

SOCIAL CLIMATE OF SEVENTH-GRADE PUPILS

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Abstract: *Authors compensation deal with comparing school climate Seventh two classes in the academic year 2006/2007. Seeking diversity and conformity assessment of climate pupils between grade selection with a focus on mathematics and science, and the normal class. In the research will verify the methodology to other seventh grade, especially value projective methods, collages, which also used in research. In particular the work of the questionnaire used CES and Test tree and collage followed by an interview with each pupil. Worked with a combined methodological approach, which receive data according to the principles of quantitative and qualitative approach. Research was attended by 40 of respondents aged 12,6–14,5 years. The results confirmed the original hypotheses about the diversity of cohesion, cooperation and the interests of pupils and the selection of normal classes. The authors are aware of a small degree of generalisation of the results and consider their research for the probe into the issue differently composite classes.*

Key words: *academic self-concept, backmarker, behavioural norms in school, cliqueness, context of schooling, educational attainment, lingo, school policy, spatial proximity, student accomplishment, cohesion, discontent*

1. Pupils differentiation

There are 3–10 % of gifted pupils in the population. Talent is usually defined as a group of abilities allowing a person to achieve results above the average of the population. To provide for their maximum development, it is necessary to approach these children differently. Thanks to different quality and quantity of their talent, gifted children need a combination of different forms of work and differentiation directly during the school day.

1.1 Inner Differentiation

Inner differentiation is built on the idea of accommodating teaching of a heterogeneous group of students to suit every member of the group. It is a way to provide gifted children with specific care without selecting (excluding) them. The way and amount

of support of gifted children in the frame of non-selective class is up to the teacher. There are the following possibilities:

- preparation of an individual plan made-to-measure every pupil,
- an offer of elective subjects (courses, activities) at school,
- problem tasks,
- projects,
- preparation of a project plans and groups involving students irrespective their grade,
- involvement of gifted students as “assistants” to pupils requiring extra help,
- work on competitions,
- individual work using e-learning methods,
- setting up of differentiated groups within classes and particular subjects.

1.2 Outer Differentiation

Outer differentiation means dividing pupils into homogeneous groups, for example on the basis of their intellectual abilities, kind of their talent and so on. Special classes (schools) are being created in this way.

Tomáš Houška (2007) defines these forms of care for gifted children:

Creation of special classrooms

It is a classroom for children whose gift enables them to work faster. The faster pace of work allows time for activities and topics that cannot be covered in non-selective classrooms. Presumably, this class will soon be ahead of the other classes. Furthermore, if the number and order of hours stays the same, at the end of fourth grade the level of the students will match with normal fifth grade pupils and these pupils will be prepared to skip one grade (and eventually go to eight-year grammar school). When establishing and running such a class, one has to be prepared for similar difficulties as mentioned concerning specialized school.

Faster and slower groups in different subjects

This solution is similar to the preceding one, but less radical and conflict. The traditional class structure remains unchanged but it splits for a number of subjects. Let us give an example of math – both classes A and B split into faster and slower groups. The two faster groups create one class and the slower groups create the other. This solution eliminates the criticism that gifted pupils from specialized classes loose contact with their peers.

Another advantage is lower tension accompanying the selection of pupils into these groups and also later entering to such a group is not that problematic. However, significant demands of this organisation are considered a disadvantage.

It is of course possible to combine these possibilities. We can establish a specialized class for a particular subject and in some grades pupils might be allowed to attend classes in a higher grade. For other subjects, they would split into groups.

A combination of these possibilities might help to save intellectual and personal development of a number of gifted children to whom school is boring, uninteresting and banal.

Mareš (2004) in his article published in a collective volume “Psycho-social Climate of School” considers an outer differentiation to be of great influence on social climate at schools as well as classes. “Eight-year and six-year grammar schools were established and students with better educational capabilities enter these schools in the period when the majority of pupils attend primary schools. The leaving of these pupils takes place at the end of lower primary school (in the case of eight-year grammar schools) or during higher primary school (in the case of six-year grammar schools) (p. 27).

