

INTERESTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SPORT

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Abstract:

The results of qualitative research aimed at finding personal views of children and youth are presented in this paper. The research was conducted in consideration of children's surroundings: school, family and local community. The main objectives of the research were to establish main opinions from the children and youth perspective about their generation problems, possibilities, solutions and ideas for these problems and situations. The *interests* of children were researched (ways of choosing activities of interest and the conditions that influences the selection were identified). The special objective of this research was to gain an insight into whether and to what extent movement activities and different aspects of physical activity are included in their overall structure of interest. The target group for this study were children and young people aged 10 to 18 years. According to the spatial location, respondents came from schools of four counties in Croatia. The main research method was focus groups. Eight focus groups were organised with a total number of 83 students, with an individual group comprised of 9 to 12 students. Then result analysis was performed, which included the collection of impressions, careful analysis of sets of transcripts and encoding of each group. Audio recordings were transcribed, and the resulting transcripts were the basis for the qualitative analysis. Frequency of appearance as well as the percentage of representation of certain codes in the total of transcripts indicated that "*interests*" were predominantly represented (396, 14.27%). "*The problem*" as the code in the researched population of students was presented in a series of representationa (302; 10.88%), followed by "*solution*" (259; 9.33%) and "*ideas*" (252; 9.08%). The registered predominant interests of primary school students, observed through the aspect of kinetic activities, showed that the movement gets its own dimension separate from the context of games and entertainment. Also, it was observed exclusively in relations with various organized sporting activities. In the context of the practice of movement and physical activity for secondary school students, the results indicated that the movement and physical activity played a key role in their interests, but practically were not implemented in their everyday life.

Key words: *children and youth perspective, interests, focus groups, prevalence of physical activities and sport*

Introduction

Forum for Freedom in Education, a non-governmental organization in the field of education, is implementing a project called "Your way! Volunteering youth capacity for building a culture of peace". A general aim of the project is to implement a new concept of stronger cooperation between civil society and public institutions taking care of children and young people (primarily social care centres, schools and family centres) that will simultaneously empower, educate and involve all stakeholders. In order to implement a new concept of cooperation, it is necessary to examine the current status and needs of children and young people. We want to hear their opinion. They are invited to say openly what they think is crucial for their involvement in school and local community and what their personal visions and creative ideas are that occur as possible

solutions. The study was designed to gain an insight into the perceptions of children and young people about the importance and respect their opinions are getting from environment. For the purpose of this study the *interests* of children were researched (their ways of choosing activities of interest and the conditions that influence that selection were identified) and *the level of satisfaction* of personal and peer *interests* were evaluated.

As numerous studies have shown that regular physical activity strengthens the body, develops motor skills, reduces the risk of premature death, improves socialization, improves health in general and has a positive effect on mental health (Bungić & Barić, 2009), the aim of this research was to gain an insight into what is the hierarchy or a classification structure of interests of children of primary and secondary school as well as whether and to

what extent the movement and different aspects of physical activity were included in overall structure of their interests. Furthermore, the research wanted to establish whether health was one of the aspects of interest and/or whether physically active lifestyle was recognized as a key factor in its improvement. Also, we assumed that the expressed opinions of primary and secondary school children would reflect the existence of certain incentive motivating factors for the practice of physical activity in daily life and would give enough information to recognize potential limiting factors for sake of which the same needs were not met. A review of research related to physical activity levels of children and adolescents in Croatia (Jurakić & Heimer, 2012) shows that there is a very high proportion of insufficiently active children and adolescents (almost 92% of girls aged 15 years are non-active). Therefore, it is interesting to show students' interests as possible elucidations of whatever the obtained structure of practising physical activity may be.

Methods

The target group for this study were children and young people aged 10 to 18 years. According to the spatial location, respondents came from primary and secondary schools of four counties: 1) Zagrebačka County (n=20), 2) the City of Zagreb County (n=21), 3) Primorsko-goranska County (n=20) and 4) Splitsko-dalmatinska County (n=22). The total of students from primary schools was 44;

20 boys and 24 girls aged 10 to 14 years. There were 39 secondary school students; 8 boys and 31 girls aged 14 to 18 years. The sample was homogeneous by students' affiliation with a particular school and the county, whereas it was heterogeneous by academic achievement and communicative competence. The reference period was May 2012, when the survey was conducted.

