

# School Environment in the Context of Prevention of Student's Problem Behaviour

Helena Vomáčková<sup>1</sup>  
Kristýna Kaprálová<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The faculty of Education, J. E. Purkyně Univerzity in Ústí n. L.; Pasteurova 1, 400 96 Ústí nad Labem; helena.vomackova@ujep.cz

<sup>2</sup> The faculty of Education student, J. E. Purkyně Univerzity in Ústí n. L.; Pasteurova 1, 400 96 Ústí n. L.; kristyna.kapralova@seznam.cz

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**Abstract** The paper maps the school environment in the context of prevention of problematic behaviour of students at one primary school in the Central Bohemian Region. On a selected sample of 8th and 9th-grade students, it uses a standardized questionnaire to find out which school areas students may perceive as problematic and which, on the contrary, suit them. A total of seven school areas were monitored, which were evaluated using basic indicators of descriptive statistics. The research task was to obtain real data and provide the school with information on what areas of school life are perceived negatively by students. In terms of the development of their behaviour, these areas pose a certain risk to future school work and are important for school prevention.

**Keywords** older school age, areas of school life, students' positive and negative perception, problem behaviour, prevention

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Problem behaviour is usually defined as a set of external manifestations, which at a certain age of an individual, in certain situations and under certain conditions come into conflict with a generally accepted norm (Průcha, 2013). The social norm of behaviour and expectations may not completely overlap with the consensus norm resulting from the experience of, for example, teachers and parents (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1995). The same applies to the individual standard set by a particular individual. In the school environment, problem behaviour has at least two aspects (Vágnerová, 2005). The first is the aspect of the student's conflict with school requirements in the form of his perception, experience and behaviour, the second is the aspect of the readiness and appropriate reaction of teachers to the adverse manifestations of students. Problem behaviour greatly marks the quality and effectiveness of the educational process (Helus, 2009), complicates class and school relationships not only between students, between teachers and students (Vojtová, 2010) but also in the relationship of students to the curriculum, to cognition as such. For these reasons, in particular, efforts must be made to minimize it.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The school environment is considered to be an essential factor in the student's secondary socialization, which can significantly support

and develop desirable patterns of behaviour and minimize undesirable ones. Teachers play a key role (Vágnerová, 1997), creating an environment that strengthens discipline and motivates students (Bendl, 2011). The emphasis on what is appropriate, passable and positively appreciated gives students space to gather positive experiences, i.e. awareness of what works. A positive experience (Vojtová, 2010) thus represents a kind of "navigation tool" that directs the student to behaviours that are passable and acceptable from the point of view of teacher management and that allow the student and his surroundings to be satisfied and the student can be praised. On the contrary, the teacher's reference to negative manifestations, to what is wrong, bad, undesirable and consequently punished brings the student a negative experience, resistance to the activities and later to the curriculum, teachers and school.

In addition, a student's defiance and inner dissatisfaction can be exacerbated if they are associated with developmental disorders such as ADD or ADHD (Šauerová et al., 2012). Students' problem behaviour can be a manifestation behind the student's explosiveness and emotional lability, impulsivity, hyperactivity or inadequate control of the student's reactions to the environment, which the student does not understand (Malá, 2000). His insufficient attention, motivation, effort and perseverance make him visible in the class team and influence the relationships of other actors in the educational process to him. These manifestations thus endanger students not only from the scientific point of view but also from the social point of view, as they affect the position of the student in the class group (Pokorná, 2005). From the latter point of view, The affective area seems to be even more important than the cognitive area (Navrátil, Mattioli, 2011); students should be shaped not only to learn and know but especially to act positively. The school environment (Čapek, 2010), the class group of peers and the relationships between them (Pecha, 1999) can significantly help them by offering the care of school psychologists and special pedagogues (Fischer et al., 2014).

