

SOCIAL HEALTH IN TERMS OF STUDENTS OF EDUCATIONAL COURSES

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Abstract: *Developing student personality to enhance key competences and positive interpersonal relationships among classmates can still be a serious problem in present-day schools. The article gives a general analysis of the concept of social health. It gives a detailed account of social health characteristics from the point of view of the development of students' social skills and optimum interpersonal relationships between individual players in school education. The issues are approached from the viewpoint of perceptions and opinions of social health of students from primary and secondary schools. Students' opinions were ascertained using a questionnaire survey.*

Keywords: *social health, interpersonal relationships in the classroom*

1. Basic Characteristics of a Social Health Concept

One of the areas of current health care approaches concerns Social Health undoubtedly. Along with physical and mental health, it forms one of the three pillars of most definitions of health. This could be substantiated by the general definition of health by the World Health Organization (WHO): “*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*”¹

The issues of social health can be seen from several areas; one of them is related to socio-economic aspects. These aspects are based on the belief that coping with high morbidity and mortality it is necessary to systematically exploit the elements of social control, such as law and legislation, education, economic instruments, mass media, etc. From that point of view, the concept of social health can be characterized as a condition in which people live with the ability to care for their health, including the use of the health system.

Another view of the social health concept may be approximated by the idea of W. A. Russell, who believes that “*human health is subject to not only personality-physiological factors but also how the man can relate to other people and cope with social institutions.*”²

Quoted concept of social health contains conditions which relate not only to the socio-health system but mainly to the personality of man as a social being. This implies that an individual needs optimal interpersonal relationships, managed by their own so-

¹ <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zdrav%C3%AD>. N.p., 20 Sept. Web. 20 Sept. 2010.

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/social-health>. N.p., 20 Sept. Web. 20 Sept. 2010.

cial skills, in order to maintain his/her well being. Many authors, e.g. R. Kohoutek, approach the social health in similar manner.

From this perspective, the social health is most frequently defined as: peace in the family, at work, in society; the optimal social communication, peaceful social relationships, etc.³ In global point of view, the concept of social health can be understood as the ability of man to be happy and make others happy. This means interacting and communicating with other people, stand up in society and work at it. It is also the ability to relax and experience life for all it's worth.⁴

Health problems and stress are closely intertwined. In relation to issues of social health, it is necessary to mention that social stress and social stressors significantly affect individual life satisfaction and mental health, but also affect physical health. A man is a product and a creator of social relationships, as well as a contact point for people surrounding him/her from birth to death. The quality of interpersonal relationships as well as the level of individual communication skills, and the possibility of its positive influence, is unquestionably part of the key factors of addressing social health issues.

In relation to issues of social stress in workplace, we need to recall the European guide to work related stress, issued in 2000. At that time, the annual economic cost of work related stress in EU countries was estimated at €20 billion Euros. Worker stress considerably contributed to that sum. Therefore, the European Commission itself encourages corporations within the EU to realize the impact of the situation and call to act. Every one of the EU countries stepped up to the recommendations of the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC their own way. Some countries are paying increased attention to prevention of psychosocial risks. E.g. in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, employers are responsible for the overall psychosocial effect of stressors on their employees, and mitigation of their negative impact on mental health.⁵

Whether we regard the school environment as a type of work environment for students and teachers, we can conclude that social health is a current topic of educational activities in terms of primary and secondary schools. Based on changes in education curriculum, it is necessary to consider a school as a place where social skills of students are developed and the optimum conditions for full-fledged development of interpersonal relationships are made.

In the next part of this contribution we will focus on the characteristics of social health in terms of development of student social skills and optimal interpersonal relationships among single factors within school education.

1.1 The Development of Students' Social Skills as Part of the Promotion of Social Health in Terms of School

Social skills are an important element of competent behaviour in social situations. As mentioned in the introduction, a good relationship with others is one of many important aspects of social well-being. For this reason, social skill development should be considered a part of essential education goals in primary and secondary schools.

³ <http://slovník-cizích-slov.abz.cz/web.php/slovo/socialni-zdravi>

⁴ <http://www.joga.cz/system/4-druhy-zdravi/>

⁵ Sapirs, M. Stres přípravě. Praha : Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů, 2003.

