

SCHOOL PREVENTION AGAINST SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR ON THE BASIS OF DATA INCLUDED IN GOOD-BYE LETTERS OF MINOR SUICIDES

Arkadiusz Urbanek

University of Wrocław, Poland
E- mail: urbanek.arkadiusz@vp.pl

Abstract

This article tackles the issue of reconstructing the circumstances of suicides committed among adolescents aged 14, 15 and 17, on the basis of analysis of good-bye letters and the discourse of life stories of individual cases. The presented research procedure focuses on capturing linguistic categories conveyed within the statements of young suicides' good-bye letters. Abstracting adequate linguistic categories from the entire content has been combined with analysis of their meaningfulness and context in entire statement, hence enabling reconstruction of the interpretation applied by the young suicides while perceiving themselves and the reality around. The methodology implied model of hermeneutic analysis of statements with additional usage of categorizing affiliation method. Conclusions from the research are of practical value, contributing to the issues of early prevention under circumstances of suicidal behaviour, constituting relevant source of practical knowledge for teachers and tutors. The research into young suicide's statements provides material which may in its practical dimension establish aspects crucial for school discussions facilitating expressions of own interpretation and judgments, as well as making teachers aware of various signals sent out by the pupils. The research results embrace linguistic categories expressed in letters, with presentation of their description and the context. Concurrently those constitute clear information about inadequate ways of interpreting the reality, additionally revealing number of similarities in communication patterns among the suicides.

Key words: good-bye letter, prevention, pupil, suicide, teacher.

Introduction

Suicide is a phenomenon drawing interest of various humanistic disciplines, including but not limited to psychiatry, psychology and ethics. Suicidal death is an occurrence, which - in the course of the history as well as in various cultures - has been perceived through symbolic or even mystic meanings assigned to such circumstances. Due to exceptional seriousness of the phenomenon as well as due to lack of satisfactory research, the suicidal issues have been tackled in similar manner, as perceived from the perspective of European and American literature. Therefore, in this regard works of Aaron Beck (1976) Roy F. Baumeister (1990), Rory O'Connor and Noel Sheehy (2002) appear significant as these authors have made attempt to establish the issue of human motivation, referring to perception of reality in critical-crucial moment, concurrently making assessment towards the level of emotional well-being. Polish literature also provides with interesting research samples within range of suicidology, with reference to which, studies by Irena Pospiszyl or Brunon Hołyst may be recalled as considerable and current ones. For instance, by the application of longitudinal information on demographic features of suicides, Brunon Hołyst worked out forecasts of the layout of particular risk groups. Moreover, significant number of research projects is rooted in social pedagogy, which may be reflected in tutors' and teachers' praxis to large extend.

Beyond shadow of a doubt, from the perspective of pedagogy the circumstances of suicidal death, especially in case of children and adolescents, shall not remain a research niche. Therefore, the aim of this paper referring to own research project is to present the possibilities of gaining knowledge on subjective representation of the social situation determining choices made by young suicides. Exploration of life experiences in individual cases is a crucial basis on which a conclusion is made as for early prevention against self-aggressive demeanour. Nevertheless, attention should also be drawn to teachers' awareness regarding not only the act of aggression, but the experiences which chronologically preceded such behaviour. The presented reconstruction research provides knowledge regarding specific "superstructure" beyond direct suicidal behaviour, concurrently opening new paths to interpretation of early intervention programmes.

Moreover, introduction to the subject matter of this research requires depicting current knowledge on suicidal prevention, which consequently shall be perceived as a task for teachers. Analysis tackling prevention activities as well as access to the theoretical knowledge outline the purpose of methodological assumption of the reconstruction research presented in this paper. The conducted research constitutes a type of inventive attempt to search for information and guidelines of a new quality for the school prevention. It is a methodological approach, which goals are set to explore information regarding state of emotions, as well as quality of depiction and subjective interpretations which all emerged in the life course of minor suicides. It is also worth to point out that the research captivated the internal life sphere of young suicide, and not merely his/her behavioural patterns, hence the research manner and quality is unconventional as it is rather rare to carry out analysis of meaning and the content of the suicides' good-bye statements (L. McClelland, S. Reicher, N. Booth 2000). Moreover, the presented theoretical as well as practical conclusions are of heuristic nature, i.e., not reaching to verify the current knowledge, but searching for new quality of thinking and accomplishing suicidal prevention at schools in general. Hence, the aim of this paper is to present practical conclusions which may be complementary towards the current teachers' knowledge and their practical competences. New quality of knowledge results from application of the reconstruction research model, which enables to reconstruct personal emotional experiences proceeding the suicidal attack. Concurrently the reflections revolve around issues reaching far beyond verification of already-known risk factors and symptoms, typical for behavioural patterns of minor suicides-to-be. Needless to say, theoretical and practical models of prevention are still quite popular and common (M. Nordeentoft 2007, p. 306). Methodological approach has been applied in accordance with hermeneutic pattern as the focus of research was tackling the statements included within good-bye letters of minor suicides. Such approach of content analysis provided opportunity to present unusual comprehension of suicidal prevention.

The procedure of activities outlined in the conclusions for teachers' conduct refer not only to the sphere of observing the pupils and their risky demeanour, but also the category of group discussion. The subject matter as well as course of the discussion both significantly outline gained results of exploring own personal experiences, as signalled by the suicides in the last good-bye statement.

While making review of publications on the issue of suicide prevention amongst children and youth, there are some problem categories that deserve particular attention. The crucial information, indispensable for shaping prevention activities at schools refer to way of recognizing factors proceeding suicidal attempts among the young. Within this range the results of scientific research provide with broad knowledge resulting in specifying few categories of the risk factors. When classifying the risk factors there may be three key-problem issues situating the reason for suicide in a) unfavourable family relations, b) lack of emotional support provided by parents to their offspring (feeling of social loneliness) c) morbid factors (child's and family members' mental illnesses, family members' addictions) (Preventing Suicide 2003, pp 13-15).

