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# CHANGES IN FRIENDSHIPS AS A RESULT OF STUDENTS' TRANSITION FROM GRADE FOUR TO GRADE FIVE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## Abstract

*The present ethnographic study deals with the transformation of social relationships in the course of students' transition from grade four to grade five of primary school. The aim of the paper is to point out the existence of non-normative transitions that tend to be interpreted as hidden since they occur within a single institution and at a moment that is atypical in comparison with the typical normative transition from primary to lower secondary level. After multi-source data collection, the study presents the issue of students leaving for selective schools and at the same time draws attention to the strengthening effect of what is termed as double leaving, which refers to a repeated change in class structure and a double strain on class climate. The study is also concerned with the period of adolescence during which the transition occurs. As a result of developmental characteristics, changes in friendships and the emergence of the first romantic relationships are encountered.*

## Keywords

*Primary and lower secondary school, non-normative transition, transfer, peer relationships, romance, ethnographic case study*

## Introduction

The transition of students from one educational environment<sup>1</sup> to another is seen as a critical moment in their educational path. This is a process that is accompanied by a host of problems involving pedagogical, social, and organizational aspects (Akos & Galassi, 2004). The consequences of all of these potentially overlapping processes affect students' school lives and may to a certain degree influence their relationships with school and learning (Walterová et al., 2011). Changes to the configuration of teacher–student relationships, changes to the nature of instruction, new forms of school work and learning, a different physical environment, and new experiences with various social relationships with classmates (cf. Akos & Galassi, 2004; Pietarinen, 1998; Smyth, McCoy, & Darmody, 2004) – these are the common difficulties that students are faced with and have to cope with during the transition.

Student transition in the Czech context is a topic dealt with by such authors as Dvořák (2011), who focused on the transition from primary to secondary school. Dvořák and Walterová et al. (2011) agree that this type of transition has received only marginal attention despite the fact that it is a turning point in the educational path of students with a considerable level of risk in terms of students' school success and psychosocial well-being. The absence of research studies centered on inter-stage transition within compulsory schooling can be ascribed to the perception of primary school as a whole, within which the transition is seen as a hidden, internal phenomenon taking part within a single institution (p. 10). This phenomenon has received greater research attention abroad, where the transition from primary to lower secondary education is usually accompanied by a move to a different building or even municipality (cf., e.g., Smyth et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, the Czech environment also includes primary schools where instruction at the two stages takes place in two different pavilions or even two detached buildings, which makes the transition more visible. Due to different capacity arrangements, there are also situations where students transfer from one educational environment to another at a time

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this study, I understand the transition from one educational context to another as a joint transition for a specific student age group. In my classification, this category comprises in particular non-traditional transitions within primary education, transitions to the higher secondary level, and transfers to different types of schools. Dvořák, Vyhnálek, and Starý (2016) include also entering kindergarten and primary school.

that is atypical of the usual normative transition from stage one to stage two of primary school. In the present paper, I deal with such a non-normative transition, specifically the transition of students from grade four to grade five of primary school which entails transfer to a new building. I classify as non-normative such student transition between individual grades of primary school that occurs at a moment that is atypical (see below). Within this phenomenon, I focus on a specific and fundamental issue in connection with the transition – the changing nature of friendship that becomes gradually evident over the transitory period, i.e. the period from grade four to grade five of primary school.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, the need for contact with peers is understood as one of school-age children's most significant needs (Vágnerová, 2008, p. 292). In early adolescence,<sup>2</sup> the peer group grows in importance and represents a source of emotional and social support for students. Friendships and also first loves evolve at this stage. Taking the need for fellowship during this period into consideration, the question arises of how relationships among students change in the context of the transition from grade four to grade five.

## Theoretical background

### *Typology of transitions within primary education*

In this study, I am concerned with peer relationships during a period of non-normative student transition – a passage from grade four to grade five of primary school. Abroad, in connection with the passage of students between primary and lower secondary education the term *transfer* is used in addition to the term *transition* (cf. Akos & Galassi, 2004). However, Galton, Gray, and Ruddock (2003, p. 1) distinguish these two terms. According to these authors, transition refers to the passage of students to the higher stage of primary school, specifically to the lower secondary level. The Czech equivalent would be a “přechod/postup” (“passage/progression”) that takes place within

