

MY FRIENDS: THE VIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS ON THE PHENOMENON OF FRIENDSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is an important thing in a person's life for both an adult and a child. Parents are nervous if their child does not have friends, adolescents are unhappy if they do not have friends, and, in general, it can be said that people who have friends are happier in life. The role of the school in this context is to create optimal conditions for internalisation, socialisation, and personalisation.

Friendship begins to form from preschool age onwards, but it develops dynamically during younger school age, taking into account developmental specificities. This is what we focused on in our research. We conducted structured interviews with pupils, which looked at two levels – the meaning of friendship for the pupil and the pupil's position in friendship relationships. In our paper, we present the view of primary school pupils on what friendship means to them.

KEYWORDS:

equal opportunities in education, friendship, internalisation, ISCED 1, research

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The current concept of education is based on the strategic and curricular documents of our country, drawing inspiration from European visions of education. Educational and upbringing principles are expressed, among others, in the main objectives of the document *Strategy of the Czech Republic's Educational Policy 2030+*, which, in addition to preparation for employment, promotes personal development contributing to the improvement of the quality of human life, the maintenance and development of culture as a system of shared values, and the development of active citizenship, which creates the prerequisites for a solidary society, sustainable development, and democracy. Individual elements of education and upbringing towards these values can be further extracted from the entire educational offer regulated by the *Framework Education Programme for Primary Education* (RVP ZV) – i.e. from all educational areas and key competences. The validity and binding nature of the Framework Education Programme were established in 2007. Since then, the Framework Education Programme for Primary Education has undergone partial modifications or additions related to its revision. At the beginning of 2025, the so-called major revision of the Framework Education Programme for Primary Education was finalised, during which the document was analysed in terms of contemporary trends in education. It was examined whether the objectives and content formulated therein correspond to the development of society and support education in line with the development of scientific disciplines and everyday practical life, but also with an emphasis on the needs of pupils. The aims of education policy imply that schools should be environments not only for education but also for the formation of social relationships and internalisation. According to the interpretive approach to child socialisation, we do not see internalisation only as a skill acquired from an adult. According to the interpretive approach, we understand socialisation in childhood as a collective process taking place in the public and social (not private) sphere. From this perspective, children begin life as social beings within an already defined social network and build their social worlds through communication and interaction (Provázková Stolinská, 2021).

Schools are seen as very important environments for the realisation of social situations. Younger school-age pupils are often exposed to social shaping and communicative demands in everyday activities with adults, which cause ambiguity and uncertainty that can be inappropriately reproduced in children's activities

in the form of routine. Therefore, adult involvement in children's life worlds is important (Corsaro, 1988). Adult-child interaction is a feature of collegial culture. The cultural routines of younger school-age pupils have both productive and reproductive qualities. The teacher's role is to provide children with opportunities and resources for sharing understanding and awareness of their place in the group (Corsaro and Rizzo, 1988). Thus, the teacher is the main agent who promotes internalisation – the formation of the concept of friendship. Friendship (and comradeship) is an important thing in the lives of both adults and children. Parents are nervous if their child does not have friends, adolescents are unhappy if they do not have friends, and, in general, it can be said that people who have friends are happier in life (Ozyurt, Provázková Stolinská, Rašková, 2024; Rašková, Provázková Stolinská, Ozyurt, 2024; Provázková Stolinská, Rašková, Ozyurt, 2024). In the primary school environment, two patterns of behaviour emerge within the concept of internalisation (Rizzo and Corsaro, 1988):

1. Social participation, where children rarely engage in solitary play, and when children find themselves alone, they try to enter one of the ongoing episodic games of others;
2. Protection of interactive space, which is the tendency of children to resist attempts by other children to gain access (e.g. while playing).

As can be seen, significant interactions occur in primary school during internalisation that support the process of socialisation and subsequent personalisation.

