

Friendship As a Determinant of Supporting an Inclusive Approach in Kindergarten

Dominika Provazkova Stolinska, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic
Miluše Rašková, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic
Eva Šmelová, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic

The European Conference on Education 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to introduce the concept of "friendship" that promotes socialization and personalization of a child in the kindergarten environment. We attach great importance to the area due to the amended Educational Act currently in the Czech Republic (1. 9. 2016) focusing on the implementation of inclusion into a real school setting. In this paper we focus on the structuring of internalization on the basis of activities for children and their behavior. Presented issues are based on the results of applied research, which was applied a qualitative approach. For the data collection was used extensive research method such as the structured interview with open-ended answers that interpersonal contact with children of preschool age enables. On the basis of this explorative tool we found answers that were recorded and evaluated in the categorization process. The interview was focused on answering five questions related to the friendship of emphasis on joint activities, satisfy their needs and strengthen their own status. This article was written as a part of the grant project titled Social aspects of inclusion in basic education in the context of international research (the research is a part of the international project - Inclusive Education no. 4401/11 - Institute for Research and Development at Faculty of Education - Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic).

Keywords: Friendship, socialization, inclusion, preschool child, kindergarten, research

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

1 Trends in education policy in the Czech Republic

For about the past 25 years, education in the Czech Republic has been subject to a major reform, the objective of which was to modernize and update Czech schools in the context of the third millennium. The fundamental aim of today's educational concept is to provide equal conditions for lifelong learning, which has the potential to transform our society into the so-called learning society.

During the process of transformation of Czech education there have already been three waves of change; transformation of the concept of education from encyclopaedism to the development of competences necessary for life; integration, as a result of which special schools were closed and the so-called open schools established (in 2008 a total of 47.1% of all children with health disability were integrated in mainstream schools); the current trend in education in the Czech Republic is the establishment and support of inclusive schools (Provázková Stolinská, Rašková, Šmelová, 2016).

As reported by P. Pitnerová and E. V. Maxová (2014), an inclusive school represents an adequate arrangement and functioning to provide corresponding education to all children irrespective of their individual differences. This is a response to diversity in all its forms with an effort to give all children the best possible level of education regardless of the form of their specific needs.

The authors performed a research study, in which they monitored the process of the transformation of a mainstream school into an inclusive school. The conclusions of the study highlighted the advantages of inclusive education such as involvement of all students in schoolwork and increased self-confidence and trust of children with special educational needs. On the other hand, the conclusions also included some reserves, particularly difficult funding.

At present, the concept of inclusion is at various stages of development across European countries. There is a trend of transforming special schools to support centres or special education centres that would run continuing teacher education programmes, develop and disseminate teaching materials and methods, support mainstream schools, parents, and partially individual students, etc. In terms of inclusion, the leading countries are Sweden, Italy, Finland, USA and the UK (Vítek, Vítková, 2010). In the Czech Republic, this area has been subject to significant changes over the past 20 years. It is necessary to realize that the indicator of successful integration is not information about the number of integrated students, but especially a thoroughly elaborated concept of inclusive teaching. This was aptly formulated by U. Heimlich and J. Kahlert (2012), who note that it is necessary to create joint education in schools, which would be open to all children, and to establish a system of special education support in order to help all children in the process of joint education.

In the context of these conditions, education and schools should develop towards a learning organization, the actors of which are all participants – teachers, children and parents. They work together to shape their own concept of the school (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: Development of inclusive school



Source: Wilhelm, 2009

2 Internalization – development of the concept of ‘friendship’ and its effect on children’s socialization

The school is considered a very important environment for the realization of social situations. Preschool children are often exposed to social formation and communicative demands in everyday interactions with adults, which cause confusion and uncertainty. This can be inappropriately reflected in children’s activities in the form of routine. Therefore, involvement of an adult in children’s life worlds is important (Corsaro, 1988). The adult-child interaction is a feature of a friendly culture. Cultural routine in preschool children has productive as well as reproductive

qualities. The role of the teacher is to provide children with the opportunity and means for sharing their understanding and awareness of their place in the group (Corsaro, Rizzo, 1988). The teacher is therefore the main representative who supports internalization – shaping the concept of friendship. Friendship is an important aspect in the life of adults as well as children. Parents are nervous if their child has no friends, adolescents are unhappy if they have no friends. In general, people who have friends are happier in their life (Hartup, Stevens, 1999).

