Suicidal and other behaviour problems among adolescents (aged 16-19):
An analysis of the perception of the problems by class tutoring teachers.

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There is a relative dearth of studies made among Polish teachers concerning their perception and attitude towards adolescents with serious behaviour problems, despite the fact that both groups are indissolubly connected and dependent on each other. This phenomenon is even stronger when it comes to suicidal behaviour, which nowadays receives more attention than ever before. This study was conducted with a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. Twelve class-tutoring teachers from upper secondary schools level were interviewed about their perception of the suicidal and behavioral problems among adolescents and data were analyzed abductively. Nine subgroups of themes were created. Finally the themes were compared with the up-to-date knowledge from a literature review in the field of schooling and suicidality. The study concluded that the perception of suicidal behaviour problems among adolescents by class tutoring teachers emerged as being not important or too far away from the general school system, despite the fact that teachers had experienced such behaviour.

Key words: Class tutors, suicidal and risky behaviour, adolescents, and qualitative analysis

In particular this study deals with suicidal and other serious behaviour problems among adolescents as these problems are perceived within the educational system and this recently has been actualized in Poland by the suicide event of a teenage girl in October 2006. Since the word suicide is more used now in the context of school system and a child, the new perspective must be undertaken in the field of education and upbringing in Poland.

A pictorial scheme based on The Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model was created to show to the reader of this paper the whole content of the thesis in one piece. The ecological model gives us the insight into the adolescent’s environment and what is happening within and around the adolescent (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sontag, 1996).

“(…) Progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

The microsystem in this research was represented by the interviewed class tutors in the school environment. The mesosystem was represented by the relation between the school and the home environment of the class tutors and students under their command. In wider contexts – the exosystem – represented by the school system, and the macrosystem – represented by law and regulations, government politics, religion, and culture.

Earlier studies of teachers perception of adolescence suicidal behaviours

The last data, delivered by WHO (2006), related to the young persons aged 15-19 in 90 countries, states that self inflicted injuries and suicide are the top causes of injury deaths in Europe. The highest rates are for Lithuania (41.1 per 100 000), Russia (33.8 per 100 000) and Belarus (33.5 per 100 00). The rates (WHO, 2008) for Poland of 15.9 and Sweden of 13.2 are in the middle of the list, while Great Britain has the lowest rate which is 7.0 in European
region. This report from 2006 also pointed out that child abuse, mistreatment, bullying in school as well as intimate partner violence can increase the risk of suicide in sooner or later time. Other important factors in adolescence are relationship difficulties with parents and friends, and social isolation. Also widespread media reporting may lead to imitation suicides.

If it is about teachers’ opinions about the phenomena of suicides very few surveys were done. Wastell and Shaw (1999) examined 127 subjects – trainee teachers - aged 18-21 about the attitudes toward suicide. In general, respondents tend to agree with scales relating suicide to mental illness and impulsivity. They also agreed with the metaphor that: suicide is a cry for help. Trainee teachers perceived the communicated intend of suicide as a primarily manipulative, and attention seeking behaviour. Such association of opinions may lead in future career to disregard the seriousness of a threat and not intervene. The results showed also that trainee teachers agreed less with the statement that suicide is morally reprehensible action or a reflection of lack of religious values.

In some reports it was mentioned that also peer students may be very helpful in preventing the process of suicides (Spiritio, 1988; Tiernay, 1991; Ross 1985 in Wastell & Shaw, 1999), but some (Leenars, 1990 in Wastell & Shaw, 1999) argued that peers cannot be therapist as the risk of responsibility of somebody’s life is too high.

Very interesting findings were described by Westefeld et.al. (2007) where 179 high school teachers were investigated about suicidal behaviour in High Schools. As the prevention and intervention resources at school they mentioned about school counselors (53%), drug/alcohol agency (13%), administrators (9%) and teachers only by 6% of respondents. But if they were asked about what should be available for suicidal students they mentioned peer support group/peer councilor, trained psychological counselors, educational programming and support from trained/trusted adults. Westefeld indicated also that only 56 out of 122 respondents mentioned that they wouldn’t do anything if they had concerns about a student being suicidal, moreover, 67% of respondents had no idea about the procedures at their schools for intervening with such students.

The most current situation in Poland, as well as the person of the Minister of Education – Roman Giertych - and his influence on the school system was briefly described in the report of Źakowski (Polityka, 10/2007). This Report is based on the data collected on the research conducted in years 2006-2007 entitled “Szkoła bez przemocy” (school without violence). According to Polityka’s reported survey more or less every tenth student in Poland was a victim of aggressive behaviour from peers. When finishing gymnasium 18% of boys and 12% of girls systematically take drugs. There is over 30% of such students on the upper secondary school level. 20% of children aged 13 years old (from primary schools) declared that they had been drinking alcohol during the previous month. The survey shows also that some types of the aggression became stronger, especially those between students and teachers. During one year the percentage of teachers being provoked to be aggressive rose from 14 up to 19, and those whose orders were ignored by students rose from 20 till 29. On the other hand students’ complaints about teachers who were using offensive words rose from 16% last year up to 20% now. What is more, according to Czapiński in this report (Źakowski, 2007) this conflict between students and teachers is not natural, has been created by the media and authorities. The whole big actions taken by media about violence (special programs, debates and alike, hosting famous educators, psychologists, pedagogues etc.) made teachers more fearful and more responsible for the picture of the school system in the society. By being stricter they have provoked the students to make more experiments with the school system and with the resilience of the teachers, because especially students aged 14-16 treat their lives as experiment. So the main goal of putting a limit to the aggression between students not only wasn’t achieved (the aggression was and is the same) but also the level of the aggression
between teachers and students was higher. In a period of less than a year the percentage of students who regularly and with enthusiasm attended classes dropped from 49 to 39 (in upper secondary school it was 36 and now is 25), and the lessons were interesting for 40% and now only 30%. One year ago 28% of students felt in school appreciated, and currently the statistics changed by one third. Also the last year, 33% of the teachers claimed that they couldn’t count on the cooperation with the parents – now it’s 40%.

Czapiński states that during this year of being governed by the Ministry of Education parents tended to withdraw from cooperation with the school. By his statements and loud slogans, the Minister is said to have made them feel that school will fix all the problems in a while, so they do not have to worry. So by being overactive the Minister made parents the main problem of the school. Education and upbringing cooperation of these two environments is needed. According to Czapiński's survey, children whose parents are not interested in school (not coming for teachers-parents meetings etc.) from two up to ten times more often take drugs, drink alcohol, smoke and are subject to violence.

Czapiński also claimed that the only thing that a teacher can do is to write reprimands or ask parents to come, but when this doesn’t work, then the teacher should go to the student’s home and see the situation, and usually that’s enough to make parents feel more responsible. Usually it’s easier for a teacher to write an application to the adequate authorities that would take the child from home and place them in the Special Center for Problematic Children or Youths – but this will not solve the problems, only postpone them and eventually create greater ones.

A lot was also written in an article of Spychała (2007) about the distance between the needs of children (compared to little philosophers) and what school and teachers can offer. It is one of the points of the summary and one more piece of puzzle in the whole picture of schooling in Poland.

Another research by Różańska-Kowal (2004) among 90 students from the third grade of general upper secondary schools also showed a great diversity between school responsibilities and the role and requirements of the students. One problem is the aspect of bullying as a component of the risky and suicidal behaviour. According to her research not only were the typical educational problems of the students emphasized, but also bullying in different forms. The main components of bullying according to McWhirters (2004) are:
- Imbalance of power with a more powerful person or group attacking the less powerful one
- Behaviour that is intended to disturb or harm
- The behaviour occurs repeatedly over time

Bullying behaviour may be verbal, psychological or physical. This aspect is also relevant to the low self esteem, lack of acceptance from peers and general well being of students at school.

And finally Kosińska (1999) research will be briefly mentioned – as the example of parental survey about time devoted to their children as the important factor of problematic behaviour among adolescents.