The main research method used is focus groups – a technique that initiates a discussion on the researched topic among individuals who do not know each other but share common characteristics. The goal of each focus group is a deeper comprehension of the researched phenomena (Milas, 2005). For the purpose of this study we organized eight focus groups with a total number of 83 students (10 to 18 years of age), with an individual group comprised of 9 to 12 students, which was considered to be the optimal group size, “*small enough to allow each participant to take a stand, on the other hand, it is big enough so that it can develop a specific group dynamics*” (Skoko & Benkovic, 2009).

Furthermore, the research utilized result analysis, which included the collection of impressions, careful analysis of the sets of transcripts and encoding of each group. Audio recordings were transcribed, and the resulting transcripts were the basis for the result analysis. There are software packages available to encode data. For the qualitative data analysis Program MAXQDA was used. Encoded appearance was then verified by comparing the constant occurrence (Table 1). The specificity of the

Table 1. Encoded appearance

	Code	All coded segments	All coded segments %	Documents
1	Interest	396	14.27	8
2	Interest m/f	59	2.13	6
3	Need	192	6.92	8
4	School as support	61	2.20	6
5	Exactly who?	113	4.07	8
6	School activities	123	4.43	8
7	Out of school – community	152	5.48	7
8	Family – relationship	16	0.58	7
9	Problems	302	10.88	8
10	Care	45	1.62	7
11	My opinion	229	8.25	8
12	Decision making	163	5.87	8
13	Safety – YES	98	3.53	8
14	Safety – NO	51	1.84	7
15	Solution	259	9.33	8
16	Volunteering	170	6.12	8
17	Area of volunteering	95	3.42	8
18	Idea	252	9.08	8

Note: Code – designation for each category defined in accordance with the aim of research; All coded segments – the total frequency of each code in the transcripts; All coded segments % – relative frequency of each code (the ratio between the frequency of certain categories and the sum of the frequencies of all categories); Documents – number of focus groups in which each code appears

above programs is reflected in the visual presentation of the occurrence frequency of codes, which allows analysis at the level of individual portraits of documents.

Results

Eighteen codes, defined in accordance with the set objectives of the research, and frequency of appearance, as well as the percentage of representation of certain codes in the total of elaborated transcripts are presented in Table 1.

Observation was made on *interests* of the surveyed primary (PS) school students (Table 2) and secondary (SS) school students (Table 3) as regarded the identified ways of choosing activities of interest and factors that influenced the selection.

The level to which personal and peer interests have been satisfied was assessed and presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 for the primary school students and secondary schools students, respectively.

Table 2. Primary school (PS) students' interests reported according to importance (most important first)

PS 1	PS 2	PS 3	PS 4
Play and fun	Friendship	Entertainment/socializing	Facebook
School	Facebook	Games	Friendship
Meeting new friends	Food	Sport	Meeting new friends
Sport	Games/playstation	School	School
Working on oneself	Mobile phones/music	Internet (Facebook, Skype, games)	Popularity
Popularity	Their own look	Singing and playing instruments	Twitter
Health	School		Games

Table 3. Interests of students from secondary school (SS) reported according to importance (most important first)

SS 1	SS 2	SS 3	SS 4
School	School	Going out/entertainment	Going out/entertainment
Going out/entertainment	Free time - hobby	School	Facebook
Sport	Going out/entertainment	Finding a job and good position	Music
Music	Seeking personality	Building personality	Popularity
Helping others	Independence	Sport	School
		Music	Money
		Free time	

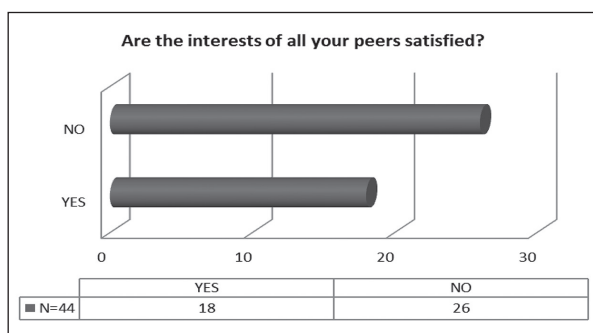


Figure 1. Assessment of peer interests' satisfaction for the primary school students.

