at those CME instructions from the point of view of the school and class teacher, we cannot but observe the expanding trend in such documentation as well as possible negative consequences resulting from such a non-stabilized methodology and legislature foundations for the school and teachers; especially, if we take into account underestimated in practice significance of educational activities of the class teacher (see Střelec–Krátká, 2009).

From the abovementioned facts results the need for standardized integrating information assisting the school authorities, educators, and, especially, class teachers in their educational efforts issuing unambiguous framework of their rights and responsibilities towards their pupils, parents, and other participating educational entities. In our opinion, the recourse of this effort could be in the 7/2005 CME Bulletin indicating that the class teacher:

- Motivates the pupils to create their in-class rules in agreement with the school rules and regulations, keeps an eye on respecting the rules (creating open and safe atmosphere and positive social climate in the classroom), supports the development of positive social interactions of pupils in the classroom.
- Intermediates communication with other teaching staff and guarantees cooperation of the school and the pupils' parents.
- Keeps record of specific features of particular class pupils and of their family background.
- Cooperates with the school career counsellor in providing consultancy services regarding decisions on the future education and career of the class pupils.
- Cooperates with the school prevention mentor in detection of warning signs, participates in implementation of minimum prevention programs, diagnoses the relationships in the classroom.
- Cooperates with the school psychologist and special needs teacher in prevention of poor academic achievement of the class pupils (rectification, guidance); in making good conditions for integration of pupils with special education needs, and, following the school principal instructions, in other areas of educational and consulting work with the pupils in the class.

In this respect, it appears very significant to strengthen the teaching profession status by, e.g., including the teacher into the public servant category.

All the mentioned circumstances have been taken into account when considering this part of our research aimed at the class teacher's reflection of the degree of strenuousness of their job, where they perceive the core of such strenuousness, and how they view current financial reward (pay increment) for the class teacher's job. Due to the limited extend of the article, we show only an excerpt of the survey results providing illustrative data on methodological procedure and its basic findings.

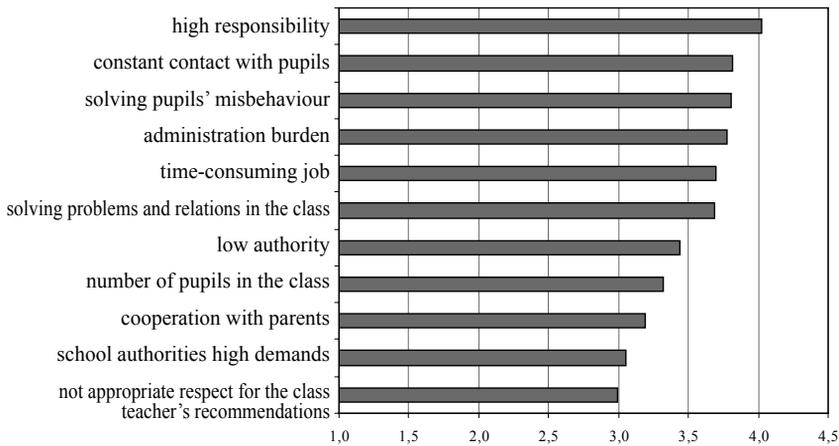
Research sample consisted of 240 (100 %) respondents (primary and secondary school teachers), out of them were 65 (27 %) lower primary school teachers, and 65 (27 %) upper primary school teachers, 110 (46 %) secondary school teachers (grammar schools, special schools, vocational schools). As for the age structure, 4 % of class teachers were younger than 25 years, 23 % class teachers were 26-35 years old, 60 % class teachers were 36-55 years old, and 14 % were 56 and over. In the research survey took part 56 (23 %) male class teachers and 184 (77 %) female class teachers.

Views on the causes of strenuousness of the class teacher's job:

(Circle the importance on the 1–5 scale. Number 1 is relatively least important value; number 5 is relatively most important value).

Question: Where do you perceive the core of strenuousness in the class teacher’s job?