Definitions of risky and suicidal behaviour

Suicide is one out of five major causes of death for people aged between 15 and 19 worldwide, and the second reason of death after traffic accidents for people aged 15 and 34 in most of European countries (WHO, 2001). People who attempt suicide show low cooperative ability, which also means fewer possibilities to get help from others, making friends etc. (Borucka, 1980 in Radziwiłłowicz 2003). Somehow, the situation is like a vicious circle.
People cannot find solutions to their problems from others, so they concentrate more and more on their own troubles and conflicts. Most adolescents in trouble are concentrating on “themselves” – as a defense mechanism – not on finding a solution to troubles (Kubacka-Jasiecka, & Susłowska, 1977 in Radziwiłłowicz 2003). The reasons for such behaviour derive from searching for their own identity, family life, relations with parents and siblings, and problems connected with school, like grades, contacts with teachers and peer relationships (Radziwiłłowicz, & Wilczewska). These behaviours especially connected with depressive symptomatology, (Ingvar, 1999), such as a negative view of one’s self, negative view of relationships with others and the future, are extremely developed and seen within the school setting.

Suicidal behaviour can be defined as: “(1) a suicide threat or other statement indicating a desire or intention to die, (2) a previous suicide attempt, (3) depression, (4) marked changes in behaviour, including eating and sleeping patterns, acting out, hyperactivity, (major) substance abuse, or high risk taking behaviour, and (5) making final arrangements or saying goodbye to possessions and/or individuals” (Hofman, Wiegersma, Zielhuis, 1999). Additional warning signs are: Increased substance (alcohol or drug) use, no reason for living, no sense of purpose in life, anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time, feeling of being trapped - like there is no way out, hopelessness, withdrawing from friends, family and society, rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge, acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking, dramatic mood changes (American Association of Suicidology, 2007).

Self-harm – defined by Mind Organization (2005) - is a broad term which includes people’s injuring or poisoning themselves by scratching, cutting or burning their skin, by hitting themselves against objects, taking a drug overdose, or swallowing or putting other things inside themselves. But sometimes less obvious forms may be involved, such as taking stupid risks, staying in an abusive relationship, developing an eating problem, such as anorexia or bulimia, being addicted to alcohol or drugs, or simply not looking after their own emotional or physical needs.

In this study instead of all these descriptive criteria I will use the general term “risky behaviour” which is a broad term that includes suicide, suicidal and self harming behaviour - unless stated differently.

Hołyst (2004) found that adolescent suicidal behaviour which is attached to temporary personality disturbances arises from physical and psychic development of the individual. Alongside with the social development of the individual, getting into new social roles (for example choosing profession) new conflicts arise, sometimes even very serious, between the individual and the environment. The conflicts and inability to cope with them result in hopelessness, psychological breakdown, withdrawal and apathy, which later on may lead to the will of not living anymore. The most common conflicts are those following the searching for meaning of life and universe/world (Hołyst, 2004). According to a well-known sociological approach – suicides are an index of disintegration of the society, not disintegration of the suicidal personality. All suicides then must be considered in a larger context, within the current and past social environment, from which these behaviours have arisen. Hołyst mentioned also the relationship between parents and children. From criminological data the phenomena of deep disorder of emotional attachment between a parent and a child, difficulties in their contacts, lack of skills in help and support when the child is in trouble may lead to suicidal behaviour among adolescents.
This kind of parental “upbringing inability” may lead to criminal as well as suicidal behaviour of their children. These behaviours are also caused by alcoholism and criminal activities in the close environment, divorced and separated families, as well as other factors.

As Winnicka founds out in her article parents who are unable to talk, only speak to their children. The words that are said by parents usually are monologues that end up with words of punishment. This way of talking is also very common in schools and homes: between teachers and their students who just must obey the rules, as well as between parents and children (teachers say only what student can’t do). Parents usually ask how it was at school, how it was on the playground, but without going deeper into details. The communication in this manner doesn’t work in two ways. Winnicka concludes: the last place for the talk is a psychotherapeutic cabinet, where the person who listens (not only hears), doesn’t try to dominate or force goals.

As MacLeod et.al. (2005) states that hopelessness about the future is the main aspect of suicidal behaviour. They claimed that lack of the positive future thinking becomes a greater factor than negative thinking of the future. This research resulted also with the statement that low perceived likelihood of positive outcomes is a strong predictor of hopelessness. As mentioned before Czapiński (in Źakowski, 2007) found that quite happy and very happy are 88% of teenagers in Poland aged 11-16, while in United States 79%. The older Polish students show the lower percentage of happiness as well.

As to the future, Polish students are on the top of the list of patriotism and attached to the tradition and culture, but on the lowest position when it comes to ability to create groups or mutual trust. It is called the negative socialization. In the upbringing process children become less socialized instead of more. Polish adolescents are good at theory, but when it comes to practice in a democratic society they fail. Czapiński (in Źakowski, 2007) argues that Polish school teaches “about democracy” but not democracy itself. The activity of the students in school setting is limited to the minimum.

Organization of the education system in Poland

The admission to the secondary school in Poland is dependent on the number of points indicated on the gymnasium-leaving certificate. Each school can have its own rules and limits of admission of students. In the Polish school system there are marks 1-6 (6-excellent, 5-very good, 4-good, 3- satisfactory, 2-acceptable, 1-unsatisfactory), given during the semester for homework or tests etc. and as average grades of each subject at the end of semester and school year. After each grade the student with mark of 2 or more, is promoted to the next grade. If not, the student may take a repeating exam in this subject, and then if failed again, has to repeat the grade. The grade can be repeated in the same school or another, depending on school rules, will of the student and parents. In the last grade students are given the final certificate of completing secondary school and then can take the final examination (matura), which is required to admit higher education. Students of technical and basic vocational school can also take “professional exams”, which enable them to perform a job.

Until September 1999 the 8-year primary school was the first stage of education in Poland. After primary school students could apply for admission to secondary, general or vocational, schools. Since 1999, a reform of the system of education has been implemented and new types of schools are being introduced, i.e. 6-year primary school, 3-year gymnasium, and the following types of post-gymnasium schools: 3-year specialized secondary school, 3-year general secondary school, 4-years technical secondary school, 2 or 3-year basic vocational school, 2-year complementary secondary school, and 3-year complementary technical secondary school. During the transitional period, both the old and the new systems
continued to coexist. In the year 2004, maturity certificates were awarded for the last time on the basis of the system functioning prior to the reform.

The total number of years of primary and secondary education is 12 or 13. At the end of the secondary education cycle students can take the maturity examination - i.e. standardised national secondary school achievement examination, and receive the maturity certificate - świadectwo dojrzałości.

Primary school Most of primary schools are the small and local ones. After 3 years of integrated education children enter the fourth grade: the school is the same, but now teachers are different for every subject. The shock is not so big. After 3 years children are admitted to a final test, and these results will guide them to gymnasium.

Gymnasium (lower secondary school) In gymnasium they also spend 3 years, but according to many teachers it doesn’t prepare them for further education, only for the final test in gymnasium. On this test the result for the admission to upper secondary schools will be based.

Upper secondary schools According to interviewed teachers’ opinion when the child fails at some point in the secondary school or in gymnasium there is still time to help, and this help usually comes from a “Psychological and Pedagogical Advisory Center”. If this help is not enough or is not provided (there is a lot of reasons for that not discussed in this paper) then a child “with a huge baggage of problems” enters the secondary school, and there it is very little left to be done about it within the school field.

The organization of the education system in Poland (under command of Ministry of National Education and Sport) since school year 2004/2005 (Eurydice, 2003, 2006) – (three types of school visited by the researcher are underlined).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Primary education</th>
<th>Lower secondary (Gymnasium)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd stage (teaching based on separate subjects)</td>
<td>3rd stage (teaching based on separate subjects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1st stage (integrated education)</td>
<td>1st stage (teaching based on separate subjects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd stage (teaching based on separate subjects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Preschool education</td>
<td>Basic vocational school</td>
<td>Lower secondary (Gymnasium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Non compulsory)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3rd stage (teaching based on separate subjects)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study was done among class tutors from three types of secondary school: general, specialized and technical.

A class tutor is a person attached to every class by the headmaster of the school to look after the students in a particular class, who is not only responsible for giving knowledge (their own subject) but also for bringing up and tutoring young people on their way to adulthood (all the time, and especially during tutoring lessons). The class tutors are responsible for upbringing of their own students, but this doesn’t mean that other teachers aren’t. The upbringing process must go on within three different environments, in which the school is one, and the others are home and local environment. According to Polish
Psychological Dictionary (1994) the process of upbringing is a process of development of morality, intellectual, artistic and physical features, which a child possesses as potential state. The intention of this upbringing is not to change the nature of a student, but to support the student’s development in harmony with environment. Upbringing demands knowledge of a child’s needs and the rules of its physical and psychical development. Having this definition in mind, and the fact that upbringing is one of the most basic aspects of being the professional teacher, it is known that the greatest part of this process is in the hands of a class tutor. The institution of a class tutor exists on every level of education, and lasts for 3 years in upper secondary school, or 4 years in technical school. There are many factors influencing the “general” condition of the Polish system of education, especially at the upper secondary school level. The main factors could be described as follows: a) Laws and regulations on the ministerial level, b) Socioeconomic background of the students, c) Relations within the family, d) Educational past and presence, e) Secondary school environment, f) Developmental moment, g) Perspectives on the future.