In a kindergarten setting, two patterns of behaviour occur within the concept of internalization (Rizzo, Corsaro, 1988):

1. Social participation, in which children are rarely engaged in solitary play, and when children are left alone, they try to enter one of the ongoing episodic games of others.
2. Protection of interactive space; children tend to prevent other children from entering (e.g. during a game).

Obviously, kindergarten is the place of significant interactions during internalization, which support the process of socialization and subsequent personalization. A significant pro-inclusive argument in the area of education policy is the fact that integration supports social development of all children – both integrated and intact – in a real school environment. This aspect supported our efforts to reflect on children's relationships in an inclusive kindergarten environment.

3 Research survey

3.1 Pre-research probe

The research design was based on a previous research probe (Rašková, 2005), which collected data from pre-school children in a kindergarten setting before the integration wave. An unstructured individual interview was performed, which in addition to factual information about the respondent (age, gender) included 10 questions aimed at the meaning of the term love between people and ways of expressing love.

The research sample included children (**n=53**, 27 boys and 26 girls) aged 3 – 7 years (three-year-old 1.88%, four-year-old 9.4%, five-year-old 39.62%, six-year-old 43.39% and seven-year-old 5.66%) from kindergartens in the regions of Olomouc, Zlín, Znojmo and Pelhřimov. **The representative sample was established by means of random sampling.** The interviews were administered in compliance with the researcher's instructions by kindergarten teachers who volunteered to cooperate.

Outcomes:

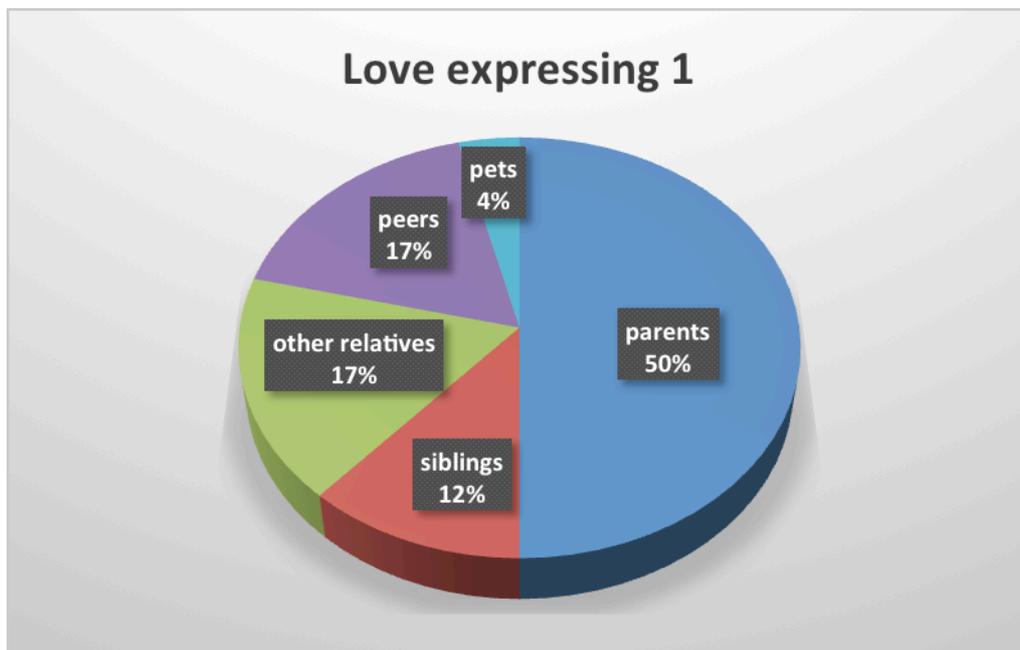
The children's responses were categorized without classification by gender or age. The children came from families with a low number of children (without siblings 22.64%, 1 sibling 50.75%, 2 siblings 20.75%, 3 siblings 5.66%). It was not analysed whether the children lived in two-parent or single-parent families or what functions their families had.