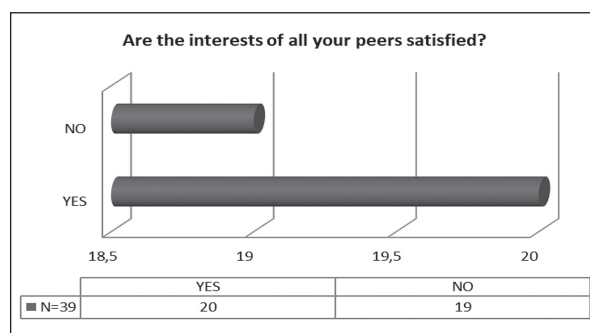


Figure 2. Assessment of peer interests' satisfaction for the secondary school students.

Discussion and conclusions

Frequency of appearance as well as the percentage of representation of certain codes in the total of processed transcripts (Table 1) indicate that “*interests*” (396, 14.27%) had the predominant representation. “*The problem*” as the code in the researched population of school students was presented in the series of representations (302; 10.88%), followed by “*solution*” (259; 9.33%) and “*ideas*” (252; 9.08%). “*My opinion*” code (229; 8.25%) covered more than half of the collected research material (51.81%). The following codes: “*need*” (6.92%), “*volunteering*” (6.12%), “*decision-making*” (5.87%), and “*out of school – community*” (5.48%) had values of 5% to 7%. The occurrence frequency of values less than 5% was obtained for the following codes: “*school activity*” (4.43%), “*exactly who?*” (4.07%), “*safety – YES*” (3.53%), “*area of volunteering*” (3.42%), “*school support*” (2.20%), “*interest – m/f*” (2.13%), “*safety – NO*” (1.84%), “*care*” (1.62%). The lowest values were obtained for the code “*family – a relationship*” (0.58%). Group dynamics is evident from the data distribution across documents. Thus, the differences in “*interests between girls and boys*” together with the recognition of “*school as support*” appeared in six documents, which means that two schools did not mention it at all. Together with the previously mentioned, the codes “*out of school – community*”, “*family – relationship*”, “*care*” and “*safety – NO*” were not mentioned in a single document.

In continuation the observation was made on *interests* of the primary (Table 2) and secondary schools students (Table 3). The level of satisfaction of personal and peer interests was also assessed (Figures 1, 2).

Interests of the participants included in the research (Table 2) were primarily playing games, seeking entertainment, socializing, going out, and meeting new friends. It seems that they do the same via Internet – Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, PlayStation and similar computer games, via Skype and other modern communication technologies that create a postmodern society of the third millennium. Boys and girls of primary school present their interest in school as a relevant dimension of personal growth and development. However, unfavourable attitudes appeared when it came to fun or entertainment, because education process, offered by the educational institution they were currently attending, did not seem motivating, interesting and creative enough. Moreover, school was considered as a serious, solid and stressful institution in which laughter is missing. In “thinking about the future” context, the primary school respondents considered education as interest and as a prerequisite for achieving the desired result when selecting further education, precisely, the selection

of high school and enrolling in a particular high school.

The registered predominant interests of primary school students as observed through the aspect of kinetic activities (physically active lifestyle) showed that the movement got its own dimension separate from the context of games and amusement, but it was observed exclusively in relations with various organized sporting activities (volleyball, basketball, soccer, rowing, etc.). A very clear distinction between various work priorities was pointed out with the claim “*school is much more important than sport*”. This statement signals that the level of knowledge and understanding of engaging in sporting activities regards predominantly the context of competitive, especially high-performance, activities that would bring them financial benefit in the future (“*There are some who are not just into school, rather choose some sport, but they do not want to be an architect, but they want to be famous football players or basketball players, for example. For them sport is in the first place.*”). On the other hand, the statement reveals insufficient level of understanding of physical activity as “activity that includes all body movements, i.e. movements in everyday life, including work, transportation, housework, recreation and sporting activities” (World Health Organization, 2004). In almost all studies on physical activity levels a higher prevalence of insufficient activity in women than in men has been established (Jurakić & Heimer, 2012). Opinions of the respondents of the current research also speak in favour of this conclusion. In the sample given here, in which boys and girls were offered to choose activities, boys were more interested in sports than girls (“*I honestly think that boys have different interests than girls, I do not know, maybe boys are more concentrated on sport.*”). It is interesting how girls expressed the importance of highlighting individuals among many similar people based on their looks, i.e. on external indicators (“*And look...I do not know...how someone dresses, means that someone has new shoes, jeans or something...*”). The possible aspects of morphology, motor and other functional dimensions of the person are left out or not mentioned at all. Among the interests of primary school children health also has purpose to provide better looks and gains in popularity. Additional work/activities are selected on the basis of personal interest and on one’s estimation that he/she is good at it (“*I do not know, generally I choose what I’m good at, so I choose basketball after that, I played with the boys and they told me: “So, you are good in that.”*”).