In short, we will focus on the definition of social skills. Social skills are usually understood as readiness through experience and training to act correctly in certain social situations.

V. Švec understands social skills as a *“the most complex competence of subjects that interact within a spectrum of difficult social situations, i.e. to comprehend situations and be able to solve problems in the most optimal way (optimal in terms of individual, also in terms of co-participants, and partners in a social situation).”*⁶

Social skills are defined by J. Praško and H. Prašková more specifically. This author couple describe social skills as *“human capability to express one’s needs in a natural way, to talk about his/her feelings and intentions, and to take into account the needs of others... Social skills are needed in working activities: We need to be able to settle matters with the authorities; to find a job; to get along with superiors and subordinates... We need them also in our personal life. Essentially, for example, to be able to notify a close person of how we feel about him/her, what we need from him/her, to be able to listen to him/her when he/she suffers, to encourage him/her when we feel he/she needs it.”*⁷ From definitions given, it is clear that social skills are related to many areas of human social behaviour.

Komárková R., I. Salměnik, J. Výrost assign a list of social skills that can be classified as socio-competent behaviour of individuals.⁸ According to these authors, among social skills are ranked: social perception (intuition, self-reflection), social communication (verbal communication, communication between people, individual communication skills, active listening), social interaction in a group (cooperation and competence in pairs, teamwork), conflicts and its management (understanding of the process of conflict, behavioural styles in interpersonal conflict), assertive behaviour (compliments, receiving criticism and criticising, management of affective attack, rejection and assessment of requirements, compromises), coping with stressful situations in a group setting (strategies of coping with stress, strategies of coping with deprivation and frustration), development of social creativity (development of social creativity in interpersonal relationships). We can conclude that the results of the survey constitute for a competent basis for students to achieve social well being.

*The requirement for student social skills development in terms of primary and secondary education is embedded in the Framework Educational Programmes. Health Education falls into the fields of education where student social skills are expected to evolve the most. In the educational field, the following anticipated outcomes are formulated: “he/she respects the acceptable rules of coexistence among peers and partners: he/she contributes to creation of good interpersonal relationships through positive communication and cooperation; he/she uses own...social skills for regeneration of organism; he/she is polite to the opposite sex; he/she applies learned social skills and behavior patterns during contact with social-pathological phenomena in school and beyond ...; he/she evaluates the potential **manipulative influence of peers** based on his/her knowledge*

⁶ Švec, Vlastimil. *Klíčové dovednosti ve vyučování a výcviku*. Brno : Masarykova univerzita, 1998. Chapter

⁶ Sociální dovednosti a jejich rozvíjení, p. 77.

⁷ Praško, Ján. and Prašková, Hana. *Aservitivou proti stresu*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 1996. Chapter 2, Komunikace, stres a sociální zdatnost, p. 13.

⁸ Komárková, Růžena., Slaměnik, Ivan., and Výrost, Jozef.; ed. *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie III*. Praha : Grada 2001. Chapter

and experience..., etc. ⁹ *Based on the list of expected results above, we can conclude that social health in primary and secondary schools is supported by the curriculum point of view. A question remains: what is the extent of fulfilment of expected results on quantitative and qualitative terms in real-world school conditions?*

1.2 Optimal Development of Interpersonal Relationships in the Classroom as Part of the Maintenance of Social Health

Optimal relationships in the classroom are some of important assumptions for effective teaching of students, in regards to **relationships among students, and among teachers and students**. Quality relationships are part of so called social environment in the classroom. According to J. Mares, the notion of social environment in the classroom indicates „*a long term phenomena, typical of a certain grade and a certain teacher for several months or years. Their creators are: students from the entire class room, groups of students from a particular class room, individual students, as well as a group of teachers teaching in the classroom, and finally, teachers as individuals.*” ¹⁰

Based on the diagnostic questionnaire “Our Classroom”, V. Holeček¹¹ outlines the social environment in the classroom under the following views:

1. Satisfaction in the classroom – student relationships to their class, degree of satisfaction, well-being in the classroom.
2. Conflicts among students – so called squabble, from tension over disputes, fights to bullying.
3. Competition in the classroom - a competitive relationship, level of effort to stand out, an experience of failure.
4. Difficulty learning - experience of school demands, how hard, difficult, or uninteresting the subject is.
5. Class cohesion - friendly or hostile relationships between children, the level of class community.
6. Order in the classroom - classroom discipline, the degree of cooperative behavior.