The research into the personal life situation of minor suicides indicates crucial role played by unfavourable family experiences. Those researching this issue emphasize the question of authoritarian ways of ruling in the family, rigid relations in communicating manner among family members, as well as lack of family contacts with the social surrounding (M. J. Carris, L. Sheeber, S. Howe 1998).

Furthermore, the quality of emotional life appears crucial when searching for risk factors generating suicidal attempts among the youth. Cases of confronting immense child's emotional sensitivity with occurrence of disturbance of morbid feature of a family member, all establish unfavourable circumstances of deteriorated quality of emotional life. This also results from inappropriate ways of handling parental care. The child painfully experiences lack of emotional support and no understanding whatsoever for his/her own problems he/she struggles with in the everyday life. Emotional loneliness is a factor that becomes the source of negative social attitudes and poor quality of relations in all spheres of life, both among the nearest and dearest, as well as in school environment and among peers. Moreover, analyzing the origin of suicidal attempt, it is important to take into consideration mental condition of the young, since the research data indicate that in three quarters of the suicide cases there have been reported issues of depression episodes or depression *per se* (D. Schaffer, P. Fisher 1981). The question of depression episodes, mental fragility as well as environmental stress triggers related to family and school situations, are emphasized in the research conducted in various countries, hence it proves its universality (Derevic K., Friedrich E., Oquendo M.A., Voracek M., Fridrich M.H., Sonneck G. 2006, p. 432). Recognizing the risk factors particular influences the process of accomplishing prevention procedures among teachers. Occurrence of endangering situations or disturbing events in pupil's life is reflected in harmful conduct expressed in school environment, therefore teachers themselves become essential source of information as they may notice relatively early any changes in pupil's behaviour. Recognizing worsened mood and decrease in emotional stimulation or even occurrence of risky demeanour contrive a way of acknowledging unfavourable life situation, encouraging to undertake prevention activities as a part of early prevention.

Teachers' observation are focused on pupils' demeanour and emotional reactions that may indicate deteriorated or unfavourable emotional state. In practice, the teachers recognize symptoms which may be specified as for instance lack of interest in the daily-basis activities, general decline in learning progress, making little effort while undertaking tasks, manifesting misdemeanour in the classroom, playing truancy or notoriously skipping classes, abuse of smoking or drug intake, and last but not least - aggressive conduct towards the peers taking place more frequently than usual (R. Cohen - Sandler, A. L. Berman, R. A. King 1982). Apart from the risk factors of suicidal behaviour, teachers' knowledge also embraces issues of practical ways of accomplishing the supportive prevention for the sake of pupils. Undeniably, information on prevention activities that may be undertaken by a teacher at school appear crucial for the quality of prevention. When specifying directions of such action it is worth to emphasize influences that set sights on strengthening pupils' personal coherence and self-openness, as well as openness towards the others. The teacher as an animator of such supportive activities may be driven by the question of personal emotional pupil's needs or objective life competences. Therefore, within the sphere of preventing actions, appears the following:

- a) activities for the sake of establishing and strengthening pupils' self-assessment, which serve as a protection buffer enabling them to make reasonably objective assessment of life events and in consequence – undertaking more effective ways of coping with personal and social difficulties,
- b) establishing appropriate interpersonal relations while preserving balanced proportion between closeness and distance, concurrently retaining personal autonomy,
- c) learning appropriate communication patterns, taking into consideration understanding

of own emotions, learning how to express emotions and to gain appropriate respect towards personal feelings,

d) establishing atmosphere of security and aggression-free environment at school (Preventing Suicide 2003, p. 27).

Likewise, working out some guidelines for prevention programmes for suicidal behaviour at schools becomes a vital problem, particularly complementary with nation-wide strategies (M. Nordeentoft 2007, p. 362). And, above all, it all seems rather essential as it tackles teachers' doubts how to search for ways of diagnosing pupils' emotional state of mind and ways of reacting accordingly.

To set an example, essential factor contributing to school prevention is accomplishment of the SUPRE programme which - thanks to WHO - has been subject to implementation in selected EU countries since 1999. In consequence of accomplishing the projected assumptions for prevention of suicidal behaviour, the principle of prevention activities has been also established in Poland, with the recommendation of school application. In consequence, teaching staff received lucid guidelines influencing the issue of prevention of suicidal pupils, such as:

- 1) recognizing pupils with personality disorders, recommending psychological counselling to them,
- 2) establishing closer relations with young people in the course of verbal communication as well as making effort to understand and provide them with assistance,
- 3) diminishing their negative emotions experienced as a result of mental stress,
- 4) paying attention and learning how to spot early signals alarming suicidal thoughts manifesting throughout conversations – specific statements or changes in non-verbal communication,
- 5) supporting pupils with poor learning skills in progressing with the schoolwork,
- 6) paying attention to truancy,
- 7) destigmatizing mental illness and elimination of alcohol and drug abuse,
- 8) referring pupils to mental treatment and rehab in case abusing drugs and alcohol takes place,
- 9) restricting pupils' access to potential suicidal tools such as poisonous medications, pesticides, weapons etc,
- 10) providing teachers and other school staff with access to methods enabling them stress management at work (Preventing Suicide, 2003, pp. 32-33).

Despite such wide range of recommendations, this type of knowledge is still not always sufficient, as there are often doubts expressed by those concerned referring to ways of gaining information on pupils' experiences and emotions. Hence, the research pattern recalled in this paper, as well as the practical conclusions, may become a proposal of practical prevention approach, however not providing additional information on risk factors, but paying attention to the important sphere of recognizing personal experiences. The group-class discussion recommended in the concluding summary becomes merely a background, just an impulse to start up a conversation, whereas what appears particularly important are the subject of the discussion and style of teacher's moderation of the discourse. Results of carried out exploration of young suicides' personal statements included within their good-bye letters constitute information endorsing to work out such an approach towards teacher's cooperation with pupils.

Current knowledge regarding the issue of children's and teenagers' suicidal behavior implies two crucial points. One is based on the premise that it is essential to enrich teachers' knowledge and school staff - as well as representative of any kind of pedagogical institutions - within the range of necessity and possibility of carrying out children's suicides prevention. Second conclusion to be made refers to outlining spheres within which prevention may take place, due to the fact that it is not equal to recognize emotional situation of the pupils and to carry out substantial actions in favour of strengthening their social competences and self-

assessment. Being a part of early diagnosis prevention, implementation of these conclusions into the wider spectrum of prevention activities may be worthwhile.