Interests of the secondary school students were examined on a personal level and on the perceptual level of the whole generation (Table 3). One of the most common responses was “*school*” that was understood as a necessity for the realization of the

person's future. Therefore, high school education is recognized as a link with the labour market and the guaranty that the desired status in society will be achieved. An integral factor of the quality of life, especially among young people, is a way of spending free time (Andrijašević, Pavšić, Bavčević, & Ciliga, 2005). The population of respondents in this sample highlighted the lack of time to meet all the requirements the education system had imposed on them parallelly with what they currently wanted (socializing with peers through media, sport activities, music and a variety of hobbies). The students were aware that they themselves were responsible for finding their own interests. They form them according to what they prefer and pursue them according to their capacities. The increasing financial dependency of society in general and individuals in particular is recognized as one of the elements that will define the possibilities to satisfy one's interests. The choice is there, but depends heavily on the capabilities of a household. So students put school in the first place in the financial structure and only then come extracurricular activities (*"...maybe financial problems are the most pronounced, because not every parent can afford some sports or activity for their children. But I think school is in the first place for every child and that needs to be financed first."*). Unfortunately, the students regard leisure and extracurricular activities as useless for their future, although these activities are currently very important to them.

In the context of the practice of movement and physical activity, the current findings are consistent with the research by Škrinjarić, Blažević and Prelčec (2009), which found that for almost 82.52% of the secondary school population movement and physical activity play a crucial role, but only 20% or less, in both genders, indeed practice physical activity. In some statements the students stressed entertainment among their most important interests. They consider outings, socializing and drinking, activities that fill them with joy.

We present here also a detailed insight into the observed interests of primary and secondary school students, their evaluation of self-satisfaction as well as links with their thinking related to possible incentive and restrictive factors for such interest structures. Primary school peers' interests, at the discretion of the participants of the focus groups (Figure 1), were not satisfied on general. They give opinions that they are required to meet certain expectations in order to satisfy their certain interests. Students allocate financial problems and the financial situation of their families as main causes, then non-supportive environment – primarily parents and teachers, followed by student laziness and insufficient knowledge of their own capabilities, skills and abilities, which often leads to short-term preoccupation with a

certain activity. The limiting factor in meeting one's interests is available time, but the students also mentioned certain health problems that can really limit children with disabilities in meeting the interests, primarily in different sports, which they identified as the satisfaction of interests. Boost for meeting one's interests can be found among peers, however they pointed out that the interests of students are not fulfilled in school, but may not even be fulfilled through primary education and that the satisfaction of interests is achieved in high school. The respondents stated that it was extremely important to examine the satisfaction of interest with a questionnaire or other investigative instrument because they believed it was crucial to ask the students what they wanted. High school students had divided opinions on questions of satisfaction interests by all peers (Figure 2). Reasons for dissatisfaction arise from the capacity of smaller communities that often do not offer any recreation facilities (Markuš, Andrijašević, & Prskalo, 2008). Furthermore, financial reasons and family disagreements represent a major obstacle for most pupils. The possible solutions are certain personal traits like determination, resourcefulness and perseverance, which are identified as qualities leading to success. Success is presented as a sense of victory in competitive bidding. Also, lack of motivation is noticeable, the causes of which are in jarring parental upbringing. Health problems, as the real reasons for impossibility of achieving interests, were also listed.