- a) cooperation with parents
- b) not appropriate respect for the class teacher’s recommendations
- c) number of pupils in the class
- d) solving pupils’ misbehaviour
- e) administration burden
- f) time-consuming job
- g) solving problems and relations in the class
- h) high responsibility
- i) constant contact with pupils
- j) low authority
- k) school authorities high demands

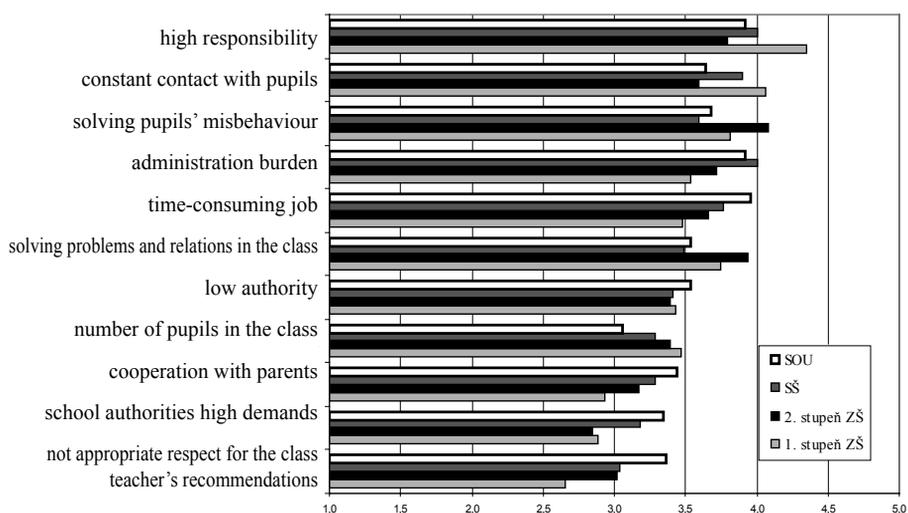


Graph comparison of average values indicates where the class teachers perceive the core strenuousness of their job:

The survey results show that the respondents (class teachers) perceive the most important factor affecting the strenuousness of their job to be **HIGH RESPONSIBILITY** arising from their work (4.03 on the 1–5 scale). The next factors: constant contact with pupils (3.81), solving pupils’ misbehaviour (3.80), administration burden (3.78), time-consuming job (3.70), solving problems and relations in the class (3.69), low authority (3.44), number of pupils in the class (3.32), cooperation with parents (3.19), school authorities high demands (3.05), low respect for the class teacher’s recommendations (3.0).

Views on strenuousness of the class teacher's job depending on the school type

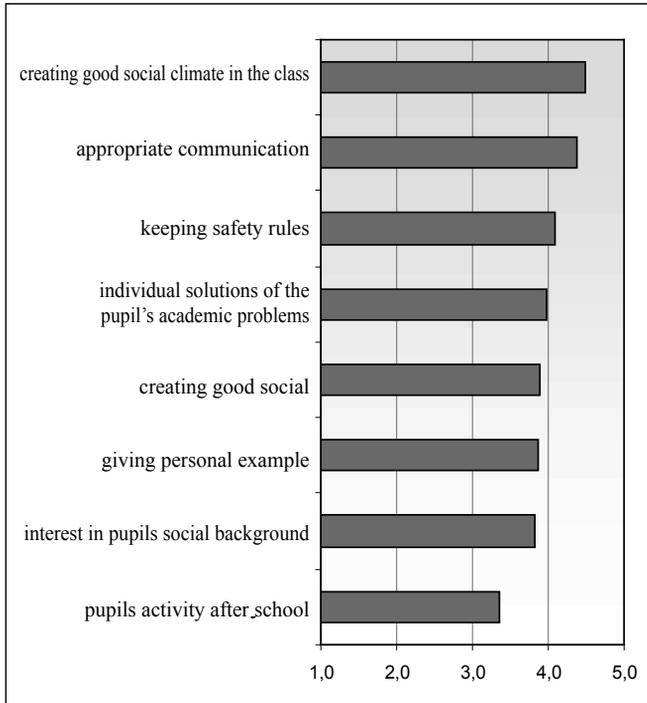
Partially, we have adopted the hypothesis assuming that the class teachers of different types of schools do perceive the core of strenuousness of their job in different areas. As expected, lower primary class teachers indicate the highest responsibility arising from their work as well as constant contact with pupils to be the core strenuousness of the class teacher's job. Strenuousness in solving the pupils' misbehaviour and relationships in the class is indicated mostly in the upper-primary class teachers' responses. Secondary school class teachers perceive strenuousness in time-consuming administration. Vocational school class teachers (more than other school-type teachers) indicate low respect for the class teacher's recommendation, difficulties in cooperation with their students' parents, and higher demands of the school authorities to be the most strenuous factors in their job.



