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A comparison of the attitudes and opinions of adolescents from the Czech majority and the Romany minority towards well-being and the classroom climate in their schools: An analysis of commonality and difference

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Throughout life, people are concerned with their well-being. Those who feel low or down try to improve their state of mind, whereas people who feel good try to maintain this state. Reaching and maintaining a positive frame of mind seems to be general and important concern over our whole life span. Well-being is not only individually determined, but also by the particular cultural background and by socio-historic and economical conditions with regard to the standard of living. The structure of 'subjective well-being' (SWB) will remain stable through the course of life, but the sources will change over time. We speak usually of two parts: habitual and actual. Habitual SWB can be attained through satisfying one or more innate or acquired needs and motives. In practice, this depends on temporarily active factors, attained either directly, by naturally positive, rewarding and enjoyable experiences, or indirectly, through the elimination or reduction of adverse conditions. SWB has two main elements: cognitive, in which an individual compares their present situation to an aspired, expected or ideal one, and emotional, in which are included everyday experiences of emotional states. During pupils' school life both elements have an important influence, as does the school itself. The school, especially the climate of the classroom, is a very important influence on social skills, because in class (and also in the school environment) there is active social learning, optimising interpersonal perception, raising social sensitivity and developing the skills necessary to solving interpersonal conflicts (Kovalcikova and Kresila, 2003).

Cognitive, affective and behavioural events in the classroom are fundamentally social phenomena. The social context of the classroom has both formal and informal processes. Formal processes would include the manner in which a young person was expected to perform the role of student (pupil), as defined by teachers, parents and the adult community. Informal groups, on the other hand, involve unique ways in which each classroom participant relates to others. In most classes an important aspect of the informal process is friendship and cooperation, and supportive friendship patterns enhance academic learning and influence students' subjective well-being, and not only in the school.

Our approach is based on a comparison of attitudes and opinions of adolescents from the Czech majority and the Romany minority towards well-being and classroom climate in their schools, and the relationships between these. We used two instruments: the *Berne Questionnaire of Subjective Well-Being-Young Form: BSW/Y* (Grob, 1991, 1995) and the *KLIT (Classroom Climate Questionnaire-Lašek, 2003)* on a pilot sample of 187 participants. BSW/Y describes five groups of components within well-being: positive attitudes to life, problems, somatic complains, self-esteem and the lack of depressive mood; KLIT uses three groups of components within classroom climate: supportive classroom climate, motivation towards negative work at school, and self-efficacy.

First, a short recapitulation of the situation in the Czech Republic, which is a mono-national state. Czechs are the 94% majority. The Slovaks represent the biggest minority with 3% (they are former fellow citizens of the single state of Czechoslovakia). The Slovak minority is not considered as an alien element, because of its similar language and common history. Slovaks do not feel like foreigners in the Czech Republic, and the converse is true of the Czechs in Slovakia. Other minorities form about 2 - 3%: tens of thousands of inhabitants: Germans, Polish, Hungarians and rather fewer Ukrainians and Russians. There are also about 20,000 to 30,000 Vietnamese, representing very distinct cultural minority. (Lašek and Vacek, 2003.)

The most problematic minority remains the Romany minority, due to its contradictory image in society. It is difficult to count the Romany inhabitants in the Czech Republic for two reasons. Firstly, some Romanies do not declare their origin – motives vary (usually they call themselves Czechs). Secondly, they migrate not only within the Czech Republic but also within Europe. Nevertheless, the number is estimated at around 250 000 – 300 000.

What particularly complicates the multicultural education in relation to the Romany minority?

There are certain features typical for this minority group, regardless the country where they live:

- The relative reservedness of Romany people, leading to isolation.
- The tendency to live in large groups ('big families').
- Strong cohesiveness and unity showed in relationships to the majority society.
- A tendency towards 'migratory' life for whole families.
- A lack of willingness to take part in work and employment, strongly preferring trading (in both legal and illegal goods).
- Less attention paid to education, and in particular to regular school attendance. (Lašek, Vacek, 2003; Kjaerullf, Monsen, Vacek, 2003.)