On one hand this process means that the best pupils, “motors” leave the higher grades, on the other hand, the difference between pupils diminishes. Previously, all these pupils were in the shade of two or three best pupils, after they have left, this position is occupied by those formerly second. The teaching speed lowers; however, the quality of education is not affected. The quantity of acquired knowledge decreases. On the contrary, the quality of knowing (its depth) rises in majority of students.

At schools in the Czech Republic, the most common solution is establishment of selective classes with a certain focus centralizing gifted pupils. Such a division brings along specific features connected to both “original” and new “elite” classes.

Another structure of pupils in the “original” classes changes the social climate of the class. Pupils who leave the classes are very often those acting as a model with which the capabilities and desired behaviour of others were compared. Average and weaker pupils remain in the class. A higher concentration of pupils with potential education and behavioural problems is observed. This fact is connected to lower activity, independence, inquisitiveness, creativity of pupils and often even cooperation. The teacher has to put greater effort to achieve acceptable results. The change of classes after leaving of gifted pupils leads to disturbance of the class climate influencing learning and teaching. Teaching methods that proved themselves to be effective and leading to set goals suddenly fail. Teachers often resign after a few initial complications and instead of finding new methods they develop a negative attitude towards the “original” classes. Teachers’ emotions towards such a class are often considerably colder or even negative. They are aware of the fact that these children have lower educational potential and thus their expectations and demands on pupils decrease. There is a risk of “self-fulfilling expectations” when the teachers expect bad results and deal with the “original” classes in such a way as to fulfil their expectations.

The division of class is not easy for pupils themselves. Their leaving to another class means disruption of friendship. However, the feeling of being “a worse class” has

much more negative influence on pupils. The whole situation is worsened by teachers' behaviour showing their negative opinion on the class. Therefore, it is not surprising that pupils lose motivation and endeavour to extricate from the prejudice. They lose a need to show that they can achieve much more and some of them draw back, others provoke the teacher, bully weaker classmates or concentrate on hobbies instead of school. This type of pupils' behaviour enforces teachers' belief that they have no potential for learning, no perspective and therefore it is useless trying to help them. This closes the vicious circle. To open and destroy the circle, great effort of professional – teachers, school and counselling psychologists and others involved in teacher preparation – is necessary.

It should be mentioned that the situation is not easy for those in selective class either. They were used to being among the best ones, respected, supported and praised. Out of the sudden, they find out that there are more pupils with the same abilities and some of them are even better. They lose their privileged position and have to fight for it again but this time the competition is bigger. They often perceive other classmates as rivals. Especially in the initial period, competition rules over cooperation in the class. There are bigger demands put on pupils and they might not cope with them and thus experience failure.

Research

Research goals

The research dealt with social climate in a selective and non-selective class on a higher primary school. The raised data were then compared in order to find out which class has a better climate. Our main focus was relationship between students, pupils' interest in education and their orientation on assigned tasks. We also tried to answer a question whether the difference of climate in non-selective and selective class is more remarkable in boys' or girls' point of view.

Place of research

The research was carried out in Brno, Primary School **Křídlovická 30b**, university school of the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno. The school was attended by 647 pupils in 13 classes of the lower and 15 classes of the higher primary school. The curriculum is given by the educational programme Primary School and at the higher primary school also by the educational programme Primary School with Extended Mathematics, Science and IT Education. The school is a member of the Association of Czech Dalton Schools. Furthermore, it is a member of the world organisation Dalton International, as a pilot school. The school has an active cooperation with partner primary schools in the Czech Republic and abroad.

There is a rich tradition of classes with extended education of mathematics, science and IT for pupils of 6th to 9th grade. The timetables contain an extra lesson of mathematics, physics and chemistry and there is also additional IT education. Pupils of

these classes achieve very good results in mathematics and science competitions. The good atmosphere is also supported by traditional math-oriented stays and several-day trips.