Research questions

1. How do Polish schoolteachers look upon suicidal and risky behaviour among teenagers in relation to the school environment and the learning situation?
2. What are the tutoring teachers’ perceived responsibilities to prevent suicidal and risky behaviour?
3. How do the teachers look upon the possibilities to solve the structural/organizational problems at school?

Method

Participants

The participants were chosen taking into account 2 criteria: firstly – they should be teachers in one of three chosen types of secondary school, and at the same time teaching students aged 16-19/20, and secondly - to perform the work of the class tutor as well. These criteria were chosen accordingly to the fact that this group of teachers has the most influence and contacts with students during the school year. The headmaster of each school was asked to select such teachers, and then only the willing ones were picked up for interview. Among those 12 participants there was one who was a professional pedagogue and therapeutist working with addicted youths in the “center for addicted youths” in Gdansk. There were 6 class tutors from General Secondary School, 3 from Specialized Secondary Schools, and 2 from Technical College and 1 from rehabilitation centre for addicted children and youths. The ages of the class tutors were between 31 years and 59, and there were 4 men among the group.

Tools

Semi-structured interviews were used. Each class tutor was asked 30 questions based on an interview guide (see appendix 1). This kind of interviewing allows the interviewer to adjust the follow up questions to the situation and formulate the questions to get deeper into the problem mentioned by the interviewer.
Procedure

The group of 12 participants was interviewed individually, and was asked questions from “interview guide” (see appendix 1), according to the time limits or other circumstances arisen from the situation, which was pointed out by the interviewee. The interview was chosen to “find out from them (participants) those things we cannot directly observe” (Patton, 1990). As Patton states, that we cannot observe such things like emotions, or past events that have influences now, and are interpreted by a participant.

All participants were informed at the beginning of the interview about ethical issues such as: willingness to participate in the research, the fact that the data would be handled confidentially and the results used only to describe the current situation of the Polish school system.

The interviewees were told that they always had the right not to answer the questions and deny further participation. After that their perceptions were collected and analyzed in order to find the answers for research questions and name those things, which are making the most barriers for teachers to fulfill their role.

As an important aspect of my research, the example of exact situation of suicide was introduced to the participants to get to know their feelings about this event.

Table 2: A summary of the characteristics of the participants interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Interview Person, IP)</th>
<th>Secondary school type</th>
<th>Sex/age</th>
<th>Taught subject</th>
<th>In years: professional work/being class tutor</th>
<th>Number of students in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IP 1 General</td>
<td>Female/46</td>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>22/9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 2 Specialized</td>
<td>Male/ 59</td>
<td>Mathematics, physics, computer science</td>
<td>-/17</td>
<td>18 = 16 boys + 2 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 3 Specialized</td>
<td>Female/ 37</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>17 = 12 girls + 5 boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 4 General</td>
<td>Female/ 33</td>
<td>Mathematics, computer science</td>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>27 = 20 boys + 7 girls (2nd grade)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 5 General</td>
<td>Female/ 54</td>
<td>Biology (natural sciences additional activities)</td>
<td>26/19</td>
<td>22 = 14 boys + 8 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 6 General</td>
<td>Female/ 39</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>17/17</td>
<td>34 = 23 girls + 11 boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 7 Rehabilitation center for addicted children and youths</td>
<td>Male/ Pedagogue &amp; therapist</td>
<td>30 patients in the whole “Center”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 8 General</td>
<td>Female/ 40</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11/4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 9 General</td>
<td>Female/ 39</td>
<td>Polish, history</td>
<td>16/16</td>
<td>15 = 8 boys + 7 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 10 Technical</td>
<td>Female/ 49</td>
<td>Basics of electrical engineering, Basics of electronics</td>
<td>23/6</td>
<td>Not a class tutor at the moment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 11 Technical</td>
<td>Male/ 40-50</td>
<td>2 subjects of practical teaching profession, civic education</td>
<td>30/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP 12 Specialized</td>
<td>Male/ 31</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>30 = 15 boys + 15 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More direct questions were asked if the participant mentioned about other relevant problem. Interviewing time was between 20 minutes (the shortest one) and 2,5 hours (the longest one) but in average they took 45 minutes, as they were taken during ordinary school day time, during the lessons or the breaks between lessons. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated from Polish into English (under the supervision of sworn translator).

**Data analysis**

This research was done using a qualitative method. The data were analyzed abductively and then clustered into themes, which were finally related to the ecological model created by Bronfenbrenner. It means that theoretical and empirical data were compared and evaluated. The theoretical material was based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model as a frame, earlier literature as well as pre-understanding the phenomena of suicide in Poland. The empirical material was obtained throughout interviews among 12 IPs in three types of selected school types.

This kind of research method is focused on subjective experiences of individuals (in this case individuals of 12 people connected with school system on practical level). This method is specifically used when a researcher wants to know the participants way of seeing things. (Mertens, 1998). A method focuses on understanding the essential experiences about the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998) of being a class tutor of a group of adolescents in school environment.

All interviews were written down in Polish, then translated into English. For the researcher it was easier to formulate concentrating units, create and then cluster into ten themes, From English transcripts than from original Polish ones. Finally they were analyzed. The first stage was to describe each theme, with an overview of the situation, and giving examples of statements. The second, was the examination of each theme in particular. All this procedure was done with the help of third party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview number</th>
<th>Words in total:</th>
<th>Words used in analysis for this paper:</th>
<th>% of used words</th>
<th>number of items:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4012</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>7,00%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (min) 1520</td>
<td>(min) 24</td>
<td>(min) 1,58%</td>
<td>5,34%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2154</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>5,44%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3202</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>(max) 15,43%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3015</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>5,44%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3985</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>10,44%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3423</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>14,61%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3395</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>9,43%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3697</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>7,60%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3505</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2,11%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (max) 6068</td>
<td>(max) 642</td>
<td>(max) 10,58%</td>
<td>8,03%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3946</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>8,03%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summary:</td>
<td>41922</td>
<td>3628</td>
<td>8,65%</td>
<td>327 (401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average:</td>
<td>3493,5</td>
<td>302,3</td>
<td>8,13%</td>
<td>33,41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimum:</td>
<td>1520</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1,58%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum:</td>
<td>6068</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>15,43%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the material was transcribed, the concentrating units were found in each interview (in total 401 units, but some of them were mentioned more than once, so 327 were
counted), and then reorganized into 10 main themes, and analyzed in order to answer four research questions.

The themes were:

1. The upbringing process in school environment
2. Perceived problems among students – problems with absence at school, will and motivation
3. Tests, exams, marks and their influence on students' mental condition
4. Presence of desperate acts, bullying, risky and suicidal behaviour
5. Problems related to the educational system
6. Ways of helping and cooperation
7. Parents’ point of view
8. “General reasons”
9. What can be done then?
10. First reactions among school environment (class tutors, teachers and their students) to a specific event of a suicide (14 years old girl in Gdańsk in October of 2006)

*The Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model* was used to show the final results of the analysis of the research.

**Results**

The use of the Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model as an analysis of general condition, resources and circumstances of class tutors and students is as follows:

The exosystem includes the school system, laws and regulations (for example division into 3 levels of schooling) and is presented at school by headmasters – arrow number 5 which indicates the limitations of teachers work – as well as Psychological and Pedagogical Advisory Center and prevention institutions like Police, Municipal Police, Monar, etc.

Another part of the exosystem, are all influences from the society, economical condition of the country, workplaces, family backgrounds – this impact is on teachers, students, and parents.

The mesosystem consists of all relations between the microsystem parts. In my study it would be cooperation between teachers and parents, as the communication from different perspectives.

The microsystem consists of Interviewed class tutors, students in their class (and peers at school), school pedagogue and/or psychologist, and parents with the home environment.