Methodology of Research

While describing the aim of research it is worth to ponder over the issue of estimating the size of the suicides phenomenon among pupils in Poland. According to statistics of Polish Police Head Department in 2010 altogether 359 individuals aged 10-19 attempted to commit suicide, of which 169 were fatal in consequence (www.statystyka.policja.pl). Suicidal behavior motoring among pupils indicate that in the years 2006-2010 episodes with children below age of 9 were rather marginal phenomena (two cases of child's death were reported – in 2006 and adequately 2007). Suicidal attempts were far more frequent among those at the stage of early adolescence, as in 2010 there were 42 suicides reported, considering the age group 10-14. Moreover, there were as many as 317 cases of suicides of those aged 15-19. Notwithstanding, such statistic data on the extend of the phenomena among youth in Poland do not differ significantly from number of such cases in other countries (M. Nordeentoft 2007, p. 308, K. Derevic, E. Friedrich, M. A. Oquendo, M. Voracek, M. H. Fridrich, G. Sonneck G. 2006, pp. 427, 429).

Taking the above into consideration, methodological aims concentrate on methodology of qualitative research in order to express the deepness of the young suicide's experiences. Therefore, the content of the study includes only three case studies of young suicides as their letters clearly and strikingly depict the methodology and style of the carried out research. At the same time, accurate recollection of excerpts from good-bye letters makes it possible to present full picture of subjective meaningfulness of the entire statement, not reflected in statistic data. Moreover, at the level of methodological goals it must be emphasized that summary and practical conclusions presented in this paper are not solely the result of analysis of three cases only.

With reference to the entire research project, this paper presents only the study sample, taking into consideration three cases of school pupils at the age of 14, 15 and 17, hence in quality research they constitute three case studies. Before committing suicide, these pupils did not know each other, they attended different schools, residing in different cities. Such variety of demographic circumstances is of paramount importance for the research, as its aim is to compare interpretation of the life realities determining decisions made by these persons in turning points of their lives. The full-range qualitative reconstruction research was conducted in the years 2010-2011, where altogether 34 cases of suicidal death were subject to analysis, with the victims being of different age and demographic profile. The source data for research included good-bye letters and witnesses' statements from the very last days of suicide's life, embracing the period from 2008 to 2009.

The entire source material embraced altogether 105 cases related to suicidal attempt, which were as cases all brought to prosecution in one of the sixteen voivodship cities of Poland. However, in majority of suicide attempt occurrences there was no circumstance of leaving a good-bye letter. Research exploring individual discrepancies among suicides leaving good-bye letter and those that do not, proved not to indicate significant nor crucial personality variation. Nonetheless, it is estimated that about 15-30% of cases leave good-bye letters (R. O'Connor, N. Sheehy 2003, p. 100, Heim N., Lester D. 1990, A. A. Leenaars 1988). Applying procedure of methodical narrowing number of sources, the number of analyzed suicide cases was also limited. At the beginning 98 cases of suicide attempt and those ended with demise were considered, with only 46 of them having good-bye letter left by the suicide, of which 11 were written by young pupils aged 14-17.

The applied pattern of qualitative research corresponds with the urging need for seeking information about emotional life of young suicides in order to provide teaching staff with another approach towards prevention of these type of demeanour. The reconstructive exploration of a

good-bye letter also refer to the vital issue of establishing ways to enforce prevention of suicidal behaviour, both amidst youth as well as the adults. Doubtlessly, what seems to be equally of paramount importance is to arrange informative campaigns addressed to the wider society, tackling issues of mental illnesses and mental health disturbances, which apparently occur in relation to suicides to large extent (S. Law, L. Pozi 2008, p. 83, 86). It is also prerequisite to acknowledge and recognize environmental stress triggers and to define threats resulting from social and economic changes (P. S Yip., C. Callanan, H. Yuen 2000, pp. 102-103, S. Law, L. Pozi 2008, pp. 81-82), as they significantly contribute to the process of changes in the youth's family life quality (K. Derevic and others 2006, p. 432). Moreover, sphere of activities supporting teachers to recognize emotional experiences of the young must be also taken into consideration, as it often becomes overwhelming to them.

In such aspect the conducted research not only set sights on, but also explore the search for subjective interpretations, revealing the quality assessment of social relations, also have a bearing on defining own personal experiences by a young suicide. Such researching approach does not depict statistic picture of the young suicide phenomenon, but is of other worth as it examines and presents the deepness of young people's experiences. Personal emotional experiences and the pattern of defining it by application of given linguistic categories contribute to assessment of young people's emotional life. In consequence, such content, constituting a knowledge that may be practically applied, significantly endow teachers effort to understand the youth, as they provide with material which is individual, personal and contains far more information about the emotional life than any statistic data may prove.

The research exploration focused on a good-bye letter, which is one of the most subjective and unique statements (A. Leenaars 1988 p. 34). The specificity of the gathered information provides methodological context of the exploration within hermeneutic research regarding the written narration. Methodological approach was inspired by discursive research, whereas concurrently due to concentration on various level of statements exploration, it was possible to carry out in-deep analyses which were not targeted to search for the motive for suicidal behaviour, but to reconstruct context in which the motive occurred. And it is exactly the discourse analysis, according to Teun A. van Dijk, that provides answer to the following question: „...how given usage of language influences the vision of a human in the world and the course of interaction, and vice versa: how various aspects of interaction and the beliefs held by the communication participants determine the form of the statements, which altogether influence the choice made towards given linguistic measures and the dynamics of the situation” (T. A. van Dijk, 2001, p. 10). Therefore, the undertaken exploration of the expression used in a good-bye letter of young suicides aims, on one hand, to read the forms of expressions, and on the other to read the context of expressions used.