Children understand **love between people** as an emotional relationship – to love (66.04%); it also involves positive behaviours to other people (11.32%) or specific

physical actions such as kissing, stroking, hugging (7.55%). The meaning of the term was left unexplained by 6 children (11.32%), 2 children (3.77%) gave a different answer (“princess”, “be afraid sometimes”).

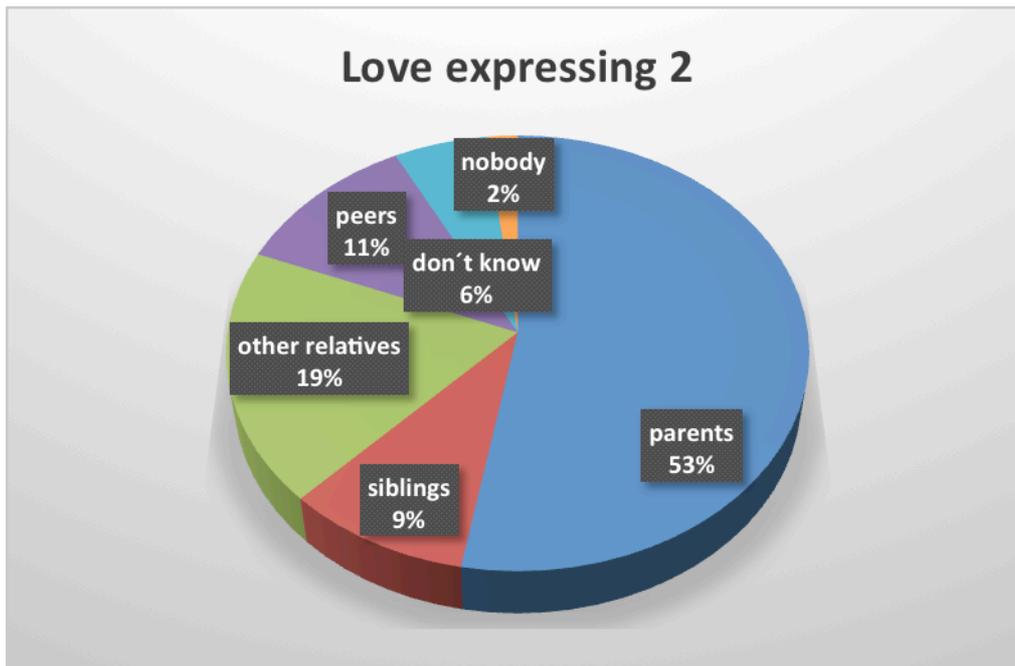
According to the children, **ways of expressing love between people** were *verbal* (3.77%), *physical* e.g. kissing, stroking, holding hands or holding around the waist, hugging, sitting on the lap, mutual help, etc. (75.47%), and *material* e.g. gifts, greeting cards, lending things, etc. (3.77 %). The question concerning ways of expressing love between people was not answered by 8 children (15.09%), 1 child (1.89%) gave a different answer – “they voluntarily choose a husband”.

Diagram 2: The relationship from the child



Children express love mostly to their parents (49.06%), siblings (11.32%) and other relatives (16.98%), but also to peers (16.98%), and even included dogs in the list (3.77%). Only 1 child (1.89%) did not respond to this question.