According to Ekins and Grimes (2009), the following patterns of interaction and activities of everyday life are observed in child-child interactions:

- Friendship is challenging because here we cannot think of getting “something for something”, but it is necessary to talk about reciprocity.
- Children perceive friendship primarily with an emphasis on reciprocity; older people describe friendship more descriptively, in a more complex way, and with a focus on the specifics of a particular friend. Thus, it is possible to say that the formation of the concept of friendship starts already with pre-school children and changes with experience.
- Around 75% of children in the early years of primary school accept their mother or teacher among their friends – this is also due to the fact that they

participate in the activities that these children carry out.

- Friendships are not all the same. They are determined by social support, conflicts and their resolution, activities, and reciprocal interest (Hartup and Stevens, 1999).
- For children in the early years of primary school, one-sided friendships appear first (they are also related to the egoistic feelings of children in this period). Reciprocal friendships begin to form developmentally (children with communication disorders, intellectual disability or developmental disabilities have the process of forming reciprocal friendships strongly affected and made more difficult).
- Child development is also affected by the influence of the social environment on young children's friendship formation, as they perceive the influence of the social environment differently at different ages.
- Children with reciprocal friendship bonds tend to be more socially interactive than children with one-sided friendships (Guralnick, Gottman, and Hammond, 1996).
- Three approaches to forming friendships:
 - The first group holds the view of Piaget – friendship as an abstract concept related to the children's perspective and abilities.
 - The second group of theorists views friendship as a dynamic social relationship that serves a number of specific functions in the children's social and emotional environments.
 - Researchers tend to focus on friendship as a type of social relationship with specific behavioural characteristics and criteria (Corsaro, 1994).

The process of internalisation is significantly determined both by the teacher's approach and by the level of conception of friendship from the perspective of the pupils themselves.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of our qualitative research was to find out how pupils of a younger school age perceive the concept of friendship, what they imagine it to mean in the context of satisfying their own needs and developing their own personal identity.

Research Sample

Seventy-five pupils attending a primary school in Olomouc (Czech Republic) were the research respondents. Girls were numerically predominant, making up more than half of the group (54.7%, i.e. 41 pupils). Thus, boys made up less than half of the group of pupils surveyed (45.3%, i.e. 34 pupils). According to age, the research sample was evenly distributed across years 1, 3, and 5 with 25 pupils each.

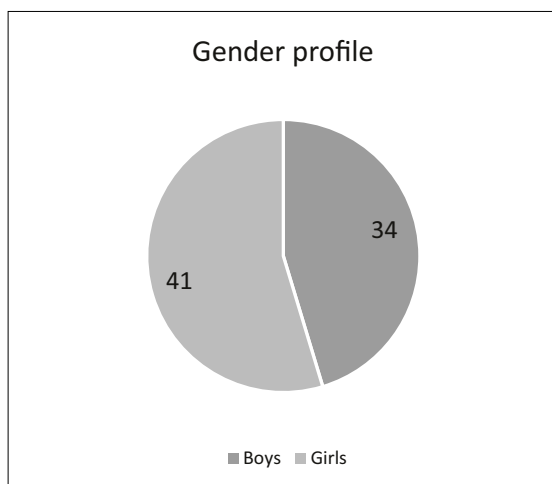


CHART 1. Gender profile of the pupil group

TABLE 1. Gender profile of the pupil group by count

Gender	N	%
Boys	34	45.3
Girls	41	54.7
Total	75	100.00

Research Methods

A structured interview was conducted with the respondents using a self-constructed set of questions (12 in total). The topic area covered by the research can be divided into two parts:

- The importance of friendship for the pupil
- The pupil's position in friendship relationships

In this paper, we focused on the interpretation of the results of the first part.

Despite the fact that the research has the features of a qualitative survey, it was a structured interview, and we were able to quantify the data given the number of the respondents' responses. Thus, we proceeded with this evaluation strategy and

also evaluated their significance within the data.

The original response categories and their coding were modified for statistical processing and simplified in many places. This was due to the high variability of possible responses (or response categories). The pupils made extensive use of the option to respond with a combination of multiple statements arranged in a row (a combination of statements marked as “+” in the data); at other times, responses to one question from one pupil consisted of one statement only.