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<sup>2</sup> I understand early adolescence in accordance with Langmeier and Krejčířová (2006) as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood that covers the first five years of adolescence. This period is a time of complex personality transformation on the physical, mental, and social levels. Vágnerová (2008), in contrast, uses the term pubescence. In this study, I have stuck to the terminology according to Langmeier and Krejčířová (2006)—early adolescence—which may be delimited as the period between ages 11 and 15.

a single institution. In contrast, they take transfer as referring to situations where students transfer to a different school. In the Czech education system, transfer may correspond with moving to a different type of school, e.g. a multi-year gymnasium. For the purposes of this study, I decided to use, in alignment with Walterová et al. (2011, p. 55), the term transition, which I understand as equivalent to a “passage/progression” to a higher grade within a given institution. Nevertheless, since the transition at the primary school under consideration is not a typical inter-stage passage but a passage taking place a year earlier, I will use the more specific phrase: *non-normative transition*. Vyhnálek (2016, p. 64) uses the notion of “non-normative” in connection with “inter-school mobility,” which he applies to situations when students leave primary school at a point other than those designated by the system, i.e. student transfers from a particular school at a time that is different from the typical normative transition to a higher level of education. This type of transition represents interference with ordinary educational procedure. In accordance with Hargreaves and Galton (2002, p. 1), I use the term transfer in the sense of “moving” to another institution, even though not necessarily to a higher-level school.

Within the category of transition, the passage from stage one to stage two of primary school can be considered the most typical form of passage and concerns the majority of students. Since it does not involve a change in organization, this type of transition is often underestimated and is referred to as “hidden” (Dvořák, 2011, p. 59) or “natural.” A non-normative transition which occurs at an atypical moment and is connected with transferring to another building can be approached in a similar way as a hidden transition, as it also takes place within a single institution. Given that students pass from one grade to the next, this moment may be perceived as having an even more hidden nature than the typical inter-stage passage, which is generally a more visible milestone in students’ school life. On the one hand, students move to a new building (transfer), while on the other, the entire period of passage occurs within one primary school (transition).

At the primary school under examination, passage from grade four to grade five involved moving to a different building. Students thus experienced the boundary between transition and transfer, and regardless of when students undergo such an experience (whether during a normative passage to stage two of primary education or at an earlier time, as in the class under examination), the entire situation may eventually bring similar challenges to students as they would face in the typical passage from stage one to stage two of primary school. Akos and Galassi (2004) mention three areas of potential problems that students may be faced with in a transition. These comprise concerns about an increase in school duties (academic issues), concerns about changes in social relationships (social issues), and, last but

not least, the domain of organizational affairs (procedural issues), such as different teachers teaching the same class, orientation in a new environment, and changes to the timetable.

In the context of transfer, the most widely known type is transfer to a six- or eight-year gymnasium, which is more or less voluntary, based on a decision made by the parents and student. The category of voluntary transfers includes also transfers to selective schools. In addition, there is a group of students for whom transfer is a necessity. This category is predominantly formed by transfers from incomplete schools to fully-organized primary schools (Walterová, et al. 2011, p. 63). Schools with multi-grade classes are an example of a transfer of necessity.<sup>3</sup>

All types of transitions/transfers—hidden, within a single organization, from necessity, and voluntary—become a lived reality for students and deserve research attention. Transfers to six- and eight-year gymnasiums (see, e.g., Straková & Greger, 2013) and transfers from schools with multi-grade classes (see, e.g., Trnková, 2006) are often discussed. The issue of hidden transitions is highlighted by such authors as Dvořák (2011), but non-normative transitions still remain a largely unresearched phenomenon. Hence, the aim of this paper is to draw attention to the existence of non-traditional organizational arrangements of primary schools leading to unusual transitions that may also affect social relationships among classmates.

#### *Peer relationships in early adolescence*

The transition from grade four to grade five of primary school takes place at a time when students are undergoing accelerated changes typical of adolescence. Early adolescence may be seen as a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood, comprising a complex transformation of personality in physical, mental, and social aspects (Macek, 2003, p. 35). Within the period of early adolescence, which covers the first five years of adolescence between ages 11 and 15, the stages of prepubescence and puberty itself are usually distinguished. The entire period is characterized by adolescents gradually breaking away from parental influence and starting new and differentiated relationships with peers (Langmeier & Krejčířová, 2006, p. 154).

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<sup>3</sup> Trnková (2008) characterizes schools with multi-grade classes as schools “where in at least one class students of more than one grade are taught together” (pp. 53–54).