For these reasons the Ministry of Education in 1998 approved classes for fifty Romany students at a private school (more than 250 students in four grades today) founded by Dr. Rajko Djurič. The Romany Social Secondary School is located in Kolín (Lašek, Vacek, 2003) and run by a Romany organization, established in 1992 as a non-profit non-governmental organisation aiming to improve living conditions of the Romanies in the Czech Republic, particularly through culture and education. Dr. Rajko Djurič is a Romany poet, sociologist, journalist and politician from former Yugoslavia.

The school accepts students not only from the Kolín region, but from the whole Czech Republic and provides students with accommodation. Teaching staff can pay more attention to students' free time (Lašek and Vacek, 2003). The school on the one hand accepts Romany children, with their specific cognitive, affective and sensual motor characteristics (Kovalčíková *et al*, 2002), and on the other hand tries systematically to move their levels of achievement towards those of the majority population.

Method

The Berne Questionnaire of Subjective Well-Being-Young Form: BSW/Y describes five component groups of well-being:

positive attitudes to life (PL 8 items from 1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree),

problems (PR, 8 items from 1 to 6),

somatic complains (SC, 8 items from 1 to 6),

self-esteem (SE, 3 items from 1 to 6) and

lack of depressive mood (LoDP, 5 items from 1 to 6).

KLIT describes three groups of components of classroom climate:

supportive classroom climate (SCC 12 items from 1 to 4),

motivation to negative work at school (MNEG 9 items from 1 to 4) and

self-efficacy (S-E 6 items from 1 to 4).

We also compared school results in Czech language (ČJ) and mathematics (MAT); in Czech 1= the best, 5 = the worst.

Sample of participants

187 adolescents – mean age 18:2 (SD 1.2 year); 107 from GYMNASIUM (GJKT) in Hradec Kralove (67 girls, 48 boys), 72 Romany adolescents, students of Romany Social Secondary School (RSSS) in Kolin (34 girls and 38 boys).

Results

N =187	ČJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	2.19	2.34	35.02	22.54	14.35	34.44	22.24	14.75	14.39	13.57
SD	0.83	0.93	6.15	3.73	2.93	6.99	7.56	4.97	2.79	5.13
MEDIAN	2	2	35	22	14	34	22	13	15	13
<i>median</i>			24.5	18.5	12.5	24.5	24.5	16.5	9.5	15.5

For the whole group we can see a higher level of supportive classroom climate than the median, but also a higher motivation to be negative towards school work (to avoid and withdraw from school work and duties); also higher level of tendency to self-efficacy.

Higher than the median are positive attitudes towards life, lower level of problems, somatic complains, higher self-esteem a lower level of depression.

Correlation; N=187	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
ČJ	0.53**	0.19**	0.29**	0.31**	0.05	0.09	0.12	0.03	0.21**
MAT		0.11	0.28**	0.20**	-0.01	0.20**	0.19**	0.06	0.11
SCC			0.16*	0.07	0.20**	-0.20**	0.07	0.08	-0.19**
MNEG				0.02	0.03	0.16*	0.30**	-0.13	0.28**
S-E					0.07	-0.01	0.06	0.22**	0.11
PL						-0.33**	-0.24**	0.36**	-0.25**
PR							0.35**	-0.12	0.27**
SC								-0.24**	0.22**
SE									-0.12

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$.

The poorer results for the Czech language leads to greater negativity towards school work, higher depression, a more supportive classroom climate and higher tendency to self-efficacy. Students with worse poorer results in mathematics have more problems, including somatic complaints.

A higher level of supportive classroom climate leads to fewer problems, low levels of depression, and positive attitudes towards life.

A greater negative approach to school work is associated with more somatic problems and a higher level of depression. Self-esteem strictly corresponds with self-efficacy.

Female students from the GJKT (non-Romany) have statistically significant higher level of problems including somatic, than boys. Boys have a higher level of depression and have a higher tendency to self-efficacy, than girls.

