

Educational Project :“ Teenage Problems all over Europe” - 2007

In this educational project we tried to find an answer to the question: Are teenage problems the same all over Europe? The discussions covered the topics of searching self-identity, age of maturity, role of friendship, peer pressure, problems associated with generation gap and school life.

Project Schedule

October – Searching identity (self-image, personality, life expectations, being 18 – age of maturity?)

November – Looking for peer acceptance (role of friendship)

December – Problems associated with generation gap

New Year 2008 – School problems

January – Too high requirements at school (comparing standards of A-level exams in our schools)

February – Bullying, aggression

March – Freedom limited by school rules (ban on smoking, drugs, chewing gum, use of mobile phones during the lesson, wearing school uniforms,

April – Summing up – Answer to the question – Maybe other problems?

Here are the compositions written by students as a follow-up to this project:

- 1. Being 18 - age of maturity**
- 2. Obstacles young people face**
- 3. Peer pressure**
- 4. What makes a good friend**
- 5. How to get along with parents**
- 6. Pros and Cons of taking “Matura” A-level exams**
- 7. Role of A-level exams – Are they necessary?**
- 8. Problem of bullying at school**
- 9. School discipline**





1. Age of maturity : 18 ?

Nowadays there are many factors which affect when various people *reach* the age of maturity. *It is commonly believed that turning 18 years old means being mature enough to start an adult life. Is that really true? I will try to present below arguments in favour of and against this statement.*

Firstly, when people turn 18 they become *adults*, which gives them a right to carry an ID card. It means that in the *light* of law such a person crossed the threshold of adulthood and maturity.

Secondly, when reaching the age of 18 you have fully developed personality. You are able to distinguish between what is wrong and right. The influence of close environment has already shaped your emotional maturity.

Thirdly, young people have life experience limited to school and family. It is an asset as they can approach problems in a fresh way. Besides, they learn quickly and willingly.

Nevertheless, *being 18 years old* you are still naive and affected by peer pressure. The right to use harmful beverages and cigarettes does not mean *that* everyone ought to do it. Young people can be easily manipulated by others.

What's more, financial independence is not an indicator of maturity. An unemployed person can be more mature in behaviour than rich, self-reliant ones. Ability to take up a job, which gives us crossing of 18, does not have to make us mature at all.

Finally, the possessing of ID card means that a person has become a citizen with given rights, but not necessarily *mature enough to take sensible decisions.*

Summing up, I'm sure that being 18 brings us closer to be mature, but does not make us mature automatically. *It cannot be taken for granted.* It gives us many rights. Our life becomes complicated and is not lined with roses, though.

Written by Robert Najuch, class 3 f

2. Young people find it difficult to get their own place to live. What are the obstacles?

Nowadays, there are more and more youngsters who would like to become independent. This means that they are unwilling to live with their parents. However, young people often find it difficult to get their own place to live. It's worth considering this issue in two ways: literally - in terms of accommodation and figuratively - how to find own place in a life. I will also try to demonstrate the obstacles which adolescents have to get over. The former aspect concerns difficulty in purchasing property to live in.

Firstly, it comes without saying that you have to pay the rent for your flat whereas flats especially in big cities are just far too costly for young people. What is more, it seems to be impossible for youngsters to take up such a well-paid job to be able to buy their own place to live.

Moreover, those ambitious youngsters do really want to study, however, it is necessary to focus almost only on learning to be a good student - to be given a scholarship or to get satisfying marks. Then, young people feel just compelled to choose between studying and working.

What also hinders getting money is the fact that banks are reluctant to issue a credit to a young person, who is looking for her own place to live.

The next obstacle is that the prices of flats are going up rapidly so how can a young person be able to pay such a big sum of money for a small flat? It does also happen that there is a scarcity of flats while more and more people are trying to get their own flat. As a result, it is difficult not only for youngsters to get a place to live.

The latter aspect is more complicated as strictly connected with period of adolescence when young people try to look for "their place in the world".

To start with, it involves searching for self-identity and independence. Obviously, adolescents want to decide about themselves but on the other hand they are financially dependent on their parents. The obstacle in this case is awareness that the world is not a paradise and others, especially adults, have a different approach to many problems. It results in generation gap.