Friendships and the need for contact with peers in general is very strong during this period, since friends provide adolescents with the social and emotional support that they need in order to overcome the insecurity they experience during the process of becoming independent. Peer groups also serve as a source of opportunities for social comparison, which is important for a realistic self-image and facilitates the process of acquiring new social skills. Peer groups provide space for sharing similar problems, views, values, and preferred ways of life (Macek, 2003, p. 57). Both symmetrical and hierarchical relationships start to develop within these groups. At the beginning of the period, peer groups are predominantly formed by members of the same gender, which helps students confirm their gender identity. Vágnerová (2008) argues that these groups often show a tendency towards self-stereotyping where peers of each gender consider themselves better than the other gender (p. 312). Girl and boy groups often differ in size, preferred gender-based behavior, and communication. Boy groups tend to be more extensive and are often organized hierarchically; there is often a leader that other members admire (Macek, 2003, p. 57). Boys emphasize shared interests, while relationships among them are not as important. In contrast, girls prefer more intimate friendship with a smaller number of members. These dyads or triads are not organized hierarchically. Girls communicate more; they share their secrets and are interested in the world of others (Vágnerová, 2008, pp. 312–313).

Over time, there is gradually less separation into boy and girl groups and mixed groups start to emerge. Mutual contacts grow in frequency, the topic of first loves appears, and the first romantic relationships emerge (Cornolly, McIsaac, & Shulman et al. 2014, p. 9). The first real romantic relationship is often preceded by a potential pairing where a group of students tried to bring a couple together based on a given characteristic, e.g. a calculated love percentage (Bittnerová, 2002, p. 4). Both friendships and more intimate relationships are characterized by instability and variability. Adolescents like to experiment, to check and confirm the social competences that may bring them security in the form of acceptance by peers (Vágnerová, 2008, p. 381). The first relationships are therefore often superficial and short-lived, as the primary focus is on gaining experience.

During the transition from grade four to grade five, acceptance by peers and in particular by older schoolmates plays an important role for students, because they lose the social position that they had built over the course of the four years at stage one of primary school and are forced to build a new position. As a result, relationships within and outside the class may for some time be relatively unstable and changeable.

## Methods

The study presents selected results of research aimed at addressing the question of how friendships change during student transition.<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to holistically understand and describe the lives of those interacting within the school environment, this paper adopts the design of an ethnographic case study (Herriot, 1997 in Kučera, 1992, p. 6), notable for its pursuit of understanding the attitudes and views of a certain group of people, which allows the researcher to explore deeper layers of interpersonal interactions (Švaříček & Šedřová, et al., 2007, p. 123). The objective of a case study is a comprehensive understanding of the case in its authentic environment.

The idea to research the phenomenon of transition originated at a time when I was working as a teaching assistant at stage one of a primary school. The initial impulse for investigating this issue arose from observation of class instruction when, with the end of the school year approaching, the grade four class teacher brought up the topic of the transition to grade five, which she identified as problematic. Concerns relating to the transition to which the class teacher was referring are connected with this primary school's non-traditional organization. As for instance Walterová et al. (2011) mention, primary school is currently conceived of as an institution that combines stages one and two into a single organizational unit. The primary school under examination is divided into stage one and stage two, with each stage situated in a separate building. Students in the first stage attend a smaller building, while students in the second stage are taught in a larger building. It is a special feature of the school that for capacity reasons grade five classes are situated in the building designed for stage two. Thus, grade five students transfer to a building intended for stage two despite the fact that under Sec. 46 (2) of Act No. 561/2004, Coll., on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education, they fall within stage one. Given this organizational arrangement, students here in fact undergo a transition a year earlier than those who have a typical inter-stage transition and are faced with similar issues. Changes in the configuration of relationships between teachers and students, curricular demands and related concerns about a decline in school results, and changes in the physical and social environment represent

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<sup>4</sup> This research question was addressed within a broader project aimed at determining the ways in which such a transition is perceived by students and their class teachers (Havlíková, 2016).

the main areas associated with the transition (cf. Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 212; Walterová et al., 2011, n. pag.). In addition, the transition period is accompanied by those changes inherent to early adolescence.