Development of optimal social climate in the classroom as a social well being of students in school is aptly characterized in Programme of Health Support at School. In the chapter „Social Welfare“ means were given by which the desired order in the classroom could be achieved. The chapter states: „An important way to create a comfortable social environment is the development of humanistic attitudes as part of education and the teachers’ and children’s personal development. These attitudes include, especially: respect, trust, and tolerance; recognition, participation and empathy; openness (willingness), and will to cooperate and assist.”¹²

⁹ Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání. Praha : VÚP. Chapter 4, Klíčové kompetence, p. 14.

¹⁰ Čáp, Jan., and Mareš, Jiří. Psychologie pro učitele. Praha : Portál, 2001. Chapter 19, Klima školní třídy, p. 568.

¹¹ Holeček, Václav. Aplikovaná psychologie pro učitele II. Plzeň : ZČU, 2001. Chapter 1, Sociální interakce ve škole, p. 12.

¹² Havlínová, Miluše., es. Program podpory zdraví ve škole. Praha : Portál, 1998. Chapter II. Obsah programu podpory zdraví ve škole, p. 94.

Development of humanistic attitudes in interpersonal relations in a classroom is a long and sometimes very difficult matter. For example, cooperative learning belongs to the organizational form of education that can aid this project. In addition to these organizational forms of education, a direct systematic work with a class group is employed to the development of humanistic attitudes among students. For this purpose, so-called introductory courses are currently widely implemented. This is a tutorial that is aimed at creating optimal conditions for creation of interaction in the group, induction, and support of these interactions. Through this program, students have the opportunity to get more information about others, understand some of motives for behavior of others, use incentives to achieve the optimal level of mutual communication and cooperation. At the same time there is the development of students' social skills that are necessary for full integration into peer and social groups.¹³

In conclusion to this issue, we can say that a systematic and continuous work with a class group is an important prerequisite for the optimal development of relationships in the classroom as a part of the promotion of social health. It is this assumption that is neglected in a school practice, often under the influence of other „important“ learning tasks.

2. Social Health from the Standpoint of Teaching and Education Students - Research Investigation

Basic characteristics of the research:

The undertaken investigation is only an orientation. Its significance lies in the views of students of the teaching and education field who view the concepts of social well being in terms of school. The results of the survey should be seen as an impetus for further reflection and discussion.

A description of the research investigation:

Students of The Pedagogical Faculty of University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen, who are studying Teacher Training for Basic Schools and Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Education should respond in writing to the question relating to issues of social health in terms of school. For the research, students of the aforementioned subjects were selected on the grounds that they studied using a combined study mode; therefore, all respondents were practicing teachers in primary or secondary schools.

The research investigation took place at the beginning of the Summer Semester of 2009/10 during the initial lecture of Psychology of Health class. After the question was given, students were allowed time to compose their written answers. Criteria for grading written responses were laid down on the basis of described features of social health in the previous chapter.

¹³ Svoboda, Michal. Využití sociálně psychologických technik ve školní praxi. Praha : UK (diploma paper) 2002. Chapter 6, Specifické využití strukturovaných programu založených na sociálně psychologických technikách ve školní praxi, p. 126.

Basic data from the undertaken investigation:

Number of respondents: 42 (Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching) – average length of teaching experience: 6 years
46 (Teacher Training for First Grade) - an average length of teaching experience: 4 years

Formulation of questions: *“How do you envision the concept of social well being and how can it be developed in terms of school?”*
Time to formulate the answer: about 30 minutes.

Criteria for analysis of the responses:

- the range of responses - maximum, minimum, and average number of rows of size A4;
- text contains a response that does not correspond to any concept of social health;
- text contains responses relating to the development of students’ social skills at a general level, for example, the word social skill occurs without further description;
- text contains responses relating to the development of students’ social skills at a particular level, for example, there are words that describe social skills in detail;
- text contains methods and forms of developing students’ social skills;
- text contains responses relating to the optimal development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom at a general level, for example, the phrase interpersonal relationships in the classroom occurs without further description;
- text contains responses relating to the optimal development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom at a specific level, for example, words that describe the interpersonal relationships in the classroom occur in detail;
- text contains methods and forms of developing interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

The results of the research investigation

The Basic Question:
“How do you envision the concept of social health and how can it be developed in terms of school?”