## 3. OBJECTIVE AND METHODS OF WORK

The aim was to use a standardized questionnaire to gain knowledge about the perception of the school by 122 students at a selected primary school to map school areas that may pose risks in terms of their future behaviour. The aim was also to compare the results of the current survey in 2021 with the outputs of the pilot project of

Vojtová and Fučík (2012), which verified the functionality of the questionnaire used. It contained 35 items, where students on a four-point scale (1 = definitely yes, 2 = rather yes, 3 = rather no, 4 = definitely no) expressed their views. By grouping the selected items, it was possible to characterize seven areas of the school environment: overall satisfaction with the school, success and opportunity, negative experiences, teacher-student relationship, school status, identity formation and interaction with peers. The arithmetic mean was used as a basic statistical tool, which allowed to express the total score obtained and was calculated for each questionnaire item and each area of the school environment within all participating school respondents (122) and then broken down into a group of boys (58) and girls. The lower the values achieved on average, the more satisfied the respondents were in evaluating individual items and given areas. Using the standard deviation, the students of the observed sample were divided into five groups according to the level of their perception of the school:

- rather positive (more than  $\bar{X} + SD$ ;  $\bar{X} + 2SD$ ),
- neutral position ( $<\bar{X} - SD$ ;  $\bar{X} - SD$ ),
- rather negative ( $\bar{X} - 2SD$ ;  $\bar{X} - SD$ ),
- significantly negative (less than  $\bar{X} - 2SD$ ).

Within the set goal, the assumption was formulated that the risk areas will not be the same for male and female students.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

In comparison with the pilot survey of Vojtová and Fučík (2012), the overall score of the average value of the respondents we monitored was almost identical, despite the time lag. While our “eighths” (67 % of respondents) were less satisfied, our “ninthths” (33 % of respondents) were more satisfied than in the pilot survey - see Table 1.

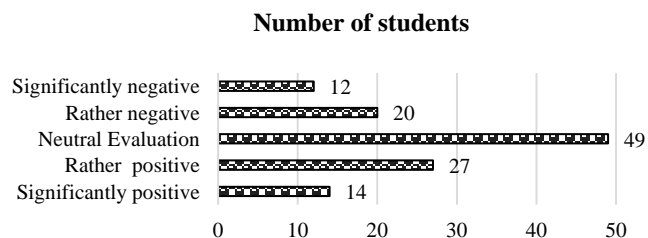
Table 1: Total scores of the group according to the distribution of years

Year	Partial Survey 2020 Overall Score	Pilot Inquiry 2012 Overall score	Difference between 2020-2012
8	2.14	1.94	0.20
9	2.07	2.21	-0.14
Total	2.11	2.08	0.03

The values of the total score given in the table can be completely omitted during the translation and can be used in subsequent analyses as a measure of the respondent's satisfaction with the school. In the case of the 2012 pilot survey, it is "stricter" by 0.03 points. When comparing the total score of the averages for the groups of male and female students, the male students were less satisfied (2.17) than the female students (2.06), but as in the previous case, the differences are not significant. The whole sample of respondents showed a normal distribution of students' frequencies according to their group membership and according to the nature of the school's perception:

- 1.00 - 1.54 significantly positive perception,
- 1.55 - 1.82 rather positive perceptions,
- 1.83 - 2.39 neutral perception,
- 2.40 - 2.67 rather negative perceptions,
- 2.68 - more significantly negative perception - see graph 1.