In this study, the domain of peer relationships in the context of transition is presented from the students' perspective. In grade four, the research sample comprised 22 students, 11 girls and 11 boys. In grade five, the number of students fell as three boys had transferred to selective schools. The students transferred to the given schools in the belief that these schools would better prepare them for entrance examinations to six- and eight-year gymnasiums. The total number of students in this grade was therefore 19, with 11 girls and eight boys. Data were collected at three points: the end of the 2014/2015 school year, at the beginning of the following 2015/2016 school year, and subsequently shortly before the end of the first semester of grade five.

The main characteristics of an ethnographic case study include application and combination of various methods of data collection (cf. Hendl, p. 108). Data on which this study is based were collected through direct participatory observation, analysis of essays, and focus group interviews with students. Figure 1 presents the data collection procedure and combination of methods in sequence.

<b>2014/2015 SCHOOL YEAR</b> <b>GRADE 4</b> <i>May-June</i>	<b>2015/2016 SCHOOL YEAR</b> <b>GRADE 5</b> <i>September-December</i>	<b>2015/2016 SCHOOL YEAR</b> <b>GRADE 5</b> <i>December-January</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>OBSERVATION 1 (O1)</b> May, June</li> <li>• <b>ESSAYS (E)</b> June</li> <li>• <b>INTERVIEW WITH THE TEACHER (IT1)</b> June</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>OBSERVATION 2 (O2)</b> September, October</li> <li>• <b>FOCUS GROUPS 1 (FG1)</b> October</li> <li>• <b>INTERVIEW WITH THE TEACHER 2 (IT2)</b> December</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>INTERVIEW WITH THE TEACHER 2 (IT2)</b></li> <li>• <b>OBSERVATION 3 (O3)</b> January</li> <li>• <b>FOCUS GROUPS 2 (FG2)</b> January</li> </ul>

Figure 1:  
*Overview of data collection methods in sequence*

Observations covered the entire period of data collection and formed the core of the process. In general, the aim was to capture all student interactions and student behavior during the transition process. Field observation notes were used to gradually build a data corpus about the phenomenon under examination.<sup>5</sup> Altogether, 39 lessons including breaks were observed.

I analyzed essays on the topic “Looking forward to grade five?!” to determine what ideas and expectations the students had about grade five. This method resulted in a corpus consisting of 22 essays each covering one A4 page. Given the non-reactive nature of the data, these essays were useful in triangulating the methods, particularly in combination with the focus groups with students described below.

I conducted four focus groups with grade five students, two at the beginning of the school year and two towards the end of the first semester. The interviews were carried out separately with seven girls and seven boys. Gender division was selected on the basis of findings from the essay analysis that indicated minor gender nuances in perceptions of the transition. The objective of the initial two interviews was to determine the students' first impressions about the new environment as well as where their ideas about grade five corresponded to the actual situation and where there was a mismatch. The first interview with the girls took 47 minutes. The interview with boys was shorter, lasting only 40 minutes. The meetings took place in the ceramics studio available to students at stage two. The two subsequent focus groups were attended by the same students as in the first two focus groups. These meetings aimed at discovering what changes could be identified in comparison with the results from the first set of interviews held when the students were novices to stage two. The interviews once again took place in the ceramics studio. The meeting with the girls took 49 minutes and that with the boys 43 minutes.

Data obtained from observations and focus groups were transcribed. The essays remained as they had been submitted. The data corpus was subsequently analyzed by means of open coding in several steps: segmentation, coding, categorization, and interpretation. The advantage of open coding lies in its simplicity and variability of use for a wide range of qualitative projects. It is a universal method for starting data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1999).

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<sup>5</sup> During data collection, I did not carry out direct pedagogical activity as a teaching assistant. I was assisted by trained interns from the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno.

## Research results

### *Transformation of social relationships within the class*

Concerns about changes in class composition were a topic that was strongly reflected during the entire transitory period. The students mostly feared that they would lose their friends because some of their classmates were leaving for different types of schools. As Nikolka noted, *“It’s a pity that some of the boys are leaving for another school.”* A similar idea was expressed by Jirka: *“Some classmates will not attend stage two with us because they are going to another school. I feel really sorry about that because I like them and they are my friends.”* A substantial change in class composition is something that usually occurs at the boundary between stages one and two of primary school. Given the non-traditional structure of the primary school under examination, the first change occurred already a year earlier than what is typical, and we may say that we confirmed concerns about potential changes of relationships within the class.