Arrow number 1 shows the cooperation between class tutors and school pedagogues and/or psychologists as the one, which helps them with handling the problems with students. Arrow number 2 shows the cooperation between class tutors and the Psychological and Pedagogical Advisory Center that is diagnosing and delivering special help for students. Arrow number 3 indicates this help and support on the educational and psychological level. The school pedagogue and/or psychologist in the “everyday problems” – arrow number 4, can support students in school environment too.
Figure 1: A pictorial representation of the results concerning general condition, resources and circumstances of class tutors and their students as seen from the class tutors point of view - adapted in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model.
Each of these themes tries to answer the research questions separately, but all those problems no matter how deep interviewed, will be always interrelating each other. That is why it must be pointed out and remembered that all answers below each question answer this one in particular and other questions in a lesser degree.

1. How do Polish schoolteachers look upon suicidal and risky behaviour among teenagers in relation to the school environment and the learning situation?

Tests, exams, marks and their influence on students’ mental condition

This theme was taken into account after reading the findings of Różańska-Kowal (2004) research about school as the main source of stress for adolescents during the process of growing up.
In all schools there are teachers who are more or less demanding, or putting it in another way, those who treat their subject as the most important and make the students learn hard, no matter how interested in the subject they may be, and those who know that some students do not show great abilities in their subject and consequently let them learn at a minimum level. There is the same situation with marks. For some students marks have no influence, and for others they are the most crucial. And so are the opinions about the attitude of the students towards tests, exams and marks.

One teacher, IP 10, gave marks during the lesson, but only to those who were active and additionally, for example, had done the exercise faster or saw a mistake in the equation on the board. However, she didn’t give bad marks if somebody made a mistake. According to her opinion, this method allows students not to be afraid of thinking during the lesson, being active and encouraged to work, with no fear of saying something wrong.

Presence of desperate acts, bullying, risky and suicidal behaviour (research question 1 and 2).

As presented in the introduction the aspect of bullying is a component of risky and suicidal behaviour. The interviewees mentioned three components which could be linked to this behaviour. Yet the result showed that they didn’t recognize bullying in its different forms, that they rather were describing the students’ behaviour as “incorrect”. Neither desperate acts nor risky behaviour were seen as categories of presuicidal behaviour. The teachers showed theoretical knowledge about bullying behaviour, and about some aspects of suicidal behaviour, but even if they named the same problems among their students in the class, they did not connect bullying with suicidal behaviour.

IP 1 was on training course about “suicidal prevention” some time ago, and for all the time she was saying that: “It is a change in behaviour” but nothing more specific. In this situation it was a verbal bullying, the girl was haunted, but teacher was keeping on saying that the girl’s behaviour was the reason of all those troubles.

At least 6 participants had some experiences of suicides or suicide attempts; some also had in the class students with a diagnosed depression, or students who were staying in psychiatric hospital. And all teachers said that aggressiveness was present in their schools, but with no connection to desperate acts or risky behaviour. As main reasons for aggressiveness they mentioned three interrelating aspects:
- Family problems (bad relations in the family, poverty, alcohol problems)
- Stress, overcaring, stress from school and/or teachers
- Depression, bullying which may lead to breakdowns.

According to one teacher all the problems that students are struggling with are rising from home and can be mapped as:

Family/home problems ⇔ school problems ⇔ the psyche fails ⇔ any kind of problem behaviour.

IP 9 represents another kind of opinion concerning suicidal problems:

“Personally I think it is a runaway. These are not only school problems, but this is also running away from consequences that may happen at home, because of, for example, lower marks. Because we also have such cases, when student commits a suicide because his/her marks are not satisfying.”

It appeared that for the detection of desperate acts, risky behaviour etc. the main role should be put to or should be granted to parents and home environment (they see the child in different situations than at school, they create the student’s first environment, where he/she is growing up therefore they know the student better). Secondly also class tutors and all teachers in school were considered to play a significant a role in detecting these problems as they observe the students most of the time. Participant teachers mentioned school pedagogue, psychologist and peers who should be made responsible to report suspicious events to the school staff. Only one IP teacher out of 12 said that the dangerous symptoms might be so hidden in a child that it wouldn’t be possible for any teacher to notice them (students for example act, show off in the class to divert attention from a real problem).

All in all, participants didn't see the school events or students behaviour as a risk of causing more serious problems than obvious ones like marks, bad language, and attendance.

2. What are the tutoring teachers perceived responsibilities to prevent suicidal and risky behaviour?

The upbringing process at school

The opinions about the upbringing process were very different. In summary from all interviews it can be seen that both parents as well as all teachers were considered equally responsible for the process, and in a less degree other members of the school staff (other teachers, the school pedagogue and/or the psychologist, and other school workers) and peers. Some of the participant teachers are of the opinion that the only way to influence students at this age is by talking, giving some remarks or advices about what and how to do things. But they do not refer to it as “upbringing”. Others are of the opinion that all teachers at school, are somehow upbringing their students by showing their own examples, way of behaviour, and of course by talking with them, helping them, and being open towards their problems. At this point, the class tutor can and should be responsible for care and recognition. Being watchful (attentive) lets the tutor be the first person to see the problem. But this is also a matter of the “willingness” of the tutor, if the tutor wants to see and help, or not.

So there is a big gap between the teacher who doesn't see the problems unless somebody reports about them, and a youth who will not ask for help. Nevertheless, most of the teachers agreed that there should be a cooperation between students and teachers in “observing”, so both parts can react at the right time. As they said students behave differently during the lessons, even on different subjects, and especially during the breaks, so not all kinds of school behaviour can be seen in the class environment, that appear only in the peer relations.
Another factor in this matter was “tutoring lessons” which should be focused on the subjects delivered by the school curriculum. But because nobody controls the performance of teachers, relying on their abilities to lead such lessons, they are mostly focusing on particular events: students’ absence (wags/playing truant), not learning (not as much as required), marks, bad behaviour (language).

It was also determined that class-tutoring teacher should have the ability to get students to speak out about what they want to say. Because they spend most of their awake time in the school environment, in “specific working conditions” with so many other peers and adults, it is impossible not to have anything to communicate to this environment, with no feedback.

Very little was indicated by sex of the teacher but two main things were seen: Women are treating their own class with “motherhood” feelings, watching them more carefully than other classes, taking care about their problems. The second thing was that men were relating to the students with bigger distance.

As the prevention (especially of suicidal behaviour) and intervention most of the participants agreed that they basically were not educated to conduct “pathological prevention” programmes. They can “touch the problem”, but they thought that this had to be professional helpers’ responsibility, of those people who would be able to explain the problems in details. In this sphere there is a great role of the school pedagogue and/or psychologist with whom the class tutors are cooperating the most if some problems appear. This cooperation may vary and include constellations like between teacher-pedagogue, pedagogue-student, or teacher-pedagogue-parent(s)-student.

Very important for IPs was also the will of cooperation among all parts and the knowledge about the importance of the processes within the school environment, which are influencing the students. The most willing persons should be the teachers who devote their work time to the student (also after lessons) and the will of students to communicate with teachers.

So if the upbringing can be shown as an equation the factors would be as follows:

\[\text{Student upbringing} = (\text{consequence} + \text{rules}) \times (\text{home} + \text{school})\]

Both environments would follow some basic rules and be consequent with acting according to these rules and their demands from a student.

**Opinions about students – problems with absence at school, their will and motivation.**

All of the participants agreed that adolescents of this age are tough to deal with. Generally students were seen as:

- **Less resilient, psychologically weak,**
  “Over those years, [23 years as a teacher] the young generation has in a way become less resilient. And one more thing, at particular time of life the student demands and child demands to lead him/herself” (IP 10)

- **Inclined to give up, resign**
  “There are also students who are coming to us because they have changed school after their first semester [because they couldn’t reach the level of required education in another school], and with those we have much more troubles, because they themselves are writing themselves off.” (IP 1)
- Not willing to learn, with no perspective, “living here and now”

“But when they finally come for a lesson teachers limit themselves only to say that they do not learn (…) Students just only listen, saying that they are all right and it is not important for them.” (IP 4)

“The psyche of those students that we have is like that nothing really matters. They do not care. Very often we have students who are here only to wait till the school ends, men are saying openly that they are hiding not to join the army. They do not think with any perspective. They do not know why they should learn, what to do after school, and that it is our [teachers’] fault.” (IP 4)

- Not caring about school.

“Some of them do not care at all how many bad marks they get.” (IP 4)

“Then they have so great educational backwardness that some things cannot be made up for. So if they have the diagnosis [for example dyslexia], they do not care.