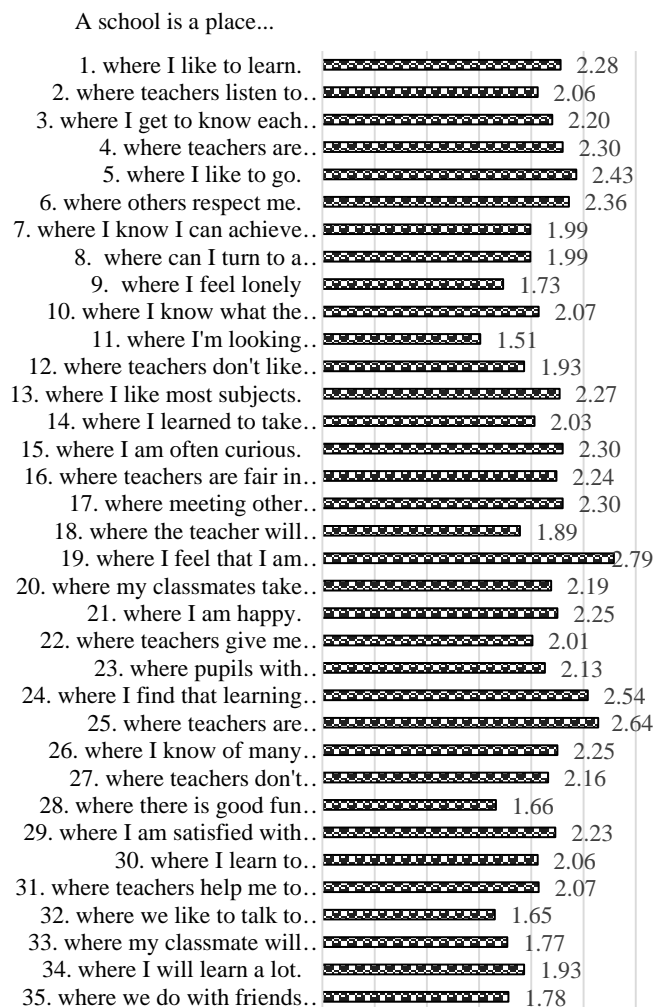
Graph 1: Distribution of respondents' frequencies according to the level of school perception



As can be seen from Graph 1, 40 % of respondents in our sample gave a neutral opinion, 34 % expressed a positive opinion and 26 % a negative opinion. Compared to the pilot project, the number of negative perceptions is more than double, which indicates greater risks in the behaviour of respondents in our sample.

Based on the analysis of total scores according to individual items of the questionnaire, items with a high degree of positive perception of the school were defined (up to and including the value of 1.82) and, conversely, risky items (above the value of 2.40, inclusive) - see Graph 2.

Graph 2: The resulting scores ( $\bar{X}$ ) of the individual statements



As shown in the graph, according to the above criterion, items 9, 11, 28, 32, 33 and 35 belong to the positively evaluated items of the

school and, conversely, items 5, 19, 24, 25 belong to the negative, i.e. risky items.

In monitoring each of the seven areas of school life and their evaluation by students, we came to the following results - see Table 2.

Table 2: Averages of individual areas of school life

	Spheres of school life	Total score Ø	Male students' score Ø	Female students' score Ø
1	Overall satisfaction with the school Questionnaire items 5+10+13+21+24+27+29	2.28	2.37	2,19
2	Success and opportunity Questionnaire items 1+4+7+15+34	2.16	2.23	2.09
3	Negative experience Questionnaire items 9+12+25	2.10	2.06	2.13
4	Teacher-student relationship Questionnaire items 2+8+16+18+22+31	2.04	2.07	2.02
5	School status Questionnaire items 6+14+19+23+33	2.22	2.26	2.17
6	Identity formation Questionnaire items 3+17+26+30	2.20	2.34	2.07
7	Interaction with peers Questionnaire items 11+20+28+32+35	1.76	1.78	1.73

Table 2 shows that the limit value of 2.11 from Table 1

- exceeded the sample of respondents as a whole in four cases out of seven, which signals a worse than average perception of the school by the respondents of our sample in these areas (overall satisfaction with the school, success and opportunity, school status, identity formation),
- did not exceed the sample of students in three areas (negative experiences, teacher-student relationship, interactions with peers), which indicates a better than average perception of school by students,
- did not reach the sample of students in four areas (success and opportunity, teacher-student relationship, identity formation, interaction with peers), which indicates a better than average perception of school by students.

Table 2 also demonstrates that according to the limit values of the normal grouping given in Figure 1

- the only area with a high degree of positive perception (up to and including the value of 1.82) was that of interaction with peers, both in the total number of respondents and in the division into male and female students,
- no area showed a high rate of negative perception (above 2.40 inclusive), although in the group of male students it was significantly closer to perception in the area of overall school satisfaction (2.37) and identity formation (2.34).