Methodological assumptions, which situate this research in the scope of hermeneutical discursive analysis required methodological operationalization. In order to precise the procedure course of the statement analysis, method of categorizing affiliation was adopted (MCA), as recommended by Harvey Sacks. This method focuses on the language used in statements by members of the society that generate it and use it in a given way (A. Perakyla 2009, p. 330). The researcher's role is to follow the descriptive understanding, i.e. descriptive usage of given categories with the meanings assigned to them by the participant of the communication process. Exploring the letter contents, each statement was analysed from three perspectives. First of all, in order to distinguish categories used by the narrator the entire content of the statements was read, whereas the category referred to a word or name, around which the narrator built up his or her wider reflections. The second stage was to find within the contents of the statements the context of applying distinguished categories defining persons, actions or events. Combination of the category and context description in which the first one appeared, penetrate the sphere towards research conclusion. This level, therefore, was aimed at specifying the patterns of

subjective interpretation of categories and reconstruction of the suicide's attitude towards the category used by him/her. Reconstruction revealed interpretations applied by minor suicides, concurrently presenting the picture of their cognitive and emotional state experienced prior to suicide. Consequently, the third stage of analysis was to confront the meaning of the category used by the interlocutor, with the commonly understood meaning of the same category, however recognized in a given society. Therefore, the aim of such procedure was to compare category in context of its function with subjective interpretation, applied by young suicides.

To sum up, the goal of the reconstructive research and conclusions drawn from their results was to put accent on the axiological dimension of the problem and its influence exerted on the life of the young. In such context quality researches gain significant theoretical and practical importance, as they revolve around reconstruction of visions and personal beliefs of the suicides, as experienced by them prior to the suicidal attempt. Therefore, the subject matter of this paper is unconventional approach to the issue of prevention of suicidal behaviour accomplished at schools. Results of the exploration provide the teachers with knowledge on subjective emotional experiences. In consequence it becomes not only a document, but also a source of knowledge on ways of prevention among the pupils.

Results of Research

The advantage of this type of hermeneutic researches stems from their practical dimension, as they equip teachers and tutors with information on the quality of young suicides' experiences. Therefore, the presentation of research findings examines two aspects – the first one is the necessity to present notional categories, abstracted from the content of the good-bye letter, whereas the second issue – of crucial importance for the teachers – is to present the subjective meanings assigned to these categories by young suicides. Comparison of the categories and the meaning assigned to them may establish a scholar way to familiarize with the growing determination of a young suicide to take one's life. It is at the same time attempt made in order to find at least partial answer to teachers' doubts why the cries for help had not been heard by them before the suicidal pupil took his/her own life.

Research into the content of a good-bye letter provides wide range of data, although seldom becoming subject of analysis. The below-presented extracts from such letters are merely excerpt of information gained and provided by the entire research project. Analysis of the entire project and source material, i.e. 46 cases of suicidal attempts among people of different age, revealed the question of the content specification and author's intentions, as well as the issue of placing the blame for the death. What seemed particularly interesting in the range of exploration methodologically coherent with described research, is the proposal of defining ways of placing the blame that the suicide related to own decision to terminate own life (L. McClelland, S. Reicher, N. Booth 2000, p. 230, 232).

Nonetheless, placing the blame becomes significantly derivative of the intention quality of the good-bye letter, which subsequently may be classified in three categories of informative, last will and provocative letters. The informative letters do not provide with much information on subjective experiences and interpersonal relations, as they mainly include personal details about the deceased and possibilities of contacting their next of keen. Authors, which intention was to leave the last will or provocative letters, describe inward experiences definitely more elaborate. In such cases the question of feeling guilty for the death is also tackled. The conducted research revealed conclusions coincide with the result of letters analysis, as suggested by the L. McClelland team. The blame for decision to commit suicide was in majority of cases placed by the suicides on themselves, however only if their letters were not held in hostile tone. Otherwise, like in case of provocative letters, the others around were to blame. In such cases the good-bye letter was an opportunity to shout out the resentment towards those, who in the suicide's opinion, largely affected their decision (L. McClelland, S. Reicher, N. Booth 2000, p. 233).

The below-presented ways of exploring the content of the letter vary in their methodic of conduct, therefore reveal not only the issues of placing the blame for the death, but also search for superior semantic spheres. Hence, it is not only about defining the character of the letter nor about defining own image or future. The linguistic categories used in the analysis are selected on the basis of the context and meaning of the statement, not on the grounds of the frequency of their occurrence in the course of the statement.

In consequence, analysis of the content stipulate the subjective meaningfulness emerging around statements, words and expressions essential for the suicide. It is definitely unusual approach as the linguistic categories and personal meaningfulness assigned to them combine in superior spheres detailed issues, not having been explored before, referring for instance the issue of placing the blame, interpretation of self-image or creation of personal suicide's feature and vision of own future.

Case Study 1

A boy, aged 14, committed suicide hanging himself, having left a unique good-bye letter. It had been written during a lesson in a school notepad, where the pupil wrote down his own thoughts just below the subject of the classes. According to information provided by the relatives and teachers, the pupil was not challenging educationally nor pedagogically, being rather withdrawn among peers, but nevertheless sustaining interpersonal contacts with them. The good-bye letter was a set of complex statements, consisting of 3 pages of a hand-written text, therefore comparing the meanings of the categories used in the statement seems crucial from the perspective of pedagogical praxis and prevention.

Table 1. Linguistic categories and their cognitive meaningfulness, included in the good-bye letter of a 14-year-old suicide boy.