There is also that everlasting division, also pointed out by IPs, of good and bad students. As an introduction and explanation of the “weak students’ phenomenon”, here are the words of IP 8:

“It is a problem that some are weaker and some are stronger than the main course. (…) those who are really weak, they fall behind for their own request. They fall behind from the main stream and they are left alone. And they fall behind so much that problems are getting bigger. Then the teacher says that this student is doing nothing, doesn’t want to do anything, cannot manage, and is also abandoned by a teacher. Sometimes it happens.”

Very few IPs told about good students (see figure 2) so this paper is focused on those of students and those problems, which are, accordingly to the literature, factors of risky and suicidal behaviour. Most of the students from the schools where the interviews were taken were described as unwilling and unmotivated. The only methods to mobilize them that the teacher and the school have are marks, usually bad ones, or talks with pedagogue or parents.

The participants felt ignored by some students, as for example when a teacher was organizing additional lessons of his subject in his free time and none of the students appeared, or when students were absent at school for about three months and close to the school year they attended the lessons and wanted the teacher to correct their marks.

Accordingly to the interviewed teachers there were also students for whom school had no ability to influence on, and these students' attitude reorganized schoolwork of the teacher completely.

Only three IPs’ statements (IP 8, 11 and 12) are included in figure 2 that shows the differences between attitudes of three types of students as being most related and direct to the general opinions of the IPs.

These differences in the class tutors’ perception are too wide to handle within one class by a teacher with a subject program for all dictated by school curricula (IP 12). Each school has a curriculum that covers the educational program from each taught subject equal for all students. The teachers feel torn between different kinds of methods to adjust their teaching so that students can go on with requested knowledge.
3. How do the teachers look upon the possibilities to solve the structural/organizational problems at school?

**Problems related to the educational system**

When a child is in secondary school the main goal is the final exams (called: Matura), which enable them to be admitted for higher education. So children are assessed all the time, learning “for the test” not to get abilities.

This is the attitude that some of secondary teachers and parents have. One of the teachers suggested that there should be more selection on these three levels of education, so that one school can have students more or less similar to each other, as it is now in some “good secondary schools”, where by high levels of points or marks only some chosen students can be admitted. If it happens in such a school that a student is to repeat the class then automatically he/she is persuaded to be transferred to another school. This is the way that one school is simply getting rid of a student and another one, which is open to all students, has then “a combination” of all types of students – good ones, better ones, and weaker ones including these repeaters (in Polish ironically called: parachuters). It can be a challenge for a school to teach them and help to solve the problems, but such situations are most common in schools where there are about one thousand students, and the percentage of “problematic youths” is high, especially when the school exists as a “group of secondary schools” for example general, specialized, technical and vocational, and sometimes even with supplementary general/technical schools.

The gymnasium level was pointed out by IPs as the place where processes of schooling, learning/teaching and upbringing can’t be held together. Children coming from usually small primary schools enter a new environment, a new peer group, new teachers, subjects and
customs, and in this particular age when they are 12/13 years old, it is the most difficult time for them to adjust to changes. The combination of new events and their own growing up makes many of them go mad. Gymnasium students are seen as more interested in showing off, and being “the best” among peers and that is why it is hard to control them. Class tutors in this study, who still remember the previous system were stating that when there were 8 grades of the primary school, children were known at school and didn’t feel they had to “fight for a position”, to be recognized. Now, in gymnasium there are only three years for a teacher to recognize and get to know the students and most important: prepare for the final test.

Additionally the IP teachers of secondary school considered the problems of gymnasium graduates as the remains of the former education and very often they are unable to solve them. These are the examples:
- A student repeating the grade (in one class IP 3 said that during the first grade 12 students failed in some way, and she was left only with 17),
- Absence of students – no practical way to make students attending the school (one way shown by teacher was giving reprimands, then signing the contract with a class tutor and promise to be present, if not child is reported to the headmaster and family court, and may be erased from the list of students or repeat the grade if the marks are not satisfactory enough to be graduated.
- Too little time for preparing students for final (Matura) exams,
- Selection of students on the first grade – the educational policy in Polish secondary school now is to devote the 1st year for finding out which students should undertake the individual learning or maybe just change school – according to IPs’ opinions it is a waste of time,
- Problems with diagnosing “educational problems with learning” – too long procedures, limitations of Psychological and Pedagogical Advisory Center, which very often have too many students to diagnose. And, if a child is supposed to have individual learning, then only medical diagnose is required, and a teacher is given a suggestion that a child should be treated individually and requirements should be adjusted by the teacher to the child’s abilities,
- “Passing level” of 30% on Matura exams is very low, so those students who pass at a minimum level are unable to enter public higher education and can enter only private high schools where the requirements are lower,
- Students do not feel attached to the school and not even to other students in a class, so they do not have any reasons to attend the school regularly,
- On the other hand students have too many rights for example when they turn 18 they can excuse the absence on the lessons by themselves, and parents do not have to know about it,
- Great age differences between repeaters of the grade and normal graduates,
- Students have too many background environments, so there are conflicts on this field for example coming from two different districts inhabitants which fight against each other beyond the school area,
- Proportions of the taught subjects are bad, and so students are not prepared well in the subjects they really need for further education.

Parents’ point of view

In this study the interviewees stated that parents consider the school as too liberal, with too little discipline especially if some students are staying in dormitory during the school year:
“But sometimes school doesn’t know till the end what’s going on at home. (...) In our dormitories there were living not only the commuters, but also students from the families with
problems. But it’s impossible to help all those students who have a hard situation at home. There is a lot of such students. Many are coming from divorced or separated families, pathological families. And this is a problem how to help them.” (IP 12)

These are the situations, which appear together, and teachers at school consider themselves as unable to deliver help, as long as the source of the problems exists beyond the school range. When it comes to bullying situations:

“The point is that bullying students do not always realize that their actions can cause a lot of harm to the potential victim. They treat this as a kind of joking” (IP 11)

And what was the most important in this matter was the fact that all of these troubles were considered as caused by one reason:

“Because they often do not know by themselves what’s going on with their child. (…) But in Poland especially, parents first of all think about making money so that the children can be fed, and have clothes on. But they forget that this child also thinks and has something to say, but they just do not listen.” (IP 12)

Some parents were also against the prevention activities organized by the non-school institutions:

“They are against, some of them are against such meetings, because they think that it can encourage the youths just to try something which is forbidden. (…) But I have never heard that somebody was trying this or that drug to check how psychoactive substances work out of sheer curiosity.” (IP 11)

Ways of helping and cooperation

Phone calls are the main way of intervention used by class tutors. Only some of them were telling about teacher-parents meetings (usually organized once a month so parents can meet the class tutor and all other teachers and talk individually). Only one person from the group of parents kept in touch via emails. This was also the only participant teacher who allowed students to come for parents-teachers meetings. Despite the fact of having 34 students she managed to work by setting the rules for parents and students from the very beginning, and so parents were informed and she was able to deliver help more quickly when she had a good cooperation with all sides (students, parents, class tutors, school pedagogue/psychologist if needed).

In more serious cases the participating class tutors cooperate with a school pedagogue or psychologist, who decides in most cases what should be done after for example directing the student for a meeting in psychological and pedagogical advisory centre or in other special institutions.

Mostly, the following institutions or organizations handled the responsibility of prevention:

- Municipal police
- Police
- The society of environmental prevention
- A centre of rehabilitation for addicted children and youths.
- A centre for single mothers, lead by nuns, which organise lectures of “education for family life”
Psychological and pedagogical advisory centre

The only help, which class tutors experienced that they could deliver, was in verbal form of advices and recommendations. On the educational level some of them organise additional lessons for corrections during free time (not paid), but it depends on the will of the teacher, since so called “individualization of teaching” during the normal lesson is impossible to lead and is more probable on language lessons where there are smaller groups.

Only one teacher, IP 12, mentioned financial support for the poorest students for example for trips or school uniform), which is still very little, and for very few students. He also pointed out that help for more talented students is not delivered at all, and by this their abilities are not developing in the right manner.

In technical college, where there were only 17 girls among ca. 1100 students, the school camera video was introduced to control the school situation and it was done in the same year as gymnasium was introduced. The class tutor (IP 11) said that:

“I remember (...) when gymnasium graduates were trying to introduce their own law and order and to control the older youths from the technical college. So it was totally opposite to what we could foresee. (...) We based experiences and knowledge about aggressiveness of those students on other school, because we knew the places where they come from, such environments were not good. Two security guards resigned from work in our school after half a year. The company gave up.”