For this reason, the following rules were introduced to group the original response categories into larger units. The greatest relevance was always given to the first statement (within the pupil’s response to a given question) given by the respondent, whether it was followed by other statements or whether this statement was given first and only. The second statement in the order (within the response to one question) was considered in terms of transcoding as follows. If an identical second statement was present in multiple (original) response categories for a given question, a separate response category was created that contained the first plus the second statement (and any additional statements/combinations).

The second rule was to group the original categories according to the similarity of their meaning, especially when there were multiple variations of the original categories but with very similar meanings.

Response categories that were more specific and/or could not be assigned to other newly created response categories were included in the category “combinations and others” (or “other”, “probably yes and others”, “material and others”). The original category “no response/don’t know” was retained and remained as a separate category even after recoding. Where relevant, a separate category was also introduced for different types of negations, e.g. “no one”, “for no one”, “nothing”, etc. (except for the supplementary question where the response “nothing” was categorised as “material and other”).

After recoding the response categories, new categories were created on this principle, in which the original categories were grouped. Responses to each question are now grouped into five categories, but there are also four or three response categories for one question. Subsequently, the original data set was modified by recoding according to the new legend. This added 12 new columns where response categories already occur after recoding, and on this basis, the data set was statistically evaluated.

Responses to the questions could be tracked by gender. Differences were tested using the chi-square test at a significance level of 5%. If the condition for using

this test was not met, the refined Fisher's exact test was used (Hindls, Hronová, Seger, Fischer, 2006).

Differences by gender in the responses to Question 1 were not significant and were not statistically significant according to the chi-square test at a 5% significance level ($\chi^2(3; N = 70) = 0.48, p = 0.923$).

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH DATA

What is friendship?

Responses to the question of what friendship means to pupils were varied. This is reflected in the category of "other" responses, which accounted for almost two-thirds of all responses (45 pupils, 60% of the pupils). The pupils responded that they thought friendship was a "good thing", "when someone hugs you", "a bond with a person", "fun", etc. The second most frequent response (21.3%, i.e. 16 pupils) was that friendship represents "people who help each other", or other pupils' ideas about the concept of friendship were added to this statement (a combination of responses). Eleven respondents (14.7% of the whole group) expressed that friendship for them represented "playing with a friend", or that it was "people who play together" (again with possible addition of other statements of what the concept of friendship means for the pupils). There were three pupils (4%) who did not respond to the fourth question, or who could have been those who did not know how to respond.

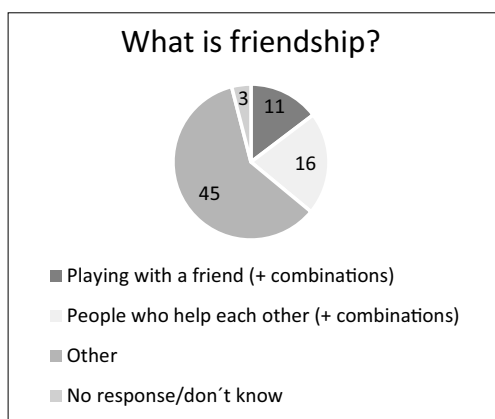


CHART 2. What is friendship

TABLE 2. What is friendship by count

4. What is friendship?	N	%
Playing with a friend (+ combinations)	11	14.7
People who help each other (+ combinations)	16	21.3
Other	45	60.0
No response (don't know)	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Differences by gender in responses to the question were moderate, with boys more likely to respond “playing” or “helping” and girls more likely to give other reasons. However, according to the chi-square test at a 5% significance level, the differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2; N = 72) = 3.28, p = 0.194$).

TABLE 3. What is friendship by statistical value

What is friendship?	Girls	Boys	P-value*
Playing with a friend (+ combinations)	4 (10.3%)	7 (21.2%)	0.194
People who help each other (+ combinations)	7 (17.9%)	9 (27.3%)	
Other	28 (71.8%)	17 (51.5%)	
Total	39 (100%)	33 (100%)	

*Chi-square test

Who are some of your friends?