Methods

Several research methods were used in the data raising process. In the initial phase, a questionnaire and a projective method were used to determine the social situation – a Tree Test. Consequently, we worked with the children in art classes where they were creating collages “Our Class” which have then been discussed with every pupil.

Questionnaire

The **CES Questionnaire (Classroom Environment Scale)** was used in the research. It was adopted by Mareš and Lašek for the use in Czech schools.

The questionnaire is aimed at pupils of higher primary schools and pupils of different types of secondary schools. The aimed age group is 12–18.

The Czech version contains 23 items¹ focusing on 6 variables of the class climate:

1. Teacher’s help to students (questions no. 3, 9, 15, and 20)
2. Pupils’ focus on tasks (questions no. 1, 4, 10, 16, and 17)
3. Relationship of pupils in the class (questions no. 2, 5, 8, and 14)
4. Interest in lessons (questions no. 7, 12, 13, and 21)
5. Quiet and order in the class (questions no. 11, 19 and 22)
6. Clarity of rules (questions no. 6, 18, and 23)

Projective techniques

A projective technique was used in order to ensure higher reliability of the measurement of pupils’ feelings about their class and their evaluation of their position in the class. A picture of a tree with people in different positions was presented to them (see attachment 1). Pupils were to colour one person with whom they can identify and that shows their feelings about the class.

A technique of collage was used in the surveyed classes as well. The pupils were expressing their opinion on the topic “our class” in the form of a collage. As the technique offers a wide space for expression of opinions, it was necessary to have a free interview with authors about the collages afterwards. The interviews were recorded. Pupils expressed freely about things they subjectively considered important. There was no beforehand prepared set of questions, the pupils were asked only questions that somehow clarified or specified the topics mentioned.

¹ The English version contains 24 items, however, the adopted Czech version left out question 20 that was not included in any of the factors in neither Czech nor Slovak factor analysis.

Respondents

Non-selective class – VII.C

Phase 1 of research (filling of a questionnaire and a Tree Test): 20 pupils (9 girls and 11 boys)

Phase 2 of research (collage) : 20 pupils (8 girls and 12 boys)

Selective class – VII.D

Phase 1 of research (filling of a questionnaire and a Tree Test): 20 pupils (6 girls and 14 boys)

Phase 2 of research (collage): 23 pupils (6 girls and 17 boys)

The second phase of the research was done after a certain time distance from the first one. Therefore, we have not managed to acquire data on all three phases from every participant.

Results of research

Questionnaire

Table no.1: RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY VII.C (non-selective class)

NAME OF VARIABLE	MIN.	AVERAGE	MAX.	MEAN	MEDIAN
Teacher's help to students	4	8	12	8,85	8
Pupils' focus on tasks	5	10	15	7,65	7
Relationship of pupils in the class	4	8	12	7,10	6
Interest in lessons	4	8	12	6,90	6
Quiet and order in the class	3	6	9	3,80	3
Clarity of rules	3	6	9	7,40	7

Table no.2: RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY VII.D (selective class)

NAME OF VARIABLE	MIN.	AVERAGE	MAX.	MEAN	MEDIAN
Teacher's help to students	4	8	12	10,59	12
Pupils' focus on tasks	5	10	15	11,30	11
Relationship of pupils in the class	4	8	12	10,20	10
Interest in lessons	4	8	12	8,95	10
Quiet and order in the class	3	6	9	7,00	7
Clarity of rules	3	6	9	7,65	9

Graph no.2: Results of questionnaire survey - non-selective (VII.C) and selective (VII.D) class