In this part all other relative problems were described within three themes of: general reasons (historical, economical, organizational and media), “what should be done then?” and reactions among school environment class to a specific event of suicide. It’s so because of the fact of not being matched with four main research questions but answering them indirectly throughout numerous links.

“General reasons”

1) historical and economical changes:

The overall situation, which emerges from the experiences of the interviewees, shows that all the sides of the conflict (school, authorities, parents and students – all of them have in mind different ideas for school to become better) seem to have hands tied. They can do little and feel hopeless. Nobody probably has ever found a solution for a non-conflict existence of children, parents, teachers and their roles. The results of the twelve interviews showed a great lack of motivation, not only from the students’ side but also from parents and teachers.

Because of lack of time and tiredness parents have no ability or are unwilling to communicate with their children. They sometimes do not want to know about some problems in order not to worry (for example on parents-teachers meeting there are only half of the parents, and those who should be present are not – which is also showing the child that they do not care about school).

A few participating teachers said that the situation is like it is because of the economical transformation after 1989, and that this generation feels free but has no idea what to do with this freedom. Parents of this generation were brought up in a different way; maybe in a wrong way, when it was well seen to be against the communist authorities. And now times are different when they have to be more engaged in work and sensitive for economical circumstances.
2) Organizational limitations:
But at the same time IPs describe that there are too many students in the classes, teaching programs are overloaded, and teachers are also in a rush for continuous self educating, living their own lives and families. The ministry of education is saving money on teachers’ hours and lessons, as well as additional help for example for dyslexia children or pedagogical therapy. The question may emerge about the sense of diagnosing children by the Advisory Centres if nothing is done with those certificates later on (usually additional lessons or activities are not organised for these children and it is up to the parents to organize this kind of support).
Also the institution of gymnasium was found guilty as the “cumulative” place of problems. School as well as parents lack arguments for explaining the necessity of learning to the child. The limitations are also causing incapability of the systems of rewards and punishments.

3) Media and their influence:
Some of the teachers accused media for a bad influence on adolescents in the age of lower and upper secondary schools. They show it as an example of the source of different information with which young people do not know what to do, or they imitate the behaviour from television and treat it as fun. Such a situation had happened on 21 of October 2006 in one of the gymnasiums in Gdańsk. After this event a lot of actions were taken in schools.
And of course the aspect of being a born teacher (teacher with vocation) or taken at random appeared. The interviewees agreed that there are some teachers who shouldn’t be in this profession, and who are harming students by severe behaviour (because they do not like students or are afraid of them, so they are trying to keep distance) or by “being a good teacher” and giving good marks for nothing, so the students have no knowledge about the subject.

IP 7 also mentioned another aspect:
“I can say that a university doesn’t prepare teachers to face many problems (...). The university taught me how to lead a lesson, and maybe there is some psychology and pedagogy, but when I came to school I had to throw away all theory, all those “smart tips”, because they (the professors) were teaching only at the university and had no clue about real school. (...). I think that the university does not prepare teachers fully to the problems which they may meet on “the schoolwork path”.

What should be done then?
A collection of all sorts of advice from the interviewees of how to help and cure the problems of the educational system was done and these are the main ones which do not involve much effort and time, but it may be able to solve some of the most important problems and make the work of teachers and class tutors lighter:

Advices to the advantage of students:
- Reducing number of students in a class (around 15-20)
- When the students turn sixteen – school should have the possibility of expelling the student who doesn’t want to learn (for example as it is in Great Britain where education is obligatory only till 16)
- Choosing the class profile later than at the first grade of the secondary school when the students are not decided about their future
- Students may attend teacher-parents meetings, so they will feel important and know that their opinions influence others and the future actions of a teacher, or parent.
- Students should have had included in their schedule lesson/activities with a psychologist (for example to develop their interpersonal abilities, working in a group, empathy, helping others, communication, etc.)
- Facultative lessons in the last grade on subjects needed to the final exams, so the students who want to learn only particular subjects will have this possibility, without wasting time for other subjects
- No isolation of the problematic behaviour of children in one place, because it will make them more problematic
- Teachers’ and parents’ need of being consequent in acting towards students
- Individual learning beside normal lessons should also be possible for more talented students

Advises to the advantage of the teachers:
- Trainings for teachers (for example psychological workshops, maybe own therapy to learn basic rules for communication with students, or how to cope with own problems and not bring home problems to school and vice versa)
- Therapeutists should help teachers “from inside” by supervisions of their work, by solving problems on teachers level
- Those teachers who are better at private teaching shouldn’t work at public school, as they teach only for obtaining the rights for pension later on and that is why they are not interested in being very engaged in school activities.
- Reduce the “paper work” of teachers by letting them focus on teaching students and developing own skills

Advises to the advantage of the whole macrosystem level situation:
- Reducing districts for schools and advisory centers so they will be not overworked and support may be delivered when needed so the child will not have any possibility to make his/her situation worse
- At least two or three pedagogues and/or psychologists in every school to help students and teachers
- Creating more regulations about how to work with “absent students”
- Shorten the procedures of receiving “individual learning” and make them easier to learn so more students will be supported
- It should be obligatory for parents to inform the school about any diagnosis which have an impact on student’s learning abilities, so the teachers can adjust their requirements and methods of working to the individual needs
- More financial support for more talented students, as the school is supposed to be a place for making possibilities for their development of knowledge, abilities and interests
- Scholarships for students should be higher and more available to motivate students

Reactions among school environment class to a specific event of suicide

This specific event was about classroom sex attack which led to a suicide of a young girl from gymnasium (see appendix 2 for more details).

“The teacher of the class had left the room temporarily and one of the boys recorded the group’s abuse of the 14-year-old girl on his mobile phone.
Some of the other girls in the class tried to help the girl, but she was only able to break free from the boys after they had stripped her. (…)"
A preliminary investigation has shown that the victim of the attack told a friend on Friday night that she would never again set foot in the school. On Saturday morning, the girl's parents found her lifeless body in her room. She had hanged herself with a skipping rope, the police said.

These kind of events (characterized as a *Werther’s effect* or *copycat suicide* and is defined as a duplication or copycat of another suicide that the person attempting suicide knows about either from local knowledge or due to accounts or depictions of the original suicide on television and in other media) happens in Poland sometimes few times a year and are very spread around in media and this particular event dated October 2006 was the one that all my research questions and study guide emerged from.

In this part long quotations are pointed out to make the reader create own perception upon the problem. These quotations are intended to illustrate different reactions as well as aspects perceived by school staff and students about the phenomena.

Most of the teachers were generally shocked when it was described and told in media, and didn’t know how they would handle the situation. Some of them had to conduct the tutoring lessons about the problem of committing suicide by the girl from gymnasium presented in the media. Thanks to these programs and articles also other aspects of schooling in general were discussed. All the opinions mentioned below directly result from the research questions and indirectly from the fact of this particular suicide event.

Some answers are not included according to the fact of not answering these questions on a satisfactory level. Sometimes the answers were shifty/evasive and underestimating the question itself or the whole problem, and it can be only presumed that teachers didn’t want to confess that they felt uncomfortable. It is also possible that they didn’t bother or had nothing to say about it.

The answers were concentrated around two main aspects of the event. First, the role of the media in presenting the event of suicide and second, the role of the class as a group handling this event and class tutors (teachers in general) and their mutual dependence.

1) The role of the media in presenting the event of suicide.

It was recognized by class tutors that the way of presenting the event of youth suicide in media had also a long term impact on the general condition of the students at a similar age.

One of the IP teachers said:

“In my opinion it was unnecessary to create the gymnasium. (…) The youth feel they’re as adults that they can do whatever they want and this sexuality is spread all around, in mass media etc. (…) Such events widely discussed are causing the next ones.” (IP 1)

“I do not want to judge journalists or media about what they were doing.... the effects of this suicide still exist (…) The form of this information was outrageous.” (IP 4)

“I was shocked. Media made “the show” too big. In media, there is too much sex, children get to know about “it” (sex) too early. And the presence of alcohol in the home environment.” (IP 9)

2) The role of the class as a group and class tutors (teachers in general) and their mutual dependence.