Linguistic category (positive meaning)	Extracts from the good-bye statements, describing the linguistic category used	Reconstructed meaning assigned to the category
Life – superior, protected value	'... I don't want to live any longer', '... I'll end up with my life and that's good', '... to end up own misery', '... I'll never change it, I decided to die and put my suffering to an end', '... I'm afraid to live', '... I don't care about this lousy life',	Life – is a misery, hassle, suffering, it is worth nothing, not being worth attention
People – people we live around, also the closest ones that provide us with support and understanding, even in most difficult times expressing their concern	'...no one is going to feel sorry for me', '... people are bad', '... they all are different than me', '...I hope nobody is going to cry for me', '...I hope that even just some of my colleagues will come to say last goodbye', '... it will be fun for everyone'.	People – are bad, they won't be bothered by death, won't cry for me, (my) personal problems are pathetic for them, they can't provide support because they don't understand. I'll be causing trouble to my nearest, they may be angry because I won't finish my school
World – The sphere of social and personal life, initiating curiosity and human growth	'... the word is mean', '...I decided to die when everything got screwed (...) if I don't get a positive mark again...'	World – is mean, everything goes wrong there, today's times make life miserable

Case Study 2

A girl that committed suicide by hanging herself at the age of 15. The information gathered from parents and teachers indicate that from the moment of changing school, the girl was problematic in pedagogical sense, often conflicted with teachers and parents. As it was the period parallel to adolescence, much of the negative behaviour was related to strong affective excitement. Before the death, the pupil had been under psychologist's surveillance, with the support aiming at lowering the level of emotional excitement. The deceased was socially active among peers, making plans for the holiday trip, mentioning it even on the day of the suicide. During frequent rows with parents, mainly tackling the rebel against pedagogical punishment applied, she was threatening them with committing suicide one day.

Table 2. Linguistic categories and their cognitive meaningfulness, included in the good-bye letter of a 15-year-old suicide girl.

Linguistic category (positive meaning)	Extracts from the good-bye statements, describing the linguistic category used	Reconstructed meaning assigned to the category
People – support, help	'I hate myself, and everyone in general (...), (...) god I had to...please help me, I'll be safe with you'	People – I hate them, they give no support
Truth – is a value, important in social life, it is always worth to speak the truth, people want to speak the truth	'everybody lies, and when I speak the truth, no one wants to believe me'	Truth – it is not around, people always lie, a lie always defeats the truth, people don't want to believe in truth
Court – socially important institution, prop of justice	'Now I know that court isn't just, why the hell I was telling the truth...' '...I must end up with myself. In kindergarten and primary school I thought that the court is just, but now I know it ISN'T...' 'I hate the police, the judges, the court in general'.	Court – is unjust, it is no worth to speak the truth, it's in vain

Case Study 3

Male aged 17, committed suicide by hanging himself. As the investigation proved, the deceased motivation was justified by a heartbreak. Approximately a month before the suicide, the woman he'd been planning the future with, told him that these plans were unreal. Since then, the deceased verbally began to express suicidal thoughts, also during a conversation on the day of his suicide. In terms of school performance, he did not cause serious problems, nevertheless his school results were very poor.

Table 3. Linguistic categories and their cognitive meaningfulness, included in the good-bye letter of a 17-year-old suicide male.

Linguistic category (positive meaning)	Extracts from the good-bye statements, describing the linguistic category used	Reconstructed meaning assigned to the category
World – The sphere of life and human growth	'...I say goodbye to you in this sick world" – sick world'	(my) world as abnormal reality, not to be accepted
Life as a long period that lass for other people	'...this is the end, end for me. You will live...' – end (mine) – life (yours)	(my) life as something that is done, personal end
Human death is something of paramount importance, dwelled upon	'...you will erase from your memory this irrelevant fact' – irrelevant fact	(my) death is of no importance, nothing to be remembered
Life is a period of struggle and fight	'...I was always giving up, and now – for the last time - I am giving up" – surrendering'	(my) life is about losing, surrendering, „always" giving up
Falling in love as a state of active emotional expressions	'G. [girl]...!ll always love her and nothing will change that – I shall love ...'	Falling in love as a surreal, post-humous state

Commencing prevention activities by the teachers implies the indispensable stage of establishing secure, open and partnership communication with the pupil in order to create atmosphere of trust. Hence, it is a situation of building up relation subject to number of interfering factors, what in turn makes such communication challenging (Preventing Suicide 2003, pp. 8-29). One of such interfering factor is cautiousness and pupil's disinclination towards open communication regarding own problems and experiences, as it may be caused by previous experiences that were related to negative communication with the adults. Consequently, the above-analyzed research show that significant role is played by strong conviction that no one can understand the difficulties and problems of these young people. Other relevant point is the ambiguity towards having conversation with the teacher, which ultimately shall constitute the first stage of furnishing assistance and prevention of suicidal attempts. In suicide circumstances, while the decision takes shape in their minds, young people present rather ambiguous attitude towards those offering help, shifting from the state of looking for assistance to the state of its definite rejection.

Despite this, attention should be drawn to the issue of establishing early prevention and exploring information on pupils' emotional state. In the context of presented categorizing analysis of selected letters content it may be assumed that recognizing the quality of emotional well-being is essential for the teachers' consideration towards early prevention of suicidal behaviour.

The knowledge, in the way accessible to the teachers, includes comprehension of risk factors and the catalogue of symptoms communicating pupil's poor emotional state of mind. Nonetheless, it is still open case to determine ways of seeking information regarding images and subjective interpretations applied by young people. Therefore, the presented excerpts of minor suicide's statements outline these issues.

On the contrary, the literature researching this topic often refers to elaborate results of statistic data tackling suicidal attempts among the adolescents and the adults and statistic layout of the frequency of such occurrences in given years and months (K. Derevic, E. Friedrich, M. A. Oquendo M.A., M. Voracek, M. H. Fridrich, G. Sonneck 2006, pp. 429 - 430, B. Hołyst 2002).

The content of a good-bye letter indicate that establishing communication and gaining knowledge on the inner word of experiences and interpretations constitute inseparable stages

of diagnosing pupil's situation. Conclusions resulting from the research provide with elaborate spheres of subjective experiences of young suicides, but also possibilities to search for such information by teachers, emphasizing other perspective than the sole symptoms verification in case alarming behaviour takes place. Practical conclusions reveal mainly the issue of teacher's communication with the group of pupils, simultaneously contributing to the prevention. Still, analysis of such statements give countenance to draw conclusions referring to directions of work confronting important communication spheres among the young, communicating subjective interpretation of self-image and the world around, as consolidated in their knowledge and beliefs.