Female students from the RSSS (Romany) have a higher level of supportive classroom climate than Romany boys, a greater tendency to avoid school work, but have a more positive attitude towards life and higher self-esteem than Romany boys: Romany girls had the highest self-esteem in the whole group of participants.

Comparing Romany and non-Romany boys, the non-Romany boys have higher tendency to supportive classroom climate and to self-esteem, than Romany boys, who have a lower motivation to negative school work.

Comparing Romany and non-Romany girls, we found very few differences: Both appeared very similar.

Non-Romany boys;N=48	ČJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	2	1.92	32.83	22.08	13.85	34.04	20.31	12.81	13.88	14.73
SD	0.58	0.76	5.46	3.40	2.47	6.42	6.52	4.06	2.89	4.98
MEDIAN	2	2	34	22	14	34.5	19.5	12.5	15	14.5
Non-Romany girls;N=67	CJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	1.66	2.10	33.79	21.99	12.54	33.76	24.07	15.24	14.40	12.48
SD	0.56	0.78	6.19	3.47	2.04	6.26	8.07	4.96	2.42	5.12
MEDIAN	2	2	34	22	12	34	23	14	14	12
T-TEST	3.16*				2.98**		2.66**	2.78**		2.35*
RSSS										
Boys;N=38	CJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	1.96	1.99	28.06	19.31	16.87	29.55	18.74	12.83	12.68	15.71
SD	0.62	0.73	8.96	6.42	9.23	9.42	7.45	4.73	3.44	4.49
MEDIAN	2	2	31.00	21	14	29.00	17.5	13	14	16
girls;N=34	CJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	1.76	2.29	32.68	21.97	12.59	33.74	24.21	14.41	14.48	13.47
SD	0.49	0.62	6.26	3.63	1.96	5.77	8.00	4.89	2.41	6.01
MEDIAN	2	2	33.5	21.5	12	33	24	13	14.5	12
T-TEST			2.50*	2.12*	2.64**	2.24*	3.63**		2.40*	
T-test boys Rom: nRom			3.04**	2.57*	2.17*	2.85*				
T-test girls Rom: nRom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$.

RSSS; N=72	ČJ	MAT	SCC	MNEG	S-E	PL	PR	SC	SE	LoDP
MEAN	2.82	2.85	37.61	23.36	16.36	35.35	21.81	15.58	14.71	13.81
SD	0.77	0.94	5.60	4.02	2.66	7.85	7.32	5.18	2.98	5
MEDIAN	3	3	38	24	16	35.5	22.5	14	15	14
GJKT;n=115										
MEAN	1.80	2.03	33.39	22.03	13.09	33.88	22.50	14.23	14.18	13.42
SD	0.59	0.77	5.92	3.44	2.32	6.33	7.69	4.76	2.64	5.18
MEDIAN	2	2	34	22	13	34	22	13	15	13
T-TEST	10.10**	6.73**	4.84**	2.4*	8.85**					

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$.

Statistically significant differences between Romany and non-Romany students are in the supportive classroom climate (Romany students higher, but also a higher tendency to be negative to school work), and Romany students have higher tendency to self-efficacy.

Conclusions

We compared Romany and non-Romany students in two specific parts of their life: subjective well-being and classroom climate. Our research showed that statistically significant differences between these two groups exist, but these are not as large or as negative as prejudiced or traditional points of view would suggest. Both groups of students have similar problems with life including school, have positive attitudes towards of life, lower level of problems, somatic complains, higher self-esteem, and a lower level of depression.

In both groups we can see a higher level of supportive classroom climate than the median, but also a greater negativity towards school work (avoidance and withdrawal); also a higher level of tendency to self-efficacy.

Romany students have higher tendency to feel they have a supportive classroom climate and self-efficacy, than non-Romanys; Romany boys have the lowest self esteem, but Romany girls the highest self-esteem of all groups of participants.

This information is very important for the Czech Republic: traditional points of view about Romany habits and values are going to have to change. Our results also indicate the evident distinction between an 'inside' and 'outside' approach to researching the Romany people.

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