Due to specifically designed pattern, the findings cannot be generalized as a representative opinion of Croatian students, but just as the representative opinion indicators of students from four counties of the Republic of Croatia. The conclusions of this study can be linked with numerous previous claims on the concerning data on the percentage of students in primary and secondary schools who do not wish to engage in any form of physical activity. We can say that *"there should be responsibility in strategy development and education of the young with incorporated value systems that will have long-term effects on the quality of all segments of life"* (Markuš, Andrijašević, & Prskalo, 2008). Given the information about a high prevalence of insufficient physical activity in Croatia, the development of a national strategy for the promotion of physical activity is perceived as the only logical procedure (Jurakić & Heimer (2012). Children and young people are often referred to in media as objects, as well as those who are decided upon, who should be protected, and often as a problem. They are mentioned in the context of protection of children's rights, in the context of crime, politics and social protection. Too little and too seldom we ask them for their opinion, which is something that we have reaffirmed in this study.

Adults too often talk about the society of knowledge for growth and progress, of the need for social change, but perhaps we are too little concerned about leading developmental, emotional and intellectual needs of future generations. How many are really familiar with the children and young people's experience and perception of the society as it is nowadays? How much do we know about how they are influenced by social events and changes, and how we allow them to express their opinions and needs? "None of this will just happen, all of us should enable it." (Daley, 2002). In the canons of modern science, contents of education finds the socialization whose definition is very well known since Durkheim (1907), so we read as follows: Event

of socialization in human activity that is determined with social conditions help in shaping the human personality (Gudjons, 1993). Analogously history shows us moments of marginalization, subordination and complete disappearance of the previously mentioned factors necessarily that lead to a one-dimensional human being whose aspirations are expressed by selecting food, clothing, ways of entertainment as children and the young do today. We must not misunderstand progress and development, but find solutions by listening to the future – our children and young people – who need role models, ideals, and values. That is the most important and most valuable inheritance that their parents, teachers and educators are obligated to provide.

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INTERESI DJECE I MLADIH U KONTEKSTU POJAVNOSTI FIZIČKE AKTIVNOSTI I SPORTA

U ovom radu prezentirani su rezultati kvalitativnog istraživanja s ciljem pronalaženja osobnih stavova djece i mladih. Istraživanje je provedeno s obzirom na okolinu u kojoj djeca najčešće borave: školu, obitelj i lokalnu zajednicu. Glavni ciljevi istraživanja bili su utvrditi mišljenje djece i percepciju mladih o njihovim generacijskim problemima, mogućim rješenjima i idejama za rješavanje navedenih problema i situacija. Istraženi su interesi djece (način odabira zanimljive aktivnosti) te su identificirani uvjeti koji utječe na izbor. Poseban cilj ovog istraživanja bio je saznati da li se i u kojoj mjeri kretanje i različiti aspekti tjelesne aktivnosti uključuju u ukupnu strukturu interesa. Uzorak ispitanika činila su djeca i mladi u dobi od 10-18 godina. Prema prostornom položaju, ispitanici su učenici škola četiriju županija u Hrvatskoj. Glavna metoda istraživanja bila je metoda fokus grupa. Organizirano je osam fokus grupa (9 do 12 učenika po grupi) s ukupnim brojem od 83 ispitanika. Audio snimke su transkribirane te je pažljivo analiziran dobiveni set i svaka je skupina kodirana. Nastali transkripti bili su temelj za

kvalitativnu analizu rezultata. Učestalost pojavljivanja, kao i postotak zastupljenosti pojedinih kodova u ukupnom rezultatu transkripata ukazuje na pretežitu zastupljenost koda „interesi“ (396; 14,27%). Sljedeći u nizu pojavljuje se kod „problem“ (302; 10,88%), a slijede ga kod „rješenje“ (259; 9,33%) i kod „ideja“ (252; 9,08%). Registrirani dominantni interesi učenika osnovnih škola, promatrani kroz aspekt kinezioloških aktivnosti, pokazuju da pokret dobiva vlastitu dimenziju odvojenu od konteksta igre i zabave. Također, uočen je isključiv odnos s raznim organiziranim sportskim aktivnostima. U kontekstu kretanja i fizičke aktivnosti rezultati učenika srednjih škola su pokazali da kretanje i fizička aktivnost ima ključnu ulogu u njihovim interesima, ali se srednjoškolci praktično ne kreću i ne bave se fizičkim aktivnostima u svakodnevnom životu.

Ključne riječi: percepcija djece i mladih, interesi, fokus grupe, prevalencija fizičke aktivnosti i sporta