Criterion: the range of responses - the maximum, minimum, and average number of rows of size A4		
<i>the maximum number of rows</i>	<i>the minimum number of rows</i>	<i>the average number of rows</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>		
52	14	28
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>		
38	9	22

Criterion: text contains the responses that does not correspond to any conception of social health			
<i>The number of respondents in total:</i>	<i>The response contains only informatik that corresponds to the concept of social health</i>	<i>The response contains only information that do not meet the concept of social health</i>	<i>The response contains information that both correspond and do not correspond the concept of social health</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>			
46	43	1	2
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>			
42	36	3	3

Criterion: text contains responses relating to the development of students' social skills at a general or particular level			
<i>The number of respondents in total:</i>	<i>Response relating to the development of students' social skills - at a general level</i>	<i>Response relating to the development of students' social skills - at a particular level</i>	<i>Response that do not relate to the development of students' social</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>			
46	26	17	3
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>			
42	27	10	5

Criterion: text contains methods and forms of developing students' social skills		
<i>The number of respondents in total:</i>	<i>Response that contains methods and forms of developing students' social skills</i>	<i>Response that does not contain methods and forms of developing students' social skills</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>		
46	21	25
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>		
42	12	30

Criterion: text contains responses relating to the development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom at a general or particular level			
<i>The number of respondents in total:</i>	<i>Response relating to the development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom - at a general level</i>	<i>Response relating to the development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom - at a particular level</i>	<i>Response that does not relate to the development of interpersonal relationships in a classroom</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>			
46	23	19	2
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>			
42	26	12	4

Criterion: text contains methods and forms of developing interpersonal relationships in the classroom		
<i>The number of respondents in total:</i>	<i>Response that contains methods and forms of developing interpersonal relationships in the classroom</i>	<i>Response that does not contain methods and forms of developing interpersonal relationships in the classroom</i>
<i>Field: Teacher Training for Basic School</i>		
46	22	24
<i>Field: Practical Training Teaching / Vocational Subjects Teaching</i>		
42	13	29

Conclusion of the research

Based on the survey results we can conclude that most of the students - teachers have a basic understanding of the concept of social health in terms of school. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the student teachers mostly formulated their response without any clarification or deeper understanding of the problem. The reason could be the reluctance of student teachers to respond in writing to a specific question or lack of awareness of social health.

The results of the survey show that those student teachers who described issues of social health in more detail were able to describe the methods and forms that lead to the promotion of social health in terms of school. The results of the survey are only the first step of the implementation of detailed research in primary and secondary school. It can be expected that teachers out of training will describe social health in a similar way as our respondents did, which means, without any deeper connection to real world teaching situations. Many experts believe that the implementation of methods of developing students' personality and positive interpersonal relationships in the class may still be a major problem in today's schools.

Finally, we can say that a man was born among humans, he lives among people, and he will live. If a man has more effective social skills, he will derive more satisfaction from interpersonal relationships, he will feel good among people, and his social dimensions of health will be filled.

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SOCIÁLNÍ ZDRAVÍ Z POHLEDU STUDENTŮ UČITELSKÝCH OBORŮ

Abstrakt: Rozvíjení osobnosti žáka ve smyslu klíčových kompetencí a pozitivních interpersonálních vztahů v třídním kolektivu, může být v současné škole stále velkým problémem. V příspěvku je obecně analyzován pojem sociální zdraví. Článek se podrobněji zabývá charakteristikou sociálního zdraví z hlediska rozvoje sociálních dovedností žáků a rozvoje optimálních mezilidských vztahů mezi jednotlivými aktéry školního vzdělávání. Problematika je zpracována z pohledů a názorů studentů na pojetí sociálního zdraví na základních a středních školách. Názory studentů byly zjišťovány prostřednictvím orientačního dotazníkového šetření.

Klíčová slova: sociální zdraví, interpersonální vztahy ve školní třídě