By far the largest group of responses was that the pupils’ friends include children “from class/kindergarten”, or the pupils added other variations to this statement (e.g. “friends from class + parents + teacher”, etc.). More than two-thirds of all pupils (66.7%, i.e. 50 pupils) responded in this way. Other combinations of responses and other uncategorised responses (e.g. “daddy + classmates”, “everyone”, etc.) accounted for thirteen respondents, representing 17.3% of all pupils. A slightly smaller number of pupils (11 in total, i.e. 14.7%) agreed that their friends included children “from class and clubs”. Alternatively, the pupils added other people or relationships to this response option (e.g. “classmates + friends from clubs + pets + daddy”, etc.). One pupil (1.3%) stated that their friends included “no one”.

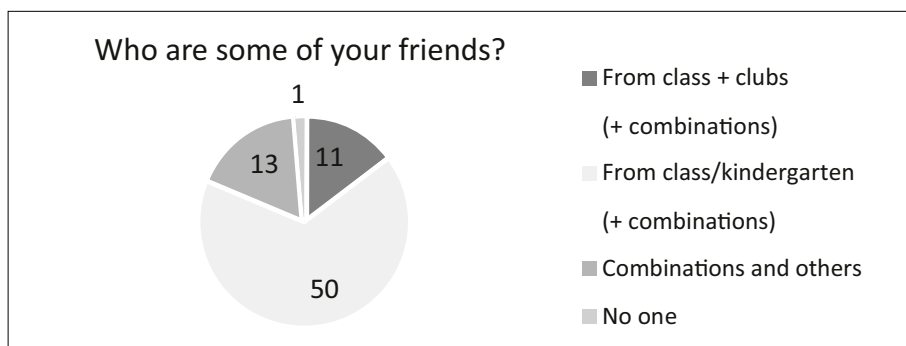


CHART 3. Who are some of your friends

TABLE 4. Who are some of your friends by count

Who are some of your friends?	N	%
From class + clubs (+ combinations)	11	14.7
From class/kindergarten (+ combinations)	50	66.7
Combinations and others	13	17.3
No one	1	1.3
Total	75	100.0

Differences by gender in responses to the question were moderate, with boys more likely to respond “from class + clubs” and girls more likely to state “from class and kindergarten”. One boy stated that he had “no one”. However, according to Fisher’s exact test at a 5% significance level, the differences were not statistically significant (Fisher(N=75) = 1.817, $p = 0.704$).

TABLE 5. Who are some of your friends by statistical value

Who are some of your friends?	Girls	Boys	P-value*
From class + clubs (+ combinations)	5 (12.2%)	6 (17.6%)	0.704
From class/kindergarten (+ combinations)	29 (70.7%)	21 (61.8%)	
Combinations and others	7 (17.1%)	6 (17.6%)	
No one	0 (0%)	1 (2.9%)	
Total	41 (100%)	34 (100%)	

*Fisher’s exact test

Why do you consider them friends?

Responses to this question were quite varied, as evidenced by the largest group of responses being “combinations and others” (28 pupils, i.e. 37.3%). Among the pupils’ statements as to why they considered the people in question as their friends, we find, for example, the following statements: “we have a lot of fun”, “we don’t hurt each other”, “good hairstyle”, etc. Around one-third of all pupils (33.3%, i.e. 25 pupils) stated that the reason was “playing together”, or they added another statement to this response (e.g. “playing together + they are nice/kind to me”). Thus, playing together as a reason for being friends was given quite often by the pupils. Ten pupils (13.3%) responded that “they have known their friends for a long time/since kindergarten”, or added further reasons (e.g. “they have known each other for a long time/since kindergarten + they are nice/kind to me”).

+ playing together”). The same number of responses (10 pupils, i.e. 13.3%) was also given for the statement “we do things together” and other reasons attached to it (e.g. “we do things together + they help me + they are nice/kind to me”). In terms of meaning, the response “we do things together” can probably be loosely related to the response “playing together”. Two pupils (2.7%) did not respond to the question or did not know how to respond.