IP 5 for example mentioned that the concentration of youths in similar (the growing up) age in one place as school etc. is the possible factor of provoking bad behaviour events. IP 6 and IP
12 meant that the class tutors (teachers in general) own inability to foresee or see the factors of suicidal behaviour. The IP 7 noticed, in addition, that their own knowledge about group behaviour is an important factor for the class tutor in her/his professional work. There were also some opinions of students, pointing out the differences between boys and girls and roles that come out from gender differences - IP 11.

“In theory they [students] understand, they know where to look for help, because I once had a girl with such problems.” (IP 3)

“On the other side we can see those provoking behaviours of girls, with earrings in stomach etc. From the psychological point of view this is very pressing, but it always was and will be. On the other side those boys and stupid freaks. People at that age are very receptive for such freaks. Every suicide frightens, and that committed in gymnasium frightens even more” (IP 5)

“And again from my own school experiences I know that class group can kill or save. Because it has the greatest influence on each person. And it’s sad that there are no people who can defend others. Because I know that a class tutor can take a side”. But that there is nobody in the class who dares reaction...But there can be as well the situation like this that there are some people in the class with such a high position that nobody dares counteracting them. (...) I still think that headmasters do not realize how far from students teachers are. And that’s the reason of such kind of tragedies.” (IP 7)

“There were a comment like this: “these girls who are supposed to soften the habits, haven’t done it. If the girls were regarding this girl as a friend, why none of them left out the classroom for help? (...) But nobody, having in mind own resilience, could foresee that she could do it. It might be the reason. (IP 11)

Those children who knew the environment of the girl were divided into 2 groups – first blaming the girl, [for what happened before suicide, the cause of the suicide] and second blaming the boys. None of the children blamed the teacher.” (IP 9)

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It should be noticed that one of IPs mentioned a new source of possible reasons of such events – not only school and family but the pressure or fear against others in the city (like gangs or bullying and other criminal events that school students are or might be involved in).

“Well the first reaction was a shock, and the way of thinking: how is it possible that we do not recognise some things, how watchful we must be, and look at our students all the time. So much! (...) I must be now more watchful and “catch” all these signs. Now in my class I have fewer students than at the beginning, and I know them better. But in a bigger and a new class there might be troubles. (...) They [students] said that it’s not so bad in our school. It’s worse with the situation in the city, when they are out of school.” (IP 12)

Discussion

The line between “normal” and “at risk” of adolescents is really thin (McWhirter, 2004; Mind 2004). Physical and psychical changes are experienced more or less intensively. And through all those changes as soon as adolescents can deal with them they are fine. The problem starts when they realize that they cannot handle themselves and outside environment any longer. That is the time when depression, aggression and divergent thinking may begin, and it may lead to suicide ideation, and attempts, or self-destructive behaviour (McWhirter, 2004; Mind...
2004). And children who are at risk of suicide often do not seek help to solve their problems (McWhirters, 2004).

All of the following risk factors described in McWhirters (2004) were also mentioned as present in one way or another among adolescents in class tutors’ classes or schools:

- Substance abuse,
- Under – and over achievement,
- Catastrophic world view,
- Cluster suicides,
- Disruptive family experiences,
- Violent families,
- Poor communication,
- Loss and separation.

Review of the recent studies suggests that those researchers nowadays are more focused on the school, which plays an important role in adolescents’ lives. Adolescents, especially between 16 and 19 years old are the group, which is entering adulthood with the greatest force, but still remains in childhood. It is obvious that students are looking for their own identity, views on the world and other people, and what maybe is most concerning: own future – in this period of life. At the same time it is the time of fascination and/or disappointments based on their own ideal and confronted with reality. Różańska-Kowal (2004) research among 90 students from third grade of general upper secondary schools has shown that adolescents concern school as the main source of tough situations (80% of participants). The top lists of stressing factors at school were: bad marks, tests/exams, and getting final marks at the end of the year – that’s also the reason why one of the ten themes and interview guide questions emerged. Bad marks were stressing both good and weak students. The good ones were feeling discredit from teacher and other students’ side and not fulfilling their own aspirations. For bad students their own conviction of having lower abilities to learn and making worse the average rate of marks was deepening. The tests/exams are seen in the aspects of the possibility to be in danger of repeating the class. So only foreseeing the bad result is making students stressful. Being forced to correct few final marks at the exams in very close time make them unable to fulfill it and they give up because their intellectual abilities are already so lowered. They are physically and psychologically tired, which excludes them from work.

The conclusion is that if school plays such an important role in children and youths’ life, maybe the school system should be more focused on children’s and youths’ personality, which is being formed during the time of childhood and adolescence. The school curricula should be adjusted in the better way to meet the requirements of the contemporary young person.

So what happens between the first grade when children for the first time enter the school happy and motivated, and the secondary school, when they become so unwilling to do anything connected with school activities? According to McWhirters’ (2004) opinion about school dropouts, school has begun to be negative and punishing, and moreover makes them to be poor learners, demanding more of “reproductive knowledge” than creativity.

I state so, because as the general conclusion of my results I should say that: even if some teachers are trying to act in favour of students, the students are passive in relation to learning and school activities.

So, in other words, a child is supposed to behave at home and school, not making problems because parents are tired and busy and teachers are obliged to complete the school program,
check the students’ knowledge etc. In both environments a child may feel lost and the only thing that he or she knows is: student is not allowed not to understand the lesson, have another point of view, ask too many questions because all this disrupts the lesson. But what can a child do to be seen and make somebody interested in him? The only thing that adults can’t control is disruptive behaviour, wags, getting in conflicts with peers or adults.

The questions that arise from this paper are:

What to do if class tutors’ abilities to handle the roles are too small, or the requirements of the role are too high?

How is it possible to create new schools but without any suspicions – pedagogical and psychological – to the way how the new system will work in reality? And also it would be important to know if teachers are prepared for “new generation”.

In summary, participant teachers consider their students as not willing to learn, and according to the Różańska-Kowal research, it may be caused by the fact that students when stressed are not trying to find solutions to their problems. This is searching rather for improving their well being ad hoc. And in this connection with the McWhirters’ (2004) statement that low self-esteem, poor self-concept, and feelings of worthlessness are typical of suicidal children and may predispose a child or adolescents to suicide thinking.

It was also shown by Kosińska research that parents are spending very little time (she meant time as the quality of time) devoted only for the child: working mothers ca. 11 minutes per day and 30 minutes during weekends, while not working mothers spend 13 minutes per day, and 30 minutes during the weekends. This is also the reason why parents do not teach their children basic rules and norms how to behave among adults for example in school (situation with pushing teacher while leaving the aula) or how to solve the problems, how to react in different situations, so the child is left somehow alone and the only way to get to know if he or she is doing right is by trials – but then usually the child gets the information: do not do that. So child becomes passive. How can this “weak student” have the abilities to work more if for all the time he/she is punished? It is already proved that when influencing only with punishments (reprimandations, bad marks, calling for parents) the effect will not be seen (Kosińska, 1999).

As mentioned before, in MacLeod et.al (2005), it might be a great challenge to engage students in goals and activities, which will give them the possibility to improve quality of future positive thinking.

But when it comes to being happy among teachers, the numbers (Żakowski, 2007) show that people with this profession are one of the happiest social groups, though they earn very little, they are satisfied (60% in gymnasium, and in secondary schools)

Some time ago Spychała (2007) wrote an article about children as philosophers. In this article he mentioned about his own investigation among students and teachers in primary school, gymnasium and secondary schools. Among other questions for students there was one asking the student for giving reasons why they have to learn polish language, biology or music. The results showed that most of them do not know and do not understand why they have to learn these subjects. But as the author says, more shocking were the results of teachers, when asked why they teach the subjects. Those teachers are usually college educated professionals but they do not know why they teach. In other words, in school there are two groups: students who do not know why to learn, and teachers not knowing why to teach. He also concluded that polish education system is based only for teaching for the tests, exams etc. and that nobody thinks what’s happening with this knowledge after the event. Nobody asks the
students after, if they remember what they have learned, not even mentioning if they understand for a while what was learned.

In summary the research questions are answered by this study as:

1. How do Polish school teachers look upon suicidal and risky behaviour among teenagers in relation to the school environment and the learning situation?

This research has shown that teachers may have too many obstacles to recognize the suicidal problems and support these students. The IP teachers’ statements such as “I observe the change in students’ behaviour” give nothing if not supported by action.

The main problem of today’s school and teacher is the inability of seeing the surrounding problems of a child with any result in suicidal behaviour. And even after seeing some problems they are not able to join the risky behaviour with the possibilities of the suicidal one. First of all, teachers have to be educated in this matter, but not only in theory but by practical solutions.

