



## Support for Creating Civil Competencies of Primary School Children from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Backgrounds as a Form of Public Safety and Protection

### Podpora tvorby občanských kompetencí žáků základních škol ze socioekonomicky znevýhodněného prostředí jako jedna z forem bezpečnosti a ochrany obyvatelstva

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#### Abstract:

*This paper entitled “Support for Creating Civil Competencies of Primary School Children from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Backgrounds as a Form of Public Safety and Protection” argues in favour of designing a curriculum that is focused on pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as well as on self-awareness in the broader and narrower social context and developing the practical skills needed to protect oneself and others (protecting the general public and protecting life, health and property). The article presents partial data that emerged from the project: Development of Civic Competencies in the Safety and Protection of the Population of Pupils from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Backgrounds, conducted by the Jan Amos Komenský University in Prague. The project has been underway since 1st March 2017 and will end 30th June 2019. The project's recommendation is, among other things, to target the area and encourage teachers to continue with topics that develop not only knowledge but also the perception of the outside world and the awareness of threats and dangers that may affect the development of the child or pupil. The topic that should be integrated with these areas is inclusion itself, which has an indisputable influence on our human society.*

**Keywords:** *Safety, civic competency, protection of the general public, socioeconomic background, pupil*



**Abstrakt:**

*Příspěvek s názvem "Podpora tvorby občanských kompetencí žáků základních škol ze socioekonomicky znevýhodněného prostředí jako jedna z forem bezpečnosti a ochrany obyvatelstva" podporuje myšlenku správného nastavení výchovně vzdělávacího programu, který je zaměřen na žáky ze socioekonomicky znevýhodněného prostředí, zaměřený na uvědomění si sebe sama v užším i širším společenském kontextu a rozvíjející praktické dovednosti potřebné k ochraně sebe samotného i druhých (ochrana obyvatelstva, ochrana života, zdraví a majetku).. Příspěvek prezentuje dílčí data, která vznikla v rámci projektu Rozvoj občanských kompetencí v oblasti bezpečnosti a ochrany obyvatelstva u žáků ze socioekonomicky znevýhodněného prostředí, který realizuje Univerzita Jana Amose Komenského Praha. Doba realizace projektu 1. března 2017 - 30. června 2019. Doporučením projektu je mj. cílit na danou oblast a podporovat pedagogy pokračovat v tématech, které rozvíjejí nejen znalosti, ale primárně i vnímání okolního světa a uvědomování si hrozeb a nebezpečí, která mohou ovlivnit vývoj dítěte či žáka. Tématem, které by se mělo prolínat s těmito oblastmi, je právě i samotná inkluze, která má nezpochybnitelný vliv na naši lidskou společnost.*

**Klíčové slová:** *Bezpečnost, občanské kompetence, ochrana obyvatelstva, socioekonomické prostředí, žák*

**Introduction**

A safe society and the notion of protecting the general public are increasingly becoming topics of discussion. Specifically, attention is paid to increasing the ability to resist unfavourable public influences and circumstances and develop competencies in decision-making processes with regard to emergency situations. This discussion can take place at several different levels: in preparing legislation, in different technical measures, in funding and also in education. This paper focuses especially on the importance of education with regard to the issue of protecting the general public. More specifically, it addresses pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds through a curriculum that enhances their self-awareness in the narrower and broader social context and developing the practical skills needed to protect themselves and others (protecting life, health and property).

The turning point in modern history is certainly the year 1989, when society witnessed a change in the perspective concerning civil protection or, more specifically, protection of the public. It can be argued that, up until 1989, everything had been handled by the state. In the years that followed, given the profound social changes, much of the burden of the responsibility for protection has since shifted to each citizen. Citizens have the right to state support, but they also have an obligation and joint-responsibility for their own protection. Consequently, the need to prepare citizens to cope with emergency situations has increased all the more, and school-based training has appeared to be the most effective.

When a curriculum is properly designed, a child can become an engaged social actor. He/she will be able to perceive the environment around it, participate in it and point out threats not only in terms of those to property, but also in terms of the human perspective and the connection to social responsibility – all in accordance with the child's worldview. [2]

Changes in society bring changes to social values, which are passed on not only within the child's home environment, but also, significantly, through educational

institutions. In this paper, we highlight the role of the primary school, which should have through the efficacy of teaching the potential to forge the future generation and thus create or guide social attitudes and values. [4]

## **1. Research**

The research can be divided into several phases:

- 1) An initial questionnaire survey distributed among pupils – June 2017
- 2) Continuous questionnaire survey distributed among pupils – June 2018
- 3) 1st guided interview with educators from the given schools
- 4) Continuous questionnaire survey among pupils – June 2019 (in progress)
- 5) 2nd guided interview with teachers of given schools (in progress)