Table 2 confirms, in terms of comparing the perception of school by male and female students, that their statements are not identical. Female students, except for one area (negative experience), were always happier with the school in our sample than their classmates

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the above sample of respondents, the survey pointed to differences in the perception of the school environment in comparison with the pilot survey in 2012. The time lag of nine years undoubtedly played a role, as did differences in the frequency and nature of respondents. The overall perception of the school by students, measured by the overall average score, shifted negatively in our survey - see Table 1, which indicates a deterioration in the perception of school by students and an increased risk of problem behaviour. Expressed by standard deviation and bands in the normal distribution of our sample - see Graph 1, 26 % of students with a high level of negative school perception represent essential information that carries both threat and challenge. Why are students so negative? What is the reason for their unfavourable evaluation of the school? Can the school influence it and to what extent? What would have to change at school for a positive change to be feasible? These and other questions and the search for answers belong to a particular school, although it does not "reach" many factors. These include inconsistency of professional training in teaching programmes at pedagogical and non-pedagogical faculties of our universities (Doulík, Škoda, 2014), lack of conception and continuity in political decisions of a total number of 21 education ministers over the past 30 years, failure to link the content standard of the teaching profession with the teacher training career system (Janík, Spilková, Přšová, 2014), non-connection of wage policy with the requirements of professional education (Vomáčková et al., 2015), etc. However, several factors are in the competence of the school and include suggestions resulting from a partial analysis of our survey. The questionnaire revealed those that can be considered distinct from a positive or negative level of perception. The danger of risky behaviour in our sample was indicated by the following items of the questionnaire:

5 – A school is a place I like to go to (it expresses the relationship to school as an institution that has to develop the potential of students: negation carries with it uncertainty whether it does it and if it does it competently and honestly),

19 – A school is a place where I feel that I am important (it expresses the student's position in terms of perceiving the value of his personality and state of subordination, dependence, independence or dignity and touches on the question of whether the curriculum or the student is more important),

24 – A school is a place where I find that learning is also fun (it expresses an opinion on teachers' working methods, which can be engaging and interesting or boring and lifeless, regardless of the content, which should be linked to practical usability and meaningfulness),

25 - A school is a place where teachers favour some students ( there is a sense of injustice in their approach to others in the spirit of violating the "hit or miss" rule, or it contains information about the insufficient explanation of why someone has so-called "benefits" e.g. due to severe manifestations of ADHD).

On the contrary, the items of the questionnaire proved to be supportive for the smooth operation of the respondents at their school:

9 – A school is a place where I feel lonely (it characterizes the importance of the school team for the student, in which he finds friends with whom he confronts his worldview and learns from them other approaches and views on his affairs),

11 –A school is a place where I look forward to a break (it supports the positive perception of the class team, which uses breaks to share, communicate school and extracurricular experiences),

28 - A school is a place where there is good fun during breaks (directly related to the above and also projects school's activities if during breaks the school allows, for example, to play ping pong, basketball in the schoolyard, relax in a hammock, etc. ),

32 – A school is a place where we like to talk to classmates (it expresses the importance of sharing experiences with peers, whose view of the facts, unlike teachers and parents, has a different informative value for the student),

33 – A school is a place where my classmate will help me if I do not know how to do the task (it indicates a state of trust and reciprocity, which strengthens the student's confidence in his work at school),

35 –A school is a place where my friends and I do a lot of interesting things outside of school (it points out the importance of positive relationships between classmates, which grow into activities outside school and expand the field of socialization).

The above information on risk and support areas indicates the direction in which the school should turn its attention. At the same time, it will not be possible without a cooperating and communicative team of teachers, without clearly formulated rules that will be rational, observed and, otherwise, enforceable. For school management, this means demonstrating the courage to fairly differentiate teachers in the evaluation of their pedagogical work and a clear definition of the criteria for their appraisal and evaluation, as working with problem students places increased demands on teachers (Stuchlíková, 2005).

Regarding differences in the perception of school by students, our survey confirmed the well-known fact that both biological factors of gender differences (Dluzen, 2005) and different levels of socialization in terms of obedience and revolt (Hebdige, 2012) work here or have a strong effect. But in addition to that also experiencing, for example, success or opportunities to be active, attractive, excellent, etc.

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