2. How do the teachers look upon the possibilities to solve the structural/organizational problems at school?

The problems may be solved on the school level by more psychological and pedagogical practical trainings and/or therapy of teachers as a solution to structural problems. There should also be more cooperation between home and school environment, which may be not so important to the peer adolescents, but still has a great impact on the student’s attitude towards people and towards the rules and ideas created by these two environments.

3. What are the tutoring teachers perceived responsibilities to prevent suicidal and risky behaviour?

Most of the teachers had experienced in their professional life the responsibility of suicidal behaviour. But these results have also shown that they prefer the prevention of suicidal behaviour to be given to specialists, like psychologists and pedagogues. Tutoring lessons only at the minimum level can help with the prevention, but anyway the tutoring lessons are focused on current events like marks, attendance, lack of learning, so only on symptoms of the problems but not the problems themselves.

Validity and limitations of the study:

The character of the research method and the fact that only a small group of class tutors were interviewed might limit the validity of this study. As Mertens (1998) states the validity of qualitative research relies on identifying the group of people who are performing differently from the rest of the society – group of people means class tutors as teachers with more responsibilities within school environment. Mertens (1998) also states that this kind of research demands from the reader to combine the results and see the whole concept presented by researcher. The results were also confronted with other data from other researchers and based on literature review.

The first limitation of the study would be the inability of interviewing (or by any other method) both class tutors and students of these teachers (as participants) to confront the class tutors’ interviews.

Secondly, there was a time limitation. The interviews were done in a period of only two weeks after Easter of 2007 and had to be finished by May – in May there was the Matura examination performed, so especially the class tutors, didn’t have much time for interviews. They were probably more stressed, didn’t want to go into details in answering, or couldn’t be
interviewed accordingly to their school work which was at that time colliding with my short visit in Poland.

Thirdly, the limitations of the method and the researcher, which needed transcribing the recorded interviews and translating them into English by myself, so that the language and understanding of the translation must be considered. It is also connected with the problem of validity and representativity, as to the fact that this method was very time-consuming so the number of participants is very low and thus may not be representative for all teachers.

Fourthly, it is not completely certain whether they answered really in the way they thought or if they answered in the way the interviewer expected.

The fifth limitation would be the use of the interview material in the analysis. As it was shown in table 3 (Number of concentrating units and words in English transcripts from 12 IPs’ interviews) it might be counted that only ca. 20% of the material were analyzed. But the fact is that the words counted for analysis were actually only the essential ones from each interview. It was done so because many of interviewees were talking in a very wordy way, sometimes even mentioning about the same matter more than once, so only the descriptive and representative thoughts were counted. It also means that for the research more important was the number of meaningful items than words. For example, the sentence in which the words were counted could have 20 words and the same item was mentioned 3 times in whole interview – but only one sentence with meaningful item was used for analysis. Accordingly to the subject of this research some of the interviewees’ materials were not taken into consideration at all.

Moreover, during the class tutors’ interviews, teachers could understand that the results would be used abroad, so more or less they could feel open to answer the questions, but on the other hand two of them were being interviewed during the lessons so it could be possible that they didn’t feel free while giving answers.

Interviewing time was between 20 minutes (the shortest one) and 2,5 hours (the longest one) and as it was during ordinary school day time (during the lessons or the breaks between them). This was also the limitation of the research as two of the participants were answering the questions during their lessons, and another limitation was that as the place (except of IP 9, this interview was taken at home) not neutral for them, the answers might not have been complete or even true.

And a final limitation were: problem of generalization as a matter of external validity as well as the fact that some of the class tutors may have been not very familiar with some terms or questions used during the interview (connection between suicidal and risky behaviour and for example marks, their responsibilities, school work in general). Sometimes the definitions of these notions had to be explained to them.

Conclusion

- The perception of the suicidal behaviour problems among adolescents by class tutoring teachers emerged as being not an important phenomenon to recognize or too far away from general school system, despite the fact that teachers had experienced such behaviour.
- There is a possibility that young people who behave in a risky/suicidal way are not recognized as a group at risk by a lot of teachers.
- Class tutors are in need of help to manage their schoolwork and supportive relations with students.
- Class tutors want to be supported with recognizing problems and replaced with help and support by other professionals, so they can focus only on educating the mainstream students.
Future Directions

Further research is needed in this field, which was uncovered by class tutors in this research. It would be also worthwhile if the governmental institutions would consider the possibility of reorganizing the school system and be focused not only on education but the general conditions of work for class tutors, teachers and students. This paper also supports the idea that adolescents at risk are among common students and ignoring them instead of offering help is a very short working solution. There should be more cooperation between servicing institutions (psychological and pedagogical advisory center, police, municipal police, school pedagogues and/or psychologists and other specialists visiting schools or having lectures) so the support may be delivered at the right time. It is a reasonable conclusion that the later the problems and conflicts will be recognized and solved, the more efforts and engagement of all sides will be needed.
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Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. Background data
(sex, age; some kind of specialization in professional work; length of professional work, etc.)

2. The participants’ views on the educational system as a whole
What is your ability to contribute to the social support and “upbringing” of adolescent pupils, especially those with problems?
What do you think of tests and marks in relation to adolescents with health problems? Are there any other problems in school that contribute to serious health problems as you see it?
Which problems in school do you think are most important for desperate acts?
Is bullying a relevant problem?

3. The participants’ own experience of meeting pupils with difficulties and helping them.
Is low well-being and suicidal behaviour among the pupils a common problem according to your experience?
How much work related to this kind of problems do you do?
How do you recognize these problems?
What do you do in practice in order to help?
How do you regard the possibilities of delivering this kind of support in the existing school system?

4. The participants’ views on their responsibilities and their role in prevention work.
To what extent do you consider suicidal problems and ill health among pupils to be a responsibility for intervention of class tutors?
If it is, how should class tutors handle these problems?
How do you estimate your own importance in this school for the prevention of these problems?
Who else are responsible – in school or outside the school?
What and/or who do you regard as crucial for the detection of suicidal problems?
What about cooperation with others who should be involved in helping the adolescent – head masters? Parents? Therapists? Social workers? Psychiatrists?

5. The participants’ suggestions of improvements.
What should be changed, according to your view, in order to facilitate prevention work?

6. Follow up questions.
- Does the theory about "bringing up" students at school can be taken in school at all? What are the obstacles?
- What programs were and are used at your school to prevent pathologies or risky behaviour.
- Do you think that suicidal/risky behaviour can be and should be taken by class tutors?
- What do you think about taking this responsibility by you?
- What problems do you see with taking the responsibility that comes with being class tutor?
- Why do you think parents’ descents the responsibility of bringing up to school and teachers?
- What were the first reactions among teachers and your own after suicide of 14yrs old girl in Gdaňsk in October of 2006? Whom or what was blamed then? Has anything changed after this in your school? What was the reaction of your class after this event? How did you treat this matter with class if it was taken up on tutoring lessons?
- Do you think that you are important in this school and for the pupils under your command as a class teacher?
- What are your experienced responsibilities to prevent suicidal behaviour in school youths?
- Do you want to add something that you find relevant and that you think I should have asked about?)
A SCHOOLGIRL in Gdansk, Poland killed herself after five boys stripped her in front of a classroom and simulated raping her.

The teacher of the class had left the room temporarily and one of the boys recorded the group's abuse of the 14-year-old girl on his mobile phone.

Some of the other girls in the class tried to help the girl, but she was only able to break free from the boys after they had stripped her.

The head teacher tried to relay the incident to the girl's parents, but only managed to get her teenage brother on the phone, who apparently did not pass on the message, police said.

"On Friday, when the teacher was out of the classroom, five boys undressed the girl in front of her classmates and then started to touch her intimate parts and simulated the sex act with her," said Jaroslaw Sykutera, a spokesman for the Gdansk police.

A preliminary investigation has shown that the victim of the attack told a friend on Friday night that she would never again set foot in the school.

On Saturday morning, the girl's parents found her lifeless body in her room. She had hanged herself with a skipping rope, police said.

The five boys who stripped the girl have been detained. The police tried to retrieve the mobile phone recording of the incident from the memory card of the phone, but the clip had already been erased.

The stiffest sentence the boys face would be time in a correctional institution for minors. Had they been adults, they could have been jailed for up to 12 years, according to the police.