This research project aims to determine the starting competencies in the area of safety and protection of the general population among the research sample of pupils from the 1st – 3rd grades at primary schools. A total of 10 primary schools participated in the project. Methodological materials and training modules are being piloted for 24 months in the form of so-called project weeks. (The project weeks run from September 2017 to June 2018, followed by identical project weeks from September 2018 to June 2019.) Each project week has on its own specific topic:

TOPIC 1: WHEN, WHERE AND HOW TO REPORT AN EMERGENCY SITUATION

TOPIC 2: PRINCIPLES OF GETTING TO SCHOOL SAFELY

TOPIC 3: PRINCIPLES WHEN LEAVING THE HOUSE

TOPIC 4: PRINCIPLES FOR WITNESSING ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR I

TOPIC 5: PRINCIPLES FOR WITNESSING ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR II

TOPIC 6: PRINCIPLES OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR ON RAIL TRANSPORT

TOPIC 7: GETTING LOST IN NATURE

TOPIC 8: RESCUE SERVICES AND UNIFORMS

TOPIC 9: FIRE, HOW TO PREVENT IT, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES I

TOPIC 10: FIRE, HOW TO PREVENT IT, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES II

The pupils are instructed in these topics in the afternoon as part of the after-school club activities. While being piloted, an application research phase was carried out to verify pupils' competencies. The ten project weeks (September 2017 – June 2018) were evaluated in June 2018. The project weeks will then be rerun in September 2018 – June 2019. The output will be a comparison of input data, data for the 2017/2018 school year and data for the 2018/2018 school year. At the end of the

project (June 2019), the last phase of application research will be carried out. This phase we will enable us to evaluate the effectiveness and comprehensibility of the methodology and the verification of pupils' competencies. Pupils' starting and final competencies will be compared to each other.

The second research method is guided interviews with teaching staff of the involved primary schools.

## **2. Initial questionnaire survey distributed among pupils – June 2017**

**Survey methodology.** In the first phase of the project, it was necessary to delineate the real situation among pupils of the first grade of the selected primary schools so that the researchers could clarify the level of knowledge of children in specific content areas and at the same time correctly evaluate the possibilities of communication with children of this age group. With the assistance of teachers, a test method was selected. They filled in the test with the children, i.e. they explained the issue in the case of misunderstandings and helped to fill in the questionnaire for children who still could not write well (grade 1). The emphasis was, of course, on the teacher to be able to explain the situation well and not to influence the child's response.

**The research hypothesis** was based on the presumption that children in early primary school lack knowledge in the relevant safety issues, a fact which entirely corresponds with their age, practical experience and high degree of family dependence. When the child is at this age, the family has a strong tendency to protect him/her from danger rather than to actively educate him/her accordingly.

**The aim of the initial questionnaire survey** among pupils was to obtain an analysis of the current state of pupils' knowledge of the protection of life, health and property of Czech citizens.

**The target group of respondents** were primary school pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The total number of respondents was 122 children.

**The main findings of the questionnaire survey, with respect to thematic areas, include:**

### **Emergency numbers:**

- 60% of children know this term. Half of the children know they have to provide factual information (what, where or their name) when calling.
- The most familiar numbers are 150 (72% of the children know it) and 158 (70% of the children it), followed by 155 (66% of the children know it). On the other hand, 112 is less known (41% of children know it).

### **Safe Behaviour Policy:**

- A full 15% of children would enter a lift with a stranger.
- Children are not likely to be tricked on the phone.

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- Children would open doors to acquaintances and relatives (misunderstood question).
- 29% of children inform parents about the destination of a walk or their return time (misunderstood question – half of the children gave a greeting).

**Fire safety:**

- 24% of children think that a fire cannot start from a small spark, and 13% of children think that it cannot start from a match thrown into dry grass.

**Health protection:**

- After a walk, 30% will check for ticks and 31% will wash their hands/body. Others either did not mention anything or mentioned another domestic activity.
- 45% take drinking water and 27% sunscreen (only 15% take both) on a trip in the summer (specifically to bodies of water). In addition, the children mentioned swimwear and different swimming equipment.
- 45% of children tell an adult when they find a syringe. On the other hand, 13% would do nothing; 5% would not know what to do, and 11% would try to throw it in the garbage.
- 13% of children do not consider a jump into unknown water dangerous; only 34% recognised the proper risk (unknown water/depth, possibility of injury).
- Most children know about the risk of injury at home. In particular, they pointed out dangerous activities such as using a knife, jumping and running, climbing on furniture, being close to cookers, appliances, stoves and heating, and using stairs.

**Behaviour near/around railroad track:**

- 4% of children do not know that playing near a train track and walking on the tracks are forbidden. 11% do not know that crossing the tracks anywhere but at the level crossing is forbidden.