Secondly, the youth start to set goals in their life realizing how difficult it is to achieve them. Although being 18 and over, they are not mature enough to take such responsible decisions about their future job, career and priorities. Hence, they either choose the same profession as their parents and then they are dissatisfied with their job. Sometimes youngsters pick out this profession which is the most popular, without taking into account that they aren't interested in doing such job which results in wasting time on requalifying/ retraining.

Thirdly, a lot of young people dream of living abroad. This is connected with challenges and with getting to know foreign cultures or languages. However, there is always a risk that they will miss their family and

hometown or even that they won't be able to communicate with foreigners.

To sum up, there are a lot of obstacles which discourage young people from getting their own place to live. To solve this problem, in the former case youngsters should be given a chance to take out loans or to be better paid at work, which would for sure facilitate them getting their own flat or house. In the latter example, they ought to listen to the voice of reason uttered by parents or other adults or seek professional guidance when choosing a job career path.

Elaborated by Anna Faber class 3 d

3. PEER PRESSURE *stronger than parents' influence*

Nowadays the topic of peer pressure is becoming increasingly popular. However, nearly everybody links it up with the issue of bullying and other dark sides of young peoples' life. Is it really true? Maybe, peer pressure has both pros and cons.

Firstly, by complying with the pressure of their peers adolescents gain valuable support of a group. It is easier for them to deal with everyday matters and unforeseen impediments as they have someone who *will* console them.

What is more, peers motivate youngsters to harder work and to taking up new hobbies. Thanks to them, children have encouragement to keep up with more intelligent friends.

Besides, peer pressure teaches how to obey social norms. Young people have an opportunity to find out that everybody's opinion should be taken into consideration. In addition, they have to take up decisions whether it is worthwhile to adjust to a group or maybe it would be better to have their own way. Moreover, they learn how to refuse in a polite way.

On the other hand, adolescents sacrifice their individuality in order not to be looked down on. They have to abide by rules and follow certain patterns of behaviour. Young people also often drop hobbies and pursuits that, in the group's opinion, are not suitable for them. As a result, the group may suppress a person's unique talents.

Furthermore, peers tend to involve others in detrimental and risky activities. Youngsters may start taking drugs or drinking alcohol just to gain acceptance.

Lastly, if somebody conforms to mates' views, he or she might be unable to make *autonomous* decisions in the future and suffer from low self-esteem.

To sum up, I think that peer pressure might be a big problem. However, when we choose nice, helpful and intelligent friends, we have a chance to take advantage of their support. Our parents are often so busy

that sharing happiness and worries with peers may be the only available way.

Written by Katarzyna Fiołek, class 3 a

4. What makes a good friend?

A friend is a person who is right beside you no matter who you *were*, who you are and *whoever* you will be. A friend accepts all your *vices*, he is always next to you if you want it. Therefore, we choose *as* a friend a person who is in close relations with us and some things go without saying if we're with him *or her*.

Friends *have usually strong personality and enough courage to be honest in common* relationship, *especially* between peers. When they don't agree with *their* friend's opinion or don't approve of his/*her* behaviour, they *speak it out – even bluntly* - and for example try to convince him that this is the wrong way to show off or *sort out the problem*.

A *good* friend always helps in a bad situation, can cheer *us up* if we haven't enough strength to deal with our problems. It's easier to live if we have *awareness* that there is always a person who can comfort *or* hug us and talk *sincerely* even if it is naked truth. A *true* friend ought to keep one's word. If he breaks *a* promise, we won't trust him anymore. However, we *should* remember that we need to treat our friend *in the same way as* he treats us. We cannot expect devotion if we don't give it *in return*.

I think we often choose a friend *among* people who are always in good mood and we can always see a smile on their faces. We like to have only joyful people round us *because we feel* happy then and that smile appears on our faces, too!

To sum up, it's good to have *a* close friend because you're accepted and don't feel lonely. We can spend a lot of time with that person and do various things together. However, *it's better to* have few but really good friends because *genuine* friendship could last very long.