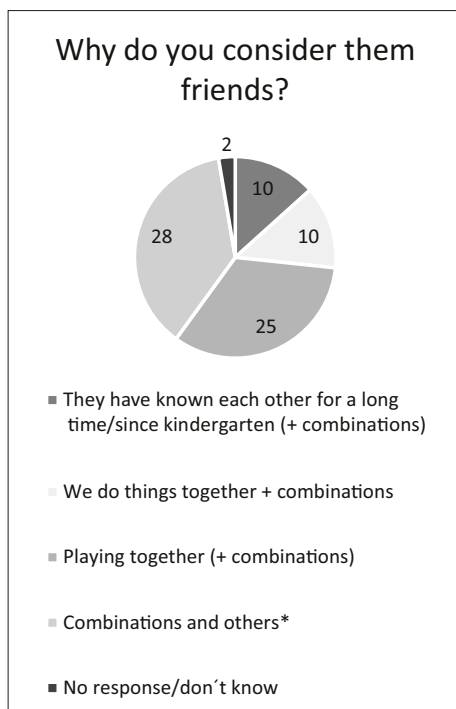


CHART 4. Why do you consider them friends

TABLE 6. Why do you consider them friends by count

6. Why do you consider them friends?	N	%
They have known each other for a long time/ since kindergarten (+ combinations)	10	13.3
We do things together (+ combinations)	10	13.3
Playing together (+ combinations)	25	33.3
Combinations and others*	28	37.3
No response/don't know	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0

* After recoding, the response option “they help me + they know each other for a long time/since kindergarten” was included in the category “combinations and others”.

Differences by gender in responses to the question were moderate, with girls more likely to respond “they have known each other for a long time”, and boys more likely to respond that “they do things together”. However, according to Fisher’s exact test at a 5% significance level, the differences were not statistically significant (Fisher (N = 73) = 5.572, $p = 0.134$).

Table 7. Why do you consider them friends by statistical value

6. Why do you consider them friends?	Girls	Boys	P-value*
They have known each other for a long time/since kindergarten (+ combinations)	9 (22%)	1 (3.1%)	0.134
We do things together (+ combinations)	5 (12.2%)	5 (15.6%)	
Playing together (+ combinations)	13 (31.7%)	12 (37.5%)	
Combinations and other	14 (34.1%)	14 (43.8%)	
Total	41 (100%)	32 (100%)	

*Fisher's exact test

What do you like about your friends?

Responses to this question were often varied, as suggested by the 36% occurrence of the “other” response category. Among the responses of a total of 27 pupils, it can be found, for example, that they like “everything” about their friends, or that they are “funny + have the same hairstyle” or “they are cool”, etc. The second most frequent response (24%, i.e. 18 pupils) was that pupils like how “nice/kind” their friends are, or give other reasons for this (e.g. “nice/kind + we get along”). A slightly smaller number of pupils (20%, i.e. 15 pupils) said that they liked “doing things together/playing together” about their friends, or added other reasons (e.g. “doing things together + supportive”, etc.). Furthermore, responses indicating that pupils like their friends, that they are “helpful”, or that they give other reasons for this (e.g. “helpful + doing things together + funny”, etc.) had a lower representation (14.7%, i.e. 11 pupils). Compared to the number of response options within the category “combinations and others”, there is a fairly strong representation of “helpful” responses (sometimes with combinations of other reasons).

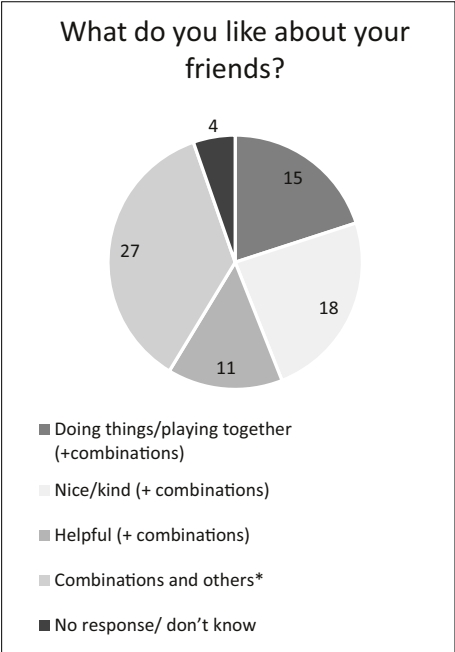


CHART.5. What do you like about your friends

* After recoding, the category “combinations and others” included, for example, the options “they are cool” or “they like me”.