**Partial summary:**

It can be seen from the above questionnaire survey and partial output that it is necessary for children/primary school pupils to point out the existence of the possibility of different threats to health, life, property or the state. Each of the questionnaire areas features a higher proportion of respondents whose responses prompt discussion of the awareness of risks and risky behaviour in their lives and surroundings. The basic prerequisite for avoiding such damage, harm or loss, or at least minimising it is to know about it and to learn/show what the risk/risky situation is and how to respond in actual classroom practice. Thus, it aims at a form of prevention through activities that lead to the preparation of children and pupils for emergency situations. The evaluation process has shown that testing children's knowledge with this method is possible, but it requires very precise processing of the questions asked and consideration of the real abilities of children of different ages. The use of various pictures and diagrams is very suitable, where children can more easily understand the situation and respond to the question with understanding.

### 3. Continuous questionnaire investigation between pupils – June 2018 evaluation

**Survey methodology.** In the second phase of the project, the annual project impact on primary school pupils was evaluated. School teachers again assisted in the selection of a test method and helped children to fill in the questionnaire, i.e. they explained the issue in the case of misunderstanding and helped to fill in the questionnaire for children who still could not write well (1<sup>st</sup> grade). The emphasis was, of course, on the teacher to be able to explain the situation well and not to influence the child's response. The test was identical to the June 2017 test, which served as an initial questionnaire.

**The research hypothesis** was based on the presumption that children who were involved in the project for one school year would demonstrate changes not only in knowledge related to the topic, but also in the context of relevant safety issues. We see the change in this process as positive with regard to gaining or expanding knowledge about the issue.

**The aim of the initial questionnaire survey** among pupils was to obtain an analysis of the current state of pupils' knowledge of the protection of life, health and property of Czech citizens.

**The target group of respondents** were primary school pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The total number of respondents was 100 children.

*Tab. 1 Respondents distribution in %*

<b>Structure of the Sample</b>		
Grade	1st Grade	28 %
	2nde	34 %
	3rd and 4th Grade	22 %
	Not stated	16 %
Primary School	Primary School	10 %
	Primary School	11 %
	Primary School	11 %
	Primary School	11 %
	Primary School	10 %
	Primary School	12 %
	Primary School	11 %
	Primary School	12 %
	Primary School	11 %
	Primary School	1 %

*Source: own investigation*

**The main findings of the questionnaire survey, with respect to thematic areas, include:**

### **Emergency numbers**

- **91% of children know** this term, which represented a significantly increased share – in the past phase it was only 60% of children.
- Most children also know that they have to provide factual information (what and where or their name) when calling. In this case, the situation showed significant improvement: the children are 2–3 times more aware of what to do in comparison to the previous phase.
- The best known are the numbers 150 (93% of the children know it), 158 (90% of the children it) and 155 (90% of the children know it). On the other hand, 112 is less known (74% of children know it). The knowledge of all lines increased significantly compared to the previous phase – it amounts to roughly 20%, and the level of awareness of line 112 has almost reached that of other numbers.

### **Principles of Safe Behaviour**

- Only 2% of children would enter the lift with a stranger, which is a significant decrease compared to the previous phase (15%).
- Children are not tricked on the phone. The answers show that almost all children are alert. The level is roughly the same as in the previous phase.
- Children would open doors to parents, relatives or someone they knew most of all. A fifth of the children say that they would open it to no one. In contrast, a child was also found who would open it to anyone. The share that would open to parents and acquaintances has risen since the previous phase, while the share opening to no one has fallen; however, some of the children seemed to understand this answer as "no one but parents".
- 69% of children inform parents about the destination of a walk and only a quarter of the children stated the place where they went.

### **Fire protection**

- Only 2% of children think that a fire cannot be generated from a small spark (almost a quarter of last year's children), and 3% of children said that a fire could not start from a match thrown into dry grass. (Last time it was 13%.) More or less, the awareness of children has reached almost the maximum.

### **Health protection**

- After walking in the woods, 79% look for ticks and 19% wash their hands/body. Other children either did not mention anything or mentioned another domestic activity. In comparison with the previous year, there was a high increase in the mention of ticks; last year, only 30% of children reported this activity, so education was working.
- On a trip in the summer (specifically to bodies of water), 57% would take drinking water and 46% sunscreen (only 23% take both). These two items grew significantly at the expense of other items. In addition, children reported swimwear, goggles,

headgear and different swimming equipment. It can be said that children mentioned more important equipment in this year's wave.