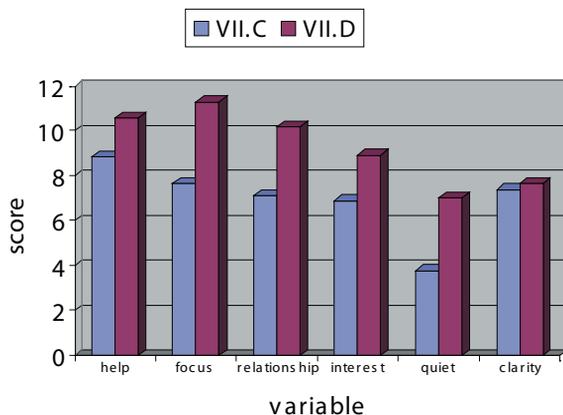
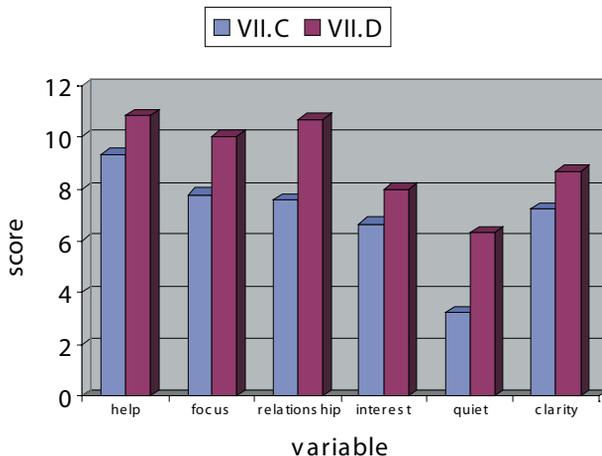


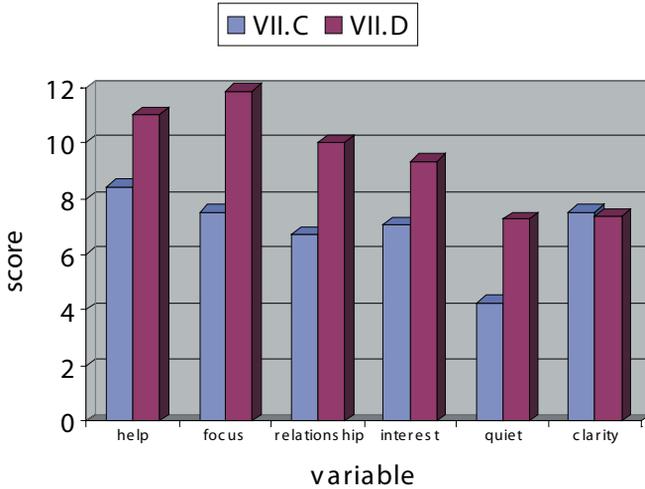
Table no.3: Results of questionnaire survey – girls vs. boys

NAME OF VARIABLE	AVERAGE GIRLS VII.C	AVERAGE GIRLS VII.D	AVERAGE BOYS VII.C	AVERAGE BOYS VII.D
Teacher's help to students	9,33	10,83	8,45	11,00
Pupils' focus on tasks	7,78	10,00	7,54	11,86
Relationship of pupils in the class	7,56	10,67	6,72	10,00
Interest in lessons	6,67	8,00	7,09	9,36
Quiet and order in the class	3,22	6,33	4,27	7,29
Clarity of rules	7,22	8,67	7,54	7,36

Graph no.3: Results of questionnaire survey - girls



Graph no. 4: Results of questionnaire survey – boys



Results of the Tree Test

VII.C

Out of 20 pupils taking the test 8 of them characterized themselves as a person that is somehow excluded from the class, does not belong to the peer group and has problems in making friendship. Furthermore, the position of the person reveals not optimal relationship with classmates. The above mentioned problems are usually observable in the students' collages as well. There can be found quarrels, rumours, dispraise and fear of difference.

VII.D

The same number of pupils (20) completed the test in the selective class, however, only 3 of them considered themselves to be a person standing out of the class. Only two of them worked on collages and their attitude is not distinctively reflected in them. Unfortunately, one girl who described herself the most negatively of all respondents – as thrown from a tree (excluded form the class) – was not working on the collage due to an illness. However, even in the questionnaire one can observe lower score.

Results of collages and interviews about collages

When analysing interviews with pupils about their collages, we picked features related to the class climate and divided them into these categories:

VII.C (non-selective class):

Class splitting into groups – majority of pupils mentioned that their class splits into a number of smaller groups that do not communicate with each other very well.