Differences by gender in responses to the question were moderate, with girls more likely to respond “nice/kind” and boys more likely to respond “doing things together” and “helpful”. However, according to the chi-square test at a 5% significance level, the differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(3; N = 71) = 4.685, p = 0.196$).

Table 9. What do you like about your friends by statistical value

8. What do you like about your friends?	Girls	Boys	P-value*
Doing things together/playing together (+ combinations)	7 (17.5%)	8 (25.8%)	0.196
Nice/kind (+ combinations)	14 (35%)	4 (12.9%)	
Helpful (+ combinations)	5 (12.5%)	6 (19.4%)	
Combinations and others	14 (35%)	13 (41.9%)	
Total	40 (100%)	31 (100%)	

*Chi-square test

TABLE 8. What do you like about your friends by count

8. What do you like about your friends?	N	%
Doing things together/playing together (+ combinations)	15	20.0
Nice/kind (+ combinations)	18	24.0
Helpful (+ combinations)	11	14.7
Combinations and others*	27	36.0
No response/don't know	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0

Would you like to be like them? Why?

Responses to the question of whether the pupils would like to be like their friends were so varied that it was only possible to classify them into three main categories, namely “yes”, “no” and “other”. More than half of the pupils said that they did not want to be like their friends. This represented 40 pupils (53.3%). Among the responses that emerged, we mention the following: “no, they are spoiled” or “no, because my friends don’t like sports”. A response evidencing the self-consciousness of the pupil in question also emerged: “no, because I want to be me”, as well as practical-sounding reasons: “no, if we played hide and seek then everyone would be hiding, even the one who counts” and “no, then we would have the same characters in games”.

A third of the pupils (32%, 24 pupils) said they wanted to be like their friends. The reasons expressed included: “yes, because he/she wants to be able to do what they do”, “yes, they are nice + good-looking” or “yes, he/she has nice hair/hat”, etc.

Eleven respondents (14.7%) responded to the question in a different way, namely “sometimes yes, sometimes no”, “rather no” or, for example, one pupil stated “no, because he/she has diabetes, but in character yes”.

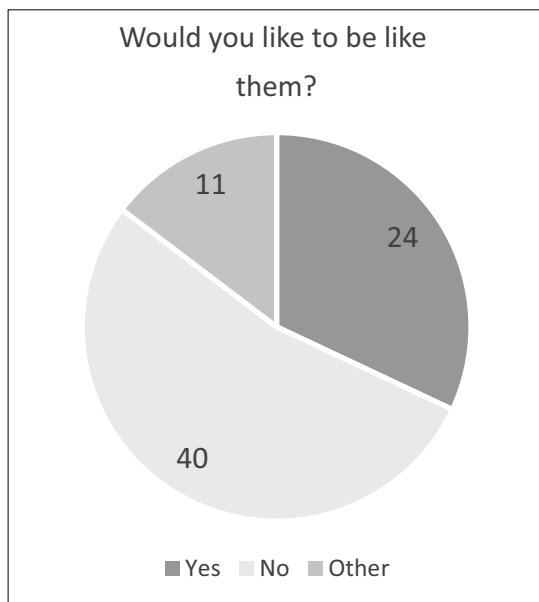


CHART 6. Would you like to be like them and why

TABLE 10. Would you like to be like them and why by count

10. Would you like to be like them? Why?	N	%
Yes	24	32.0
No	40	53.3
Other	11	14.7
Total	75	100.0

Differences by gender in responses to the question were very moderate, with girls slightly more likely to say “yes” and boys slightly more likely to say “no”. However, according to the chi-square test at a 5% significance level, the differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2; N = 75) = 0.206, p = 0.902$).