Diagram 3: The relationship to the child



As suggested by the responses, the children believe that **love is expressed to them** also by their parents (52.83%), siblings (9.43%), other relatives (18.87%) and peers (11.32%). Only 3 children (5.66%) do not know who expresses love to them and 1 child (1.89%) answered nobody.

It is obvious that love is a significant part of today's and future life of children and is one of the priority topics. All expressions of love included in the questionnaire were reflected by the children also in the context of their peers. Here we can see a strong influence of the school environment on the emotional development of the child.

3.2 Follow-up research survey

The amendment to the Education Act in the Czech Republic (1 September 2016), which declares the implementation of inclusion in a real school environment, was an impetus for expanding and updating the research data. Therefore, the purpose of the research survey is to examine children's understanding of the concept of 'friendship' (with an emphasis on integration in kindergarten), which is a prerequisite for expressing love to peers.

The applied research will be based on a qualitative approach. Data collection will be performed by means of an extensive research method – structured interview with open-ended responses. This will allow interpersonal contact with preschool children. This explorative tool will be used to collect answers, which will be recorded and assessed during a process of categorization. The interview will focus on five questions relating to friendship with an emphasis on joint activities, satisfying one's own needs and strengthening one's own status.

Conclusion

The objective of the paper was to outline the current situation in the Czech Republic, where a significant determinant of modern school is the inclusive approach. A significant pro-inclusive argument in the area of education policy is the fact that integration supports social development of all children – both integrated and intact – in a real school environment. This aspect supported our efforts to reflect on the relationships between children in an inclusive kindergarten environment.

Firstly, we presented the results of the pre-research, which was conducted before the implementation of the integration wave. During the pre-research we examined the concept of ‘love’ from the perspective of preschool children. Subsequently, we plan to focus on children’s understanding of the concept of ‘friendship’ (with an emphasis on integration in kindergarten), which is a prerequisite for expressing affections to peers. This paper was written as part of a grant project entitled Social aspects of inclusion in basic education in the context of international research (the research is part of an international project – Inclusive Education no. 4401/11 – Institute for Research and Development, Faculty of Education – Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic).

References

Corsaro, W. A. (1988) Routines in the Peer Culture of American and Italian Nursery School Children. *Sociology of Education*. Vol. 61, No. 1.

Corsaro, W. A. and T. A. Rizzo. (1988) Discussion and Friendship: Socialization Processes in the Peer Culture of Italian Nursery School Children. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 53, No. 6.

Hartup, W. W. and N. Stevens. (1999) Friendships and Adaptation Across the Life Span. *American Psychological Society*. Blackwell Publishers, Vol. 8, Numb. 3.

Heimlich, U. a J. Kahlert (2012) *Inklusion in Schule und Unterricht. Wege zur Bildung für alle*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Pitnerová, P. a E. V. Maxová (2014) Inkluzivní škola pro efektivní vzdělávání všech žáků. In Pipeková, J., Vítková, M. et al. *From School Inclusion to Social Inclusion and Participation in Society*. Brno: MU.

Provázková Stolinská, D., Rašková, M. a E. Šmelová. *Inclusive approach - a trend in the transformation of Czech schools*. EDULEARN. Barcelona, 2016. ISBN 978-84-608-8860-4. DOI: 10.21125/edulearn.2016.1366.

Rašková, M. (2005) Děti mladšího školního věku a jejich pojmání lásky, partnerství, manželství a rodičovství. Sborník z 13. celostátního kongresu k sexuální výchově 2005. Pardubice.

Rizzo, T. A. and W. A. Corsaro. (1988) Toward a Better Understanding of Vygotsky's Process of Internalization: Its Role in the development of the Concept of Friendship. *Developmental Review* 8. 0273-2297/88.

Vítek, J. a M. Vítková (2010) *Teorie a praxe v edukaci, intervenci, terapii a psychosociální podpoře jedinců se zdravotním postižením se zaměřením na neurologická onemocnění*. Brno: Paido.

Contact e-mail: dominika.stolinska@gmail.com