Question: How and/or by what means can class teachers contribute to physical, mental, and social health of their pupils?

- individual solutions of the pupil's academic problems
- interest in other pupil's problems, active share in their solutions
- appropriate communication
- recommending and/or creating after-school activities of pupils
- interest in the pupil's social background, communication with parents
- class-teacher as a role-model of a lifestyle
- creating good social climate in the class
- keeping safety rules, warning against potential injuries

The following graph of average values of the responses compares on the 1–5 scale the areas by means of which the class teachers can contribute to health of their pupils:

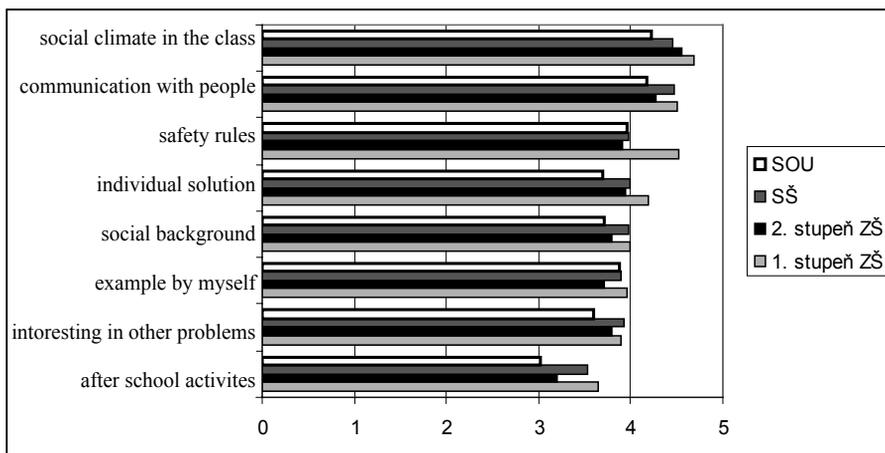


The survey results show that the respondents (class teachers) value creating good social climate in the class (4.5 on the 1–5 scale) as factor supporting the pupils’ health most.

The next factors: appropriate communication with the pupils (4.37), keeping safety rules, warning against injuries (4.1), individual solutions of the pupil’s academic problems (3.97), interest in social background of the pupil and communication with parents (3.88), teacher as a role-model of lifestyle (3.86), interest in other pupil’s problems, active share in their solutions (3.81), recommending and/or creating after-school activities of pupils (3.36).

Views on the class teacher’s contribution to the pupil’s health depending on the school type

The class teachers’ responses show significant differences depending on the type of school. E.g., non-parametric dispersion test results (Kruskal–Wallis test) indicate good social climate in the class as most appreciated by lower-primary school teachers, then by upper-primary teachers, secondary school teachers, and vocational school teachers, which corresponds indirectly with the age of the pupils/students (degree of their physical, mental, and social maturity).



H1: Class teachers of different types of school attribute different significance to the areas which could contribute to health of pupils/students

We have formulated zero and alternative hypotheses on the correlation between the views of class teachers on the ways contributing to health of pupils and the types of school where the class teachers work.

H_0 = There is no correlation between the number of class teachers responses on the questions and the type of their school

H_A = There is correlation between the number of class teachers responses on the questions and the type of their school.