TABLE 11. Would you like to be like them and why by statistical value

10. Would you like to be like them? Why?	Girls	Boys	P-value*
Yes	14 (34.1%)	10 (29.4%)	0.902
No	21 (51.2%)	19 (55.9%)	
Other	6 (14.6%)	5 (14.7%)	
Total	41 (100%)	34 (100%)	

*Chi-square test

RESEARCH RESULTS

Already at pre-school age, children are able to establish relationships with their peers, although various factors contribute to this, e.g. meeting with other families, attending clubs together, etc. The emergence of the need for this relationship is a signal of a certain degree of maturity of the child. Peer relationships in pre-school are usually symmetrical – both peers are equal, have similar competencies and status. Psychologically significant is especially the conformity in the area of external signs and manifestations, and the need for sharing activities is intensified in children. At a younger school age, relationships with peers are further developed. At first, the need for self-benefit emerges, but in the second period of the first stage of primary school, this need develops towards mutual sharing. The psychological statement about the aspect of friendship from the perspective of the younger school-age pupil was completely confirmed. The participants clearly confirmed the commonly known and established criteria for choosing their friends. Important criteria at this age include association with a specific person or people from the peer circle, their joint sharing in various activities (most often playing games), pleasant appearance and positive behaviour, or having various things that children like or have in common. The investigation showed that at this age, no handicap of the child determines the choice of a friend, and children are not subject to social prejudices. At this age, it is important for the child to satisfy his/her own needs, and in friendship, he/she emphasises congruence in the area

of needs and interests. An important role here is played by the teacher and his/her equal approach to children and pupils. On the contrary, if a disabled friend needs help, pupils are very happy to help.

CONCLUSION

In the paper, we wanted to emphasise the importance of friendship for the child's life. It is a challenging, but very important phenomenon that needs to be developed and promoted in pupils because it determines the quality of their lives. We have outlined the starting points of what the level of friendship is from the perspective of developmental psychology, but also the trends in educational policy. The latter sets the creation of conditions for internalization as one of its strategic goals.

Our research efforts were stimulated by interest in finding out the current view of participants (primary school pupils) on this element. The results of the structured interviews revealed a clear idea of who a friend is and why, as well as an idea of one's own identity in the context of friendship. The results obtained broaden our research base, as we first followed the development of friendship according to age categories, then the meaning of friendship, and we are currently evaluating the data on the pupils' position in friendly relationships. We aim to structure a view of primary school pupils' life and emotional ties based on empirical data. We consider this particularly important for teachers who have to optimise the conditions in the social environment for quality emotional growth and development among pupils.

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MOJI PRIJATELJI: POGLED UČENIKA OSNOVNE ŠKOLE NA FENOMEN PRIJATELJSTVA

SAŽETAK

Prijateljstvo je važan dio života svake osobe, kako odrasle tako i djeteta. Roditelji su zabrinuti ako njihovo dijete nema prijatelja, adolescenti su nesretni ako nemaju prijatelje, a općenito se može reći da su ljudi koji imaju prijatelje zadovoljniji svojim životom. U tom kontekstu uloga škole jest stvarati optimalne uvjete za internalizaciju, socijalizaciju i personalizaciju.

Prijateljstvo se počinje oblikovati već u predškolskoj dobi, no dinamično se razvija tijekom mlađe školske dobi, uzimajući u obzir razvojne specifičnosti. Upravo smo se na to usredotočili u našem istraživanju. Proveli smo strukturirane intervjue s učenicima kojima su obuhvaćene dvije razine – značenje prijateljstva za učenika i položaj učenika u prijateljskim odnosima. U radu predstavljamo perspektivu učenika osnovne škole o tome što im prijateljstvo znači.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

jednake mogućnosti u obrazovanju, prijateljstvo, internalizacija, ISCED 1, istraživanje

* Rad je podržan u okviru projekta *Children's Life and Teacher-Parent Collaboration*, br. IGA_PdF_2024_021 (hrv. *Život djece i suradnja učitelja i roditelja*) čija je glavna istraživačica izv. prof. dr. sc. Dominika Provázková Stolinská.