Discussion

Suicide may be perceived in two dimensions, through temporal and problematic perspective. Therefore, it is a sudden occurrence i.e. embracing the very moment of self-annihilation, nevertheless while searching for wider spectrum of such human actions, what appears crucial is the effort made to reconstruct the unique process of reaching the moment of committing suicide. Reconstruction of such process constitutes a vital problem to the presented analysis results (Table 1,2,3) whereas the recollected excerpts from the statements provide teachers with specific style applied by suicide pupils to describe themselves and their life reality.

The doubt tackling seriousness and meaningfulness of the diagnosed motive of suicidal action emerge as substantial conclusion from the reconstruction. As far as my point of view is concerned, I believe that the motive perceived as the factor directly related to suicide is of no relevant importance whatsoever to prevention or teachers' pedagogical activities. The research findings reveal that the scope of practical interest correspond to the superior problem which is recognition of subjective, cognitive and emotional state, as they constituted the basis for the motivation. Pedagogues' experience and knowledge indicate that the factor immediately determining motive for suicide is not usually a particularly essential one. In case of young people at period of adolescence, suicide becomes often reaction to a heartbreak, difficulties in relations with peers and adults, or even problems at school. However, many teachers wonder why millions of young people go through such problems on a daily basis, but still - only for very few of the pupils it is a factor resulting in losing sense of further living. The outcome of reconstruction research presented above constitutes an attempt to answer this question, hence - it reveals the process of establishing specific states of emotions and knowledge, which are merged with the events of a everyday life. Therefore, what is perceived as a pupil's immediate suicide motive, is merely a secondary constituent. Practical dimension of the research findings provides the teachers with a subjective style of perceiving social reality as applied by the suicidal pupils, for the reason that the process which takes place over a period of time is constituted at the level of subjective beliefs and interpretation. Hence, in case of young suicides, negative interpretation of the self-image and social reality are deeply rooted in the moment of suicidal act. In consequence, exploring subjective interpretations exercised by given individuals immediately prior to the suicide became a source of practical knowledge, crucial for establishing early prevention against self-aggressive behaviour.

Conclusions drawn from results gained within reconstruction research allow to reveal spheres of early prevention, constituting school tasks on its basis. Reconstruction of young man's experience in critical situation also allows to make a draft for educational programmes aiming predominantly at establishing circumstances for expressing emotions and answering the signals. Concurrently, as far as teachers are concerned establishing prevention implies arranging circumstances for the youth to have the opportunity for the catharsis expression of own tensions, beliefs and visions.

While reconstructing the meaning of good-bye statements and linguistic categories applied, the conclusion on quality of such categories seems to be automatically drawn. Consequently, from the perspective of pedagogical work at school, accent should be put on axiological issues in the process of upbringing. Polish pedagogy often tackles this issue at theoretical level encouraging teachers to bring up children towards values. Religion or ethics classes, as well as humanities in general, do place values in the core of curricula, making it key principles in life of a young and adult man. The research findings also confirm the significance of axiology in the process of upbringing. One of the conclusions indicates that values such as life, love, people, or the truth had been undoubtedly rooted in the consciousness of examined cases. They had been important to them, as in critical moments of life these were values that each of the deceased pupils referred to. The significance of pedagogical influences must be emphasized both among families and schools or religious communities, as in case of these young people the axiology was an inherent component of their socialization and upbringing. It is also clear that these values had been recognized and acknowledged by them, as proved by assigning to them additional importance. Therefore the good-bye letters communicate lack of meaningfulness of further life, raising the problem of unfulfilled faith in values.

Moreover, there is another conclusion indicating subjective interpretation of categories (notions) describing values, since in each of the analyzed good-bye statement the doubt expressed by the young was apparent upon recalling the values which subjectively seem to have disappointed them, as seen in the above-quoted excerpts of the good-bye letters. The conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of the above is the thesis that growing readiness of a young man to commit suicide takes place due to loss of faith in the significance of values. These, which seemed to have been life principles, became in their subjective perception devaluated. Methodological correctness of hermeneutic research excluded researching similar cases related to each other emotionally. Nevertheless, it came into view that the perception of values in life bore significant resemblance. Therefore, the question on practical importance of research conclusion arises, mainly in the context of teachers' work as far as the early prevention of widely embraced youth internalization behaviour is concerned.

Crucial emphasis in the discussion tackling this problem tackles the difficulties faced by teachers, specialists and partners while noticing signals of crying for help, sent by the young experiencing suicidal thoughts. In statements of other cases included in research procedures (34 cases of people of different age) the motive of no understating and lack of attention from other people have been equally often mentioned. One of the causes for such situation is the subjective process of reconfirming own, negative self-interpretations, own future and social surrounding. The youth does not communicate such beliefs, moreover not looking for occasions to do so. Their visions are for them uniquely sorted and coherent, therefore might be underestimated while expressed, as in reaction to negative life image it is rather tendentious to answer "don't worry", "things will get better", "sometimes everybody thinks this way". In consequence, it only reassures the suicides-to-be in thinking that no one understands their painful experiences. Another core issue is the concentration of prevention activities on spotting and preventing against self-aggression among the youth. What seems obvious and substantial is to teach a mature way of managing problems of adolescence, nonetheless, as the research findings revealed – second stage of support, i.e. axiological education, is equally essential and indispensable.

Conclusions

Pragmatic aspects of research findings concentrate teachers' and tutors' attention on very early prevention of suicidal behaviour although, unquestionably, such issues are problematic for teachers, as the teaching staff is frequently constituted by experts in given field of studies, not by psychologists or pedagogues. Hence - the vivid and practical matters regarding directions

for early prevention programmes for those manifesting self-aggressive behaviour. In this regard it is also essential to find ways to combine the above factors, so it can become available for all teachers dealing with didactics and upbringing. Therefore, on the basis of the conducted research, from which sample has been presented in this paper, some conclusions may be drawn as far as the spheres of educational prevention are concerned.