Non-parametric dispersion test results (Kruskal–Wallis test) comparing several statistical averages led to partial rejection of zero hypothesis about no differences in the class teachers' responses on particular questions and the type of their school. Non-parametric dispersion test results do indicate statistically significant differences in the class teachers' responses, in particular, on recommending and/or creating after-school activities of pupils, keeping safety rules and warning against potential injuries, creating good social climate in the class, and appropriate communication (see Střelec–Krátká, 2006; Krátká, 2007).

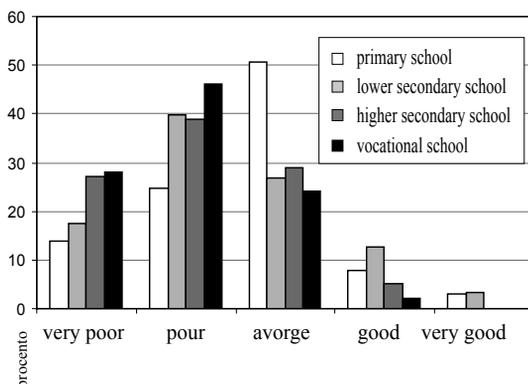
Class teachers' views on the financial reward (pay increment) for their work

Question: How do you view current financial reward for the class teacher's work?

very poor – poor – average – good – very good

21 percent of surveyed class teachers view their current financial reward very poor, 37% poor, and 33% average. Only for 7% of class teachers current financial reward is good and about 2 percent of class teachers find financial reward very good. The average value is 2.30 (on 1–5 scale).

Views on the class teacher's current financial reward depending on the school type



Current financial reward (pay increment) for the class teacher's work is viewed by the class teachers as bad (average value 2.30 on the 1–5 scale). We have adopted a hypothesis that the class teachers of different types of schools have different points of view on the current financial reward (pay increment) for their work. The lower-primary school class teachers (51 %) view their pay increment as average and are contented with them. The least contentment with their financial reward (pay increment) is expressed by secondary and vocational school teachers. We have rejected the hypothesis that the class teachers with different length of work experience have different views on current financial reward (pay increment) for their class teacher's work. Partially, we have adopted the hypothesis that male class teachers are of different opinions on financial reward for their class teacher's work than female class teachers. 33 % male class teachers view their financial reward very poor contrasting with 18 % of female class teachers. According to the opinion of surveyed teachers, the appropriate financial amount should reach CZK 2,000 (current pay increment for the class teacher's work reaches on average CZK 500–600 in the Czech Republic). We have rejected the hypothesis that the class teachers

from different types of school have different views on the appropriate financial reward (pay increment) for their class teacher's work

Particular (local) conditions for the class teacher's work have not been looked at within the scope of our research. The findings thus do not enable us to examine, e.g., into what extent the class teachers' responses were affected by number of pupils/students in the class, number of lessons spent with their pupils/students by class teachers, turnover of class teachers, level of successfulness of traditional and/or non-traditional class teacher–parent cooperation strategies, etc. These issues plus some others will come within the scope of our future research activities. Nevertheless, the survey findings have certain value pointing to the significance of the class teacher's work which has been attributed to it at present.

PODMÍNKY PRO PRÁCI TŘÍDNÍCH UČITELŮ PŘI OVLIVŇOVÁNÍ ZDRAVÉHO ROZVOJE ŽÁKŮ

Abstrakt: Příspěvek je sondou do podmínek pro činnosti třídních učitelů na základních a středních školách. Cílem studie bylo zjistit, jak je třídními učiteli reflektována míra náročnosti této jejich funkce, v čem vidí těžiště její náročnosti a jak se dívají na stávající finanční ohodnocení za funkci třídního učitele. V textu studie jsou použity faktografické údaje, z nichž některé byly již publikovány v rámci výzkumného záměru PdF MU Brno MSM002162421 Škola a zdraví pro 21. století.

Klíčová slova: třídní učitel, legislativní východiska, míra pedagogické náročnosti, faktory zdravého rozvoje, finanční ohodnocení.