Brands of clothing – One third of pupils said that the brand of clothes, shoes and mobile phones is very important in the class. Those who have them are showing off and that is unpleasant for pupils who do not have money.

Girls – ladies – Six pupils pointed to the fact that some girls care about their look excessively and unnecessarily try to look older than they are.

Boys – clowns, butches

Childishness – Marking some classmates as infants was quite common.

Naughtiness – Some pupils admit that their class often bothers teachers.

Rumours – A few pupils complained about the rumours in the class.

Alcohol and cigarettes – One quarter of pupils mentioned that their classmates smoke and drink alcohol. However, majority of them does not agree with such behaviour.

Rows, fights – I found out that radical exchanges of opinion are nothing rare in this class. They even fight sometimes.

Lack of interest in school – There were some pupils that openly admitted that they do not enjoy school.

Endeavour to get good marks – The majority of pupils agree that being average is enough.

Competitiveness – There is no rivalry concerning school results, only in sports and things possessed.

Cooperation – There was no consensus concerning cooperation. Some pupils took a view that they help each other while others thought the contrary.

Bullying – There is bullying in the class, but no one wants to do anything about it.

Danger – An opinion appeared that the class is dangerous, not because pupils would threaten each other but because they are mean.

Laziness – They are not much into learning.

Change of opinion – A change of opinion and re-formation of groups might appear sometimes.

Community – When it comes to it, they are able to stick together as a class against others.

VII.D (selective class):

Friendship – Pictures expressing a strong friendship, especially among boys, appeared very often. The friendship developed even outside the classroom.

Boys vs. girls – Almost a half of the respondents complained about bad communication between boys and girls.

Groups – An opinion that the class is divided into groups - more precisely 2 groups of girls and 2 groups of boys appeared in this class as well.

Leaving of classmates – Some of the pupils are troubled by the fact that their friends they will go to a new school at the beginning of the next school year and new pupils will come and integrate into the class.

Naughtiness – They can bother their teachers from time to time.

Endeavour to get good marks – They are interested in good school results and try to achieve the best marks.

Competitiveness – There is no competition concerning school results, only in sports.

Pushing off – There is one boy in the class whom the other boys do not take as a friend.

Childishness – Some pupils were marked as infants.

Gift – Pupils are aware of being in a selective class. They consider themselves as brighter than others and feel that there are higher demands being put on them.

Fun – They have fun in the class, but sometimes they laugh at some classmate.

Problems in communication – They have problems in finding consensus when making decisions together.

Rows – There are conflicts.

Feelings in the class – They feel comfortable, well.

Apart from that, these pupils spoke for the whole class about what pupils like (drinks and food) and what they enjoy doing (sports, hobbies).

However, there was one girl in the class who evaluated the class in a different way, compared with her class mates, more negatively. When explaining the collage she described the class as split into a few groups which do not communicate together and secretly fight against each other. They cannot agree on anything. Each group has its secrets that will not give away. They all pretend to be friends, however, the reality

is different. Even though being friends together, they do not understand even their best friends. She does not feel well in the class a bit.

Opinions and attitudes of this girl were derived from her personal experience and they do not seem to influence the overall classroom climate.

Interpretation of results

Non-selective class

The data acquired by the questionnaire show that in the non-selective class there have been achieved average (or slightly above average) results only in the items clarity of rules during lessons, taking exams and writing tests. Presumably, the reason for this result is the fact that in teachers' point of view, this class is a problematic one and therefore they feel exact explanation of rules necessary to handle the class better.

Teachers' help to students can be labelled as average as well. The other variables achieved results below average. The variables relationship between students in the class and interest in lessons were slightly below average. Worse results were found in the variable focus on tasks and considerably below average was perception of quiet and order in the class.

The Tree Test showed that 40 % of students feel that they are not a stable part of the group and perceive their position in the group as problematic.