1. First conclusion results from the fact that there are numerous similarities in the ways of interpreting the role played by adults in dramatic situations, as described by young suicides. General impression of no understanding from the surrounding makes the suicides withdrawn from sending the signal for help, and in majority of cases they do not seek for reasons to inform others about subjective opinions and decisions. And although providing programmes of early prevention is feasible, it becomes problematic when carried out in direct manner, as it is difficult for the teacher to intervene straightforwardly. Moreover, since it is highly unethical and inappropriate, the teacher cannot encourage conversation regarding suicidal plans. On top of that, according to teachers in practice such activity is completely ineffective. The latter conclusion also being reflected in the research findings. None of the deceased had - prior to suicide - demonstrated the register of own thoughts to others, whereas the good-bye letter was merely a tool to shout out contents important for their own selves, with no intention whatsoever to wait for reply. It is confirmed by the very formula of the good-bye letters having been discovered after the suicide was committed.

2. Since early prevention of suicidal behaviour is not conceivable in a straightforward manner, there is the question arising of how it can be worked out by the teachers. In substance, the findings of reconstruction research appear crucial in such case, as they reveal the heart of the matter. Doubts in values that are considered significant in given culture were the leading thread in the letters written independently. As the young suicides concentrated on lack of meaningfulness assigned to values, and since they also expressed lack of understanding and paying attention, some draft of prevention activities in schools may be made. Such topics of discussion seem appropriate for tutoring classes, and since in Polish school each tutor has one teaching hour weekly at own disposal for pedagogical issues, it may be tackled during such a class meeting. Moreover, written homework of judgmental value may become occasion to speak up one's mind, as it encourage the pupil to think over and express his or her subjective opinion. It is particularly important sphere of education within humanities since the purpose of such profile classes is to provide circumstances to express own opinion, concurrently referring to axiology.

3. Arranging circumstances to speak one's mind requires well-thought approach towards the theme of such statements. The research results lead to important conclusions and guidelines pointing out that the themes shall concentrate on values and principles important for given society and culture. Key conclusion, as it was stated above, is to notice common basis on which readiness to give up one's life arises, with simultaneous growth in lack of confidence in values making life meaningful. Taking into consideration categories included within the statements, themes for group discussion with pupils emerge naturally since they embrace issues of beliefs, opinions on human relations, the value of human life, value of love or the truth. Similarly, particularly as shown in the example, the contents in Table 2 highlight the issue of human's faith in social deal, which is guaranteed by the mission of publicly important institutions such as the court, the police or school.

4. Another component of such early prevention is the style of managing discussion by the teacher as the group leader. Directing discussion consists of three level (stages), which also result from recognizing subjective interpretations of young suicides. The first stage is to confront given theme with individual assessment of own experiences. It is a combination of opinion on discussed value such as life, truth and justice, with pupil's individual experiences. This level demonstrates particular meaning of the discussion as it confronts self-assessment in relation to given values. Second stage of discussion constitutes attempt to shift the emphasis towards

confronting values with others. It is the ground for discussing pupils' subjective interpretations, referring to their observation of adults, parents, teachers, politicians, etc. Unmistakably, confidence in principles needs to provide specific role models which would confirm their life significance and authenticity of values. Consequently, the third level of discussion focuses on the issue of future, in other words - personal perspective of the future. The main problem is to describe visions how given value may largely contribute to the future life, and whether perception of value may change.

5. Additional practical conclusion is to sketch the features of interpretations and pupil's opinions which may raise the alarm to teachers. As depicted in the findings of research into young suicides, their personal interpretation may demonstrate several features. First of all, it is negative, i.e., the meaning assigned to the values is negative and they are perceived devaluated. Other features of interpretations include: a) widespread of values devaluation confirmed by others, b) rooting negative interpretation, i.e. in future life their negative creation is not a subject to change, c) negative interpretations embrace number of values, therefore loss of faith in their significance is dispersed onto more than one sphere of life. Qualitative research methods proved that particularly in case of the young and people at the age of adolescence the despair affects existential values such as life, love, people, honesty or truth. Comparing with findings of reconstruction research among adults' good-bye letters, the loss of meaning of life affected to smaller degree existential values, with more emphasis put on the issues of everyday life matters such as family problems, financial bankruptcy, diseases or lack of the life success as such.

As far as teachers are concerned, the core of prevention and pedagogical discussion is to spot those individuals, whose opinions and interpretations are alarming, therefore by expressing opinion straightforwardly the teacher is capable to assess which pupil manifests negative notion of values. It does not mean to purely select potential suicidal groups as it would be inappropriate, nevertheless such assessment is crucial regarding prevention and education, as in consequence it may have positive influence on the expressed ominous opinions.

The proposed approach to set up group discussion constitutes more pragmatic way to search for information on pupils' emotional well-being, nevertheless it also provides with the opportunity to express their own personal experiences. The linguistic categories and personal meaningfulness assigned to them presented in the analysis constitute for teachers the ground of prevention works, which in such manner lessen their emotional burden, which may often accompany such activities and become overwhelming for the practitioners.

Summing up conclusions referring to school prevention of self-aggressive activities among pupils it is worth to emphasize the problems unequivocally resulting from accomplishing such projects. Polish implementation of the guidelines for prevention programme encounters some obstacles, as also highlighted by the teachers. One of such is the difficulty in encouraging teachers to further education and improve their qualifications as far as suicide prevention is concerned. The other issue is the teachers' dilemmas considering the sense of lacking competences within the range of prevention. There are also problems resulting from working out appropriate approach toward a pupil that manifests depressed mood and emotional difficulties. Moreover, other crucial point, although merely tackled in scientific research, is the lack of emotional readiness among teachers to participate in prevention of suicidal behaviour among children and adolescents. Particular significance regards not only diagnostic knowledge and methodical competences, but also personal fears of own emotional resilience while facing information on personal, often intimate experiences gained from pupils (Preventing Suicide 2003, p. 25). Therefore, group discussion constitutes less overwhelming way of seeking information than in the perspective of conducted research appeared to be also important in case of minor suicides. It is therefore the reason to recognize such findings as of paramount importance for the praxis of prevention activities.