There were three boys that did not enter grade five with the rest of the students. Since this is a small number, their departure need not at first seem likely to cause any significant change in the configuration of relationships within the class. However, these boys were students with excellent results and, moreover, were popular with their classmates and helped cement the group. Therefore, their departure caused a certain degree of changes in existing friendships (*“We don’t like Nina and Jonáš so much anymore, or actually, we quite like Jonáš, but not Nina”*) as well as the starts of new friendships (*“Now I talk to Anna; I also sat with her at one desk for a while, but then the teacher separated us”*). Based on the observations of lessons, and particularly breaks, that took place towards the end of the semester, I can conclude that both the original relationships from grade four and the new ones formed in grade five gradually stabilized.

It is often declared that the Czech education system is characterized by early differentiation especially due to students leaving for eight-year gymnasiums. Such departures mostly affect primary schools, where so-called residual students that are difficult to work with concentrate (Straková & Greger, 2013). Problems occur also in social relationships, where parallel classes may be merged as a result of a significant number of students having left. Mechanical regrouping of grades naturally hinders group cohesion, and affiliation with the former class may continue for several years.

At the primary school examined, the departure of classmates was commented on mainly by students who also had good results but who had not succeeded at entrance examinations to selective schools. They saw their failure as temporary and were planning on applying to this type of school again the following year, as with Kuba’s comment: *“It’s a pity that the boys left but I will also apply to that school next year.”* Other students were also thinking

about transferring, predominantly to six- or eight-year gymnasiums. Martin stated, *"I will sit for entrance exams to a multi-year gymnasium next year."* The fact that some students had left had somewhat influenced the climate in the class and at the same time the wave of departures was strengthened, since the students who remained felt more certain about their plans for the future. The non-traditional organization of the school thus reinforced the existence of so-called double leaving, which means repeated change in class structure and double pressure in terms of class climate.

*Classmates as a source of security*

During the four years that students had spent at stage one of primary school, they had undergone development from novices to the oldest and most experienced students. After transitioning to grade five, they again returned to the same position as when they had started school, i.e. they were the youngest students. This was understandably accompanied by feelings of fear and worries that students talked about with reference to the future.

Students expressed their worries in connection with coming into contact with older schoolmates. Olaf succinctly stated, *"I fear the older ones."* They most feared the oldest and, as David put it, *"biggest ones."* David further said, *"I hope I'll know where to go and won't stray into a grade nine classroom."* It is evident that the students were aware that they would be the youngest ones and were planning to avoid contact with older students.

Some students even feared bullying, as illustrated by Karel's statement: *"I went to have a look and the older kids are strange and I don't want any bullying there."* Olaf even counted on bullying: *"I don't look forward to the older kids bullying me."* In his essay, Dan also made a comment on the issue of bullying, saying that there was no bullying at stage one, only joking about first graders. In his view, now the jokes would change into ridicule targeted at the youngest ones, i.e. him and his classmates: *"we just sometimes laughed about the first graders when they went out with their slippers on, and so now the older kids will make fun of us."* These illustrative comments confirm the significance that the students ascribed to the sudden change in status from the oldest to the youngest students.

Nevertheless, the students were managing to overcome their fear of the unknown with the help of their classmates. They clearly relied on their friends from the same grade. Pavel noted, *"It's good that friends of mine from grade four are going there too."* Lucka expressed her feelings of security in a similar way: *"I will still have my friends there so I won't be as afraid."* As a further example, Aneta stated, *"I'm glad that my friends are going there too, so I am not so worried."* Martin expressed himself most aptly: *"I'm lucky to be going there with the others, because when they're fresh with me I'll call boys from my class to help me."* Classmates thus not only eliminate prohibitive fear but will also come to help in case of need and thus make it possible to face the older kids as a group.

After they had started grade five, students were confronted with a number of changes. In one respect, they expressed relief that their fears had not materialized. As Olaf put it, "*Fortunately, the ninth graders don't bother me, so I'm not afraid.*" The students did not mention any signs of bullying. It turned out that several of the worries had been unfounded and so vanished after the transition. Nevertheless, shortly after the transition the security provided by friends played a significant role in other respects, particularly in adapting to the new environment. Most of the students had encountered difficulties with orientation in the new building and therefore explored the premises in pairs or groups, relying on the others' better orientation skills. "*I once forgot where to go, but Anička helped me and turned me in the right direction.*" This observation revealed also situations where students had got lost in the school building, but the very presence of their friends was sufficient for them not worry at that moment about whether they were heading in the right direction. An additional factor that made the adaptation smoother for some students was older siblings who were in a higher grade and already knew the environment well.