The collages show that in the area of *interpersonal relationships* one can observe negative phenomena such as rumours, rows, fights, bullying and splitting into groups that are not communicating together. However, as a class they are able to unify when dealing with others.

As for the area of *school work*, they are not very ambitious, feel no need to compete, they rather help each other. They are not interested in the school work too much and do not want to study much.

In the area of *behaviour* they admit being naughty often, having class clowns, butches as well as ones behaving like infants. Some girls try to look older. They judge others by their look and things possessed quite often.

Selective class

All results in this class achieved average score or slightly above average. Teachers' help to students received the best evaluation. It was followed by relationship between students, clarity of rules, focus on tasks and interest in classes. As average can be considered evaluation of quiet and order in the class.

The Tree Test showed a negative evaluation of one's position in the group in 15 % of pupils.

In the area of *interpersonal relationships*, the collages revealed strong friendships, especially between boys, but not between all members of the group. There is one boy in the class who is not accepted by others. Even in this class splitting into groups is observable. These groups do not feel need to communicate with others. Furthermore, a barrier in communication between boys and girls was found. Pupils

mentioned rows and problems when reaching consensus. As for the area of *school work*, these pupils are aware of being in a selective class and having to meet higher demands. They try to fulfil the demands and have good results; however, they do not compete. The area of *behaviour* in the class – some of them are childish, they are sometimes naughty to the teacher, they have fun, but sometimes by laughing at other classmates.

Conclusion

We attempted to make an overview of our findings on class climate. Indisputably, class climate considerably influences pupils not only during lessons but also after school as class is one of the most important environments where the process of socialization takes place. Experience the child gains in the class influences its perception of the world. Therefore, it is vitally important to create the most pleasant class climate with highly positive relationship between pupils, their high interest in lessons and quality help and support from teachers.

The aim of the research was to find out whether such a climate is more likely in non-selective or selective classes. Results acquired by three different research methods show that better climate can be found in selective classes. Therefore, one could say that creation of such classes and selection of pupils is worthy. Gifted students are given more attention and better care while experiencing better class climate. Certainly, this is positive; however, it has its other side as well. Class climate in non-selective classes is worse because the pupils are aware of its “averageness” and pupils that pushed the class forward left. These pupils have feeling that there is no need to try to achieve better results. During our visits in the school we heard teachers’ explanation of pupils’ possible future failure because they are not “the clever ones”. Pupils must have felt their opinion and that certainly has not supported their self-confidence and motivation. Therefore, the advantages experienced by pupils of selective classes might be achieved at the expense of average pupils.

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SOCIÁLNÍ KLIMA ŽÁKŮ SEDMÝCH TŘÍD

Souhrn: Autoři příspěvku se zabývají porovnáním školního klimatu dvou sedmých tříd ve školním roce 2006/2007. Hledají rozdílnost a shodu hodnocení klimatu žáky mezi výběrovou třídou se zaměřením na matematiku a informatiku a běžnou třídou. V předvýzkumu si ověřili metodiku na jiné sedmé třídě, zejm. výpovědní hodnotu projektivní metody, koláže, kterou ve výzkumu také použili. Při konkrétní práci použili dotazník CES a Test stromu a koláž s následným rozhovorem s každým žákem. Pracovali tedy s kombinovaným metodologickým přístupem, kdy získávali data podle zásad kvantitativního i kvalitativního přístupu. Výzkumu se zúčastnilo 40 respondentů ve věku 12, –14,5let. Výsledky potvrdily původní hypotézy o rozdílnosti soudržnosti, kooperaci a zájmech žáků výběrových a běžných tříd. Autoři si uvědomují malou míru zobecnitelnosti výsledků a považují svůj výzkum za sondu do problematiky rozdílně složených tříd.

Klíčová slova: školní sebepojetí, jedinec bez šancí, normy chování ve škole, vytváření klik, kontext vzdělávání, školní prospěch, žargon, koncepce dané školy, prostorová blízkost, výsledky žáků, soudržnost, nespokojenost