- 20% of children tell an adult/parent when they found a syringe. One third of the children say that they will not touch it (one quarter last year). Half of the children would call the Czech Police (one fifth last year).
- 11% of children do not consider jumping into unknown water dangerous! This is only 2% less than in the previous phase. In this case, no improvement was evident. Others are aware of the risk. Most of them have given the right reasons (unknown water/depth, possibility of injury).
- As with last year, most children know about the risk of injury at home. Among the dangerous activities they mentioned were using a knife, touching a kitchen stove, jumping and running, fire, being close to appliances, stoves and heating systems and using stairs.

#### **Behaviour near/around railroad track:**

- 2% of children do not know that playing near a train track and walking on the tracks are forbidden; 11% of children do not know crossing tracks at anywhere but at a level crossing is forbidden. In this respect, the situation remained at a level similar to that of the previous year. With the exception of the ban on crossing, awareness is generally high overall.

#### **Understanding and interest in issues**

- This year, children were much more interested in answering questions (74% against last year's 62%), and they also understood them better.

#### **Partial summary:**

The evaluation of the duration of the project weeks in the 2017/2018 school year, which included all ten thematic weeks – one month = one project topic, yielded positive findings. These findings are primarily linked to the input data when the area/issue was unclear or incomprehensible for the pupils. After one year of conducting the project, the pupils' knowledge, abilities and skills significantly corresponded to the topics of threats to health, life, property or the state.

#### **4. Guided interview with school educators on the given topic**

At the beginning of the research task, it was necessary to delineate the situation among the teachers of the cooperating schools that showed interest in the project to cooperate and participate in its implementation in the field. **The aim of the guided interview** was to determine the knowledge of the educators and their experience with education in the area of pupil behaviour in emergency situations, the way of creating support materials for education, and also the level of education in the topics of pupil behaviour in emergency situations. At the same time, it was aimed at ascertaining whether and how educators work with classroom teachers in linking topics between teaching and education in the after-school programme.

Six basic questions were asked in a semi-structured focus group, with a broader thematic framework "Competencies of Educators in the Field of Pupil Behaviour in Emergency Situations in the Context of the Transmission of Information to Children". According to respondents' responses and observed group dynamics, additional questions were asked by the moderator, always pointing to the specified focus.

Seven school club educators and 4 directors from participating schools took part in the interview.

### **Partial summary:**

The semi-structured interview and the subsequent analysis of the obtained data indicate that the level of competency of educators in the field of safety topics that are part of the proposed methodology depends on the person. Schools do not provide educators with conceptual training in this area. When working with pupils, educators are dependent on their own initiative and creativity, both in finding teaching materials and in creating aids (e.g. road signs). Educators have experience in teaching and finding teaching materials, drawing especially from the Internet. Schools are financially limited and parents cannot or do not want to participate in the financial provision of teaching aids. Educators to a greater extent do not even have a first aid course.

In light of the above, one of the partial outputs is methodological support, which didactically encapsulate each of the project weeks and gives impetus to the development of the teacher's initiative in the field. An integral part of the methodological output is tests of the individual project weeks. The methodological output will be a document called *Methodology*.

### **Conclusion**

With regard to the input questionnaire survey filled in by pupils from participating primary schools and the interviews with the participating educators or headmasters from these schools, a need to support safety is evident. Given the increasing risks or risky situations that may arise not only with primary school pupils but to each of us, some preparedness is required. Since each person is unique, we cannot predetermine how each of us will act in a given risky or challenging situation. However, it is essential to know what the possible risks and how to prevent them. Partial outputs of the initial questionnaire survey among pupils show some lack of awareness concerning the given topic, when they may happen in their lives, which will influence their further development or life path. A continuous questionnaire survey, after one year of project duration, delivers positive outputs, which are reflected in knowledge, abilities and skills of children/pupils in the given areas of threats to health, life, property or the state. Support is also given to educators who deal with the topic. In terms of the project, support does not only mean personal meetings and sharing of experience, but also for the creation of methodology, which is a partial output of the project. Each topic from the project weeks has an instructive chapter and various practical recommendations. Part of this methodology includes individual tests used to verify the knowledge of children/pupils.

The project's recommendation is, among other things, to target the area and encourage teachers to continue with topics that develop not only knowledge but also the perception of the outside world and the awareness of threats and dangers that may affect the development of the child or pupil. The topic that should be integrated with these areas is inclusion itself, which has an indisputable influence on our human society.

Therefore, the project's assistance and support, which we offer, is not only in the form of prevention. It also seeks from a pedagogical point of view to support value-based attitudes, as well as practical skills, not only by educators/teachers but also by children/pupils thanks to the practical form of teaching. Support for the idea of inclusion needs to be incorporated in the value orientation of the future generation of first-grade pupils. Inclusion not only in the involvement of children/pupils from a socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, but as the essence of social solidarity and diversity of society.

### **Acknowledgment**

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