It turns out that friendships took on new qualities. Students no longer emphasized only shared activities but also the ability to show solidarity and provide help. The need to share feelings and experience the discomfort of the new environment together also became important. To some extent, friends were seen as a source of security and support.

#### *First loves, or from friendship to romance*

The transition from grade four to grade five is accompanied by developmental changes that intensify during grade five. In addition to relying on classmates as a source of security, students formed new, romantic relationships. At the beginning of the school year, grade five students went on a one-week residential school trip designed to help them to adapt to the new environment. In most schools, such courses are held one year later when students pass from grade five to grade six, the typical boundary between stages one and two of primary school. In this case, the course was organized one year earlier due to the school's non-traditional division. Two grade five classes together with their new class teachers and some other teachers took part. The focus groups were held with the students shortly after they had returned from this course, when they were full of new impressions and experiences. The school trip was therefore a major topic in the interviews. The girls were more talkative, and they most valued the more relaxed routine, visits to one another's bedrooms, and frequent discotheques. For example, Aneta said, "*What was great about it was that we had a disco almost every day.*" Discotheques gave the children a feeling of maturity and a certain intimacy. As Nikolka noted, "*There was a great disco; they had a disco ball and it was much, much more grown-*

up.” Katka added, “*We had slow dances with boys.*” In the interviews, there were even statements about who was dating whom and who loved whom. One romance was especially intense for Anna: “*Well, it was love at first sight; I fell in love with Pavel from class 5B.*”

Girls became newly interested in boys from the other grade five class and, due to the hormonal changes they were experiencing, started to perceive and get to know the boys in a different way. However, not only were boys from the other class attractive, but the girls also wanted to get closer to their classmates. According to the boys, the interest was only one-sided. The boys strongly denied any interest and gave a conservative impression. Jirka said, “*There was always a discotheque and the girls kept approaching us.*” Kuba acknowledged, “*Yeah, they wanted to dance; they kept bothering us and pulling us in.*” The boys interpreted the situation in their own way; they characterized the girls’ behavior as silly and built more closed groups centered around their own interests where there was no room for girls.

Prepubescent behavior had a profound impact on the students’ school life also once they had returned from the school trip. This is seen in data from observing breaks between lessons, which revealed how girls spent their free time. The discussion started by joking about who would be a good match for whom. One of the girls even wrote down the notorious love equation: “*A + B = big love.*” This behavior, which was observable in particular in the girls, may be interpreted as a kind of virtual matching foreshadowing actual relationships. Lucka commented further on the issue of dating: “*Well, now Natka is going out with Erik. They’ve already kissed.*”

These down-to-earth statements illustrate that love is not just a topic to talk about but also something that the students were starting to experience. Aneta described her situation as follows: “*Well, I like Kuba, but sometimes also Emil, but with Kuba it was love at first sight.*” Other girls also touched upon frequent changing of boyfriends. This variability in relationships can be interpreted as experimentation, with adolescents trying out and verifying the social competences that may bring them a sense of security from acceptance by their peers. During the interview, a quarrel broke out among the girls as to who was dating whom and what the signs of it were. The girls believed that there was a relationship between two of their peers when they met in the corridor during a break and had a date. Observation of such a break revealed that the date must necessarily cover the entire break and invitations were solely in the competence of the boys.

It is amusing to compare this account with the way boys perceived the situation – they mostly did not have any information about dating the girls and did not want to have such information. It is clear that these observations revealed platonic, as Kučera (2005) put it, “romance.” We can also identify a desire of the prepubescent girls to be courted by the boys, even though it

came at the girls' initiative (cf. Bittnerová, 2002). Such behavior confirms the difference in maturity between boys and girls, with girls maturing earlier than boys (Vágnerová, 2008. p. 327). The difference in development is evident in the sphere of leisure time activities. The girls were occupied both during the school trip and after returning to school with activities with a romantic overtone, while the boys were engaged in sports activities, playing computer games, or buying sweets from the school's vending machine.