References

- Arboleda – Florez, J., & Holly, M.L. (1998). Development of suicide screening instrument for use in a Remond Centre setting. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 35, p. 595-598.
- Barker, C., & Galasiński, D. (2001). *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis. A Dialogue on Language and Identity*, London: Sage Publication.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1990). Suicide as escape from self. *Psychological Review*. Vol. 99, p. 90-113.
- Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*, New York: International University Press.
- Cantor, C. H. (2000). *Suicide in the western world*, In: K. Hawton (Ed.), *Suicide and attempted suicide*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Carris, M. J., Sheeber, L., & Howe, S. (1998). Family rigidity, adolescent problem solving deficits and suicidal ideation: a meditational model. *Journal of Adolescence*. Vol. 21(4), p. 459–472.
- Cohen - Sandler, R., Berman, A. L., & King, R. A. (1982). Life stress and symptomatology: determinants of suicide behaviour in children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, Vol. 21, p. 178-186.
- Heim, N., & Lester, D. (1990). Do suicides who write notes differ from those who don't? *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, Vol. 82, p. 372-373.
- Derevic, K., Friedrich, E., Oquendo, M. A., Voracek, M., Fridrich, M. H., & Sonneck, G. (2006). Suicide in Austrian children and young adolescents aged 14 and younger. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 14, p. 427-434.
- Dijk van, T. A. (2001). *Research in Critical Discourse Studies*. In: T. A. van Dijk (Ed.) *Discourse as structure and meaning*. Warsaw: PWN
- Gould, M. S., Shaffer, D., & Grenberg, T. (2003). *The epidemiology of youth suicide*. In: R.A. King, & A. Apter (ed.) *Suicide in children and adolescents*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Gould, M. S., & Kramer, R. A. (2001). Youth suicide prevention. *Suicide and Life – Threatening Behaviour*, Vol. 31, p. 6-31.
- Hołyst, B. (2004). *Criminology*. Warsaw: Lexis Nexis.
- Hołyst, B. (2002). *Suicidology*. Warsaw: Lexis Nexis.
- Law, S., & Pozi, L. (2008). Suicide in China. Unique Demographic Patterns and Relationship to Depressive Disorder. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, Vol. 10(1), p. 80-86.
- Leenaars, A. A. (1988). *Suicide notes*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Leenaars, A. A., Lester, D., Wenckstern, S., McMullin, S., Rudzinski, D., & Brevard, A. (1992). Comparisons of suicide notes and parasuicide notes. *Death Studies*, Vol. 10, p. 132-152.
- Nordeentoft, M. (2007). Prevention of suicide and attempted suicide in Denmark. In: *Danish Medical Bulletin*, Vol. 54, p. 306-369.

- McClelland, L., Reicher, S., & Booth, N. (2000). **A Last Defence: The Negotiation of Blame Within Suicide Notes.** *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 10, p. 225-240.
- McKey, P. W., Jones, R. W., & Barbe, R. H. (1993). *Suicide and the School: a Practical Guide to Suicide Prevention.* Horsham: LRP Publications.
- O'Connor, R., & Sheehy, N. (2002). *Understanding Suicidal Behaviour.* Gdańsk: GWP.
- Peck, D. L. (1989). Teenage suicide expressions: echoes from the past. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, Vol. 10, p. 53-64.
- Perakyla, A. (2009). Analysis of conversations and texts, In: N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Vol. 2. Warsaw: PWN.
- Pfeffer, C. R. (2000). Suicidal behaviour in children: an emphasis on developmental influences, In: K. Hawton (Ed.), *Suicide and attempted suicide*, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Pospiszyl, I. (2008). *Social pathology.* Warsaw: PWN.
- Rutz, E. M., & Wasserman, D. (2004). **Trends in adolescent suicide mortality in the WHO European region.** *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 13, p. 321-331.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shaffer, D., & Craft, L., (1999). **Methods of adolescent suicide prevention.** *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, Vol. 60, p. 70-76, 113-116.
- Schaffer, D., & Fisher, P. (1981). **The epidemiology of suicide in children and young adolescents.** *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, Vol. 20, p. 545-565.
- Shiori, T., Kuwabara, H., Abe, R., Iijima, A., Kojima-Maruyama, M., Kitamura, H., Bando, T., & Someya, T. (2006). Lack of relationship between the pupillary light reflex response and state/trait anxiety in remitted patients with panic disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 95, p. 159-164.
- Shneidman, E. S. (1980). *Voices of Man*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Shneidman, E. S. (1988). **Suicide Notes. Predictive Clues and Patterns.** In: A.A. Leenaars (Ed.), *Suicide Notes* New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Shrira, I., & Christenfeld, N. (2010). **Disentangling the Person and the Place as Explanations for Regional Differences in Suicide.** *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour*, Vol. 40, p. 287-297.
- Sonneck, G. (2000). *Krisenintervention und Suizidverhuetung*, Wien: Facultas Universitaetsverlag.
- Tanney, B. L. (1992). Mental disorders, psychiatric patients, and suicide. In: R. W. Maris, & A. L. Berman, & J. T. Maltzberger, & R. I. Yufit (Ed.), *Assessment and Prediction of Suicide*, New York: Guilford Press.
- Weishaar, M. E., & Beck, A. T. (1992). **Hopelessness and suicide.** *International Review of Psychiatry*, Vol. 4, p. 177-184.
- Yip, P. S., Callanan, C., & Yuen, H. (2000). **Urban/rural and gender differentials in suicide rates. East and West.** *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 57, p. 99-106

Zapobieganie samobójstwom. Poradnik dla nauczycieli i innych pracowników szkoły (eng. Preventing Suicide a resource for teachers and another school Staff) (2003) Warsaw – Geneve: Departament of Mental Health-WHO.

Zenere, F. J., & Lazarus, P. J. (1997). **The decline of youth suicidal behavior in an urban, multicultural public school system following the introduction of a suicide prevention and intervention programme.** *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Vol. 27(4) p. 387-403.

Advised by Harun Yilmaz, Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, Turkey

Received: *September 19, 2011*

Accepted: *December 06, 2011*

Arkadiusz Urbanek

Doctor, Faculty of Pedagogy, Division of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences, University of Wrocław, Pl. Uniwersytecki 1, 50-137 Wrocław, Poland.
Phone: +48 71 367 23 16.
E-mail: urbanek.arkadiusz@vp.pl
Website: <http://www.pedagogika.uni.wroc.pl>