Growing interest in partner relationships is naturally influenced by the atmosphere of stage two. The building has a more mature look in comparison with the environment of stage one. As David put it, "*It's quite grown-up up here, with no pictures, only these posters and orders, such as 'Don't take drugs.'*" Grade five students are the youngest at the school, and it is therefore understandable that they have greater interest and desire to explore the brand new world, the world of older and more experienced schoolmates. The students felt the need to behave in a more mature way because this is what their older and socially stronger schoolmates did. On the one hand, they feared contact, but on the other hand they wanted to become part of life at stage two, which led them to attempts at getting closer to their older schoolmates. If the older students were spending the breaks "kissing in the corridors the whole time" as David put it, it is no wonder that the younger children were trying to copy them. It was no longer attractive to play together on the carpet during breaks, as they had done at the lower stage; it was now normal to walk the corridors and show interest in what was going on at stage two of primary school.

### Conclusion

In the present study, I dealt with transformation of peer relationships over the course of student transition from grade four to grade five of primary school. I understand this transition as a non-normative transition given that it took place at an atypical moment within a single institution and was connected with transfer to a different building. I approach transition as an internal phenomenon, which I designate in accordance with Dvořák (2011) as hidden. Walterová et al. (2011) describe as hidden the typical normative transition, i.e. the transition from stage one to stage two of primary school, because it takes place within a single institution. It may seem that the student is not making any transition and is continuing at the same school, usually in the same building (cf. Dvořák, 2011, p. 59). I designate such a transition as natural. In comparison, non-normative transitions may be seen as hidden but as having greater intensity because they take place at a different period than what is typical for the transition from one stage of primary school to the next.

This study draws attention to the fact that students perceive changes in social relationships, one of the consequences of the transition, in an intense way. Students' prevalent interest in terms of social relationships is presented similarly by research from abroad (cf. Topping, 2011). In contrast, teachers and parents have curricular and organizational changes at the core of their attention (Topping, 2011). Similarly, Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) argued that different participants may see different stressors as significant. In the same line, Anderman (2002) interpreted research as primarily focusing on the nature of curriculum and declines in students' school results but overlooking students' developmental characteristics. This may be due to the fact that developmental changes are viewed as a natural part of the period of early adolescence and do not suggest such clear consequences as, for instance, hard data on the decline in students' school results after transitioning to a higher secondary level.

Students commented on the change in class composition particularly in connection with the departure of their classmates with excellent results for selective schools. These departures were commented on mainly by those students who were planning to transfer to such schools themselves but who had not succeeded at the entrance examinations. These students had also performed well, and the fact that their classmates had left may have somewhat aggravated their situation, given that they remained in the class as solitary figures. The question is whether these students will lose their ambitions and start to stagnate when they are no longer in the company of their successful classmates. Another path opened for them in the possibility to stay in grade five for one year and then leave either to join their former classmates at the selective schools or for eight-year gymnasiums. Students who stay and do well at school thus may feel motivated to leave and join their friends. As a result, the wave of departures is somewhat strengthened, which raises the question of student differentiation.

The Czech education system may, in general, be characterized by early and high differentiation, in particular in connection with six- and eight-year gymnasiums. Primary schools thus become residual schools filled with unmotivated students that are hard to work with (Straková & Greger, 2013, p. 74). We can say that the school examined thus suffers twice, since the departures are doubled as a result of the non-traditional organization. The first wave of students transfer after they complete grade four, usually to selective schools, in the belief that these will better prepare them for subsequent transfer to a six- or eight-year gymnasium. The second wave of students traditionally leaves after grade five. The departure of their classmates places a heavy strain on the remaining students, since class relationships are affected with greater intensity than when students leave only once.

Regarding results, I further place non-normative transition in the period of adolescence when friendships evolve and the first romantic relationships emerge. Kučera (2005, p. 194) calls grade five a “plateau” before puberty fully erupts in grade six. Given the nature of the results, grade five may be called “the first grade of puberty.” However, we need to keep in mind the possible influence of the environment of stage two of primary school, which students perceived as more mature in comparison with that of stage one. The students commented on the way the premises were decorated as well as the behavior of older schoolmates. The students’ development might have been accelerated as a result of the non-traditional transition, given that I noticed prepubescent behavior already after students returned from the school trip at the beginning of the school year.

The current study opened several sub-topics related to the changing nature of peer relationships during the period of non-normative transition. I explained how existing friendships change and what role is played by some classmates leaving. Last but not least, I pointed out the impact of girls’ prepubescent behavior and raised the issue of the first romantic relationships. To conclude, I suggest continuing in the exploration of peer relationships, in particular at the boundary between grades five and six when the second wave of students leaving for other types of schools is expected, causing further changes in the class group.

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