Prepared by Adrianna Sztuka class 1 c

5. How to get along with parents when you're a teenager?

'History repeats itself', as the old English saying goes. Not only may you be a parent in the future but you might also have to face up to unruly children who will behave like you. Nevertheless, it's not too late for

teenagers to improve relations with parents. Despite the fact that getting on with them is very difficult it brings about happiness and peace in the family.

Firstly, every child should remember that parents worry about their safety. In order to protect teenagers from danger such like criminals, drugs and alcohol, they introduce some rules, sometimes very strict. The only possible solution to influence their plans is talking everything over together. If they don't change their mind, acting on prohibition will become necessary.

What is more, the most effective method of gaining parents trust is showing them respect and being polite. Even if you are in a bad mood, the situation will not get *better* in case you are at each other's throats.

Moreover, helping parents in household chores is a very sensible idea. They will be more relaxed then and additionally children will become more reputable. Teenagers very often want to be treated as adults but it is impossible without duties.

Furthermore, the most harmful to contacts with parents are lies. Better than doing mother or father down is telling the truth and admitting *the* fault. Nearly every parent will forgive children very quickly or even turn a blind eye to distressing situation.

Lastly, adolescents often spend free time only with their friends and peers but it would be also very nice to devote time to go out somewhere with family. Both parents and children may be impressed for example to find out something about each other's hobbies. Besides, teenagers will have a chance to be handed down some traditions or experiences. Getting on like a house on fire will be possible.

All in all, in today's world even being on speaking terms with parents *becomes a* challenge. Some people claim that there is a huge generation gap between children and adults but on the other hand, creating good relations does not seem to be so hard. For sure it requires putting a lot of effort in it *nevertheless* it really pays off *in the long run*.

Elaborated by Katarzyna Fiołek class 3 a

6. Pros and Cons of taking "Matura" Exams

The "matura" so called *A-level final* exam in Polish *education* system is a necessary *step to take* after graduation from high school. The points which student *gets* from *the* chosen subjects *are* the basis to assess his knowledge. There are two parts of *the* matura exam: oral and written, but the most important is the *latter* one. In addition, a student can choose the subject level – *basic* or *extended (more advanced)*. *Although* some consider the "matura" exam the best assessment of knowledge stored in our mind, it has also some disadvantages.

Firstly, *this final exam covers all the things which a student learnt in High School. Consequently, student is not able to remember all information on a specific day, he can easily forget some details of each task. Despite long preparation for these tests, he cannot predict which tasks he will draw from the set of examination papers in case of an oral exam.* Secondly, it is sometimes unfair for *students who are keen on some subjects but worse at other which is obligatory to take and can fail the exams. It would be very harmful for them because they wouldn't be able to go to university of their dreams which usually has strict points' limit.* Thirdly, the exams are a very stressful form of assessing *knowledge. Especially during the oral exams, students are frightened and nervous in front of the Examination Board. It doesn't help presenting own skills when a student knows that his future depends on one day of exams.*

On the other hand, *matura exams treat students equally – in all the country there is writing on the same day, hour, including identical tasks. The demands of oral exams are the same for given levels (basic or advanced), so chance to present own skills is theoretically the same. Moreover, good pupils should be flexible in their favourite subjects. If they are, they won't have many problems with using their knowledge at an exam. This way they will show they are really knowledgeable in this specific subject. Finally, it is sure that the repeated material before matura would be held in mind for a long time. By doing this, a student familiarizes himself more with the subject which he is interested in, and he could benefit from this at university.*

All things considered, there are both advantages and disadvantages of the matura exam. The opinions are divided – teachers consider the traditional assessing is the best, pupils disagree, but everything in our Polish educational system has various opinions. I think that *maybe* it is better to hold the tradition of matura exams in Poland than be sorry after unsuccessful state changes. ☺

Written by Maria Pietruszka, class 3f

Are "Matura" Exams necessary?

„Matura” is an exam which every student *has* to take in the last (third) class of a secondary school. *It is an equivalent to British A-level exams. Every single student has to pass both oral and written exam of the subjects which he/she chooses by obtaining at least 30 %. Three exams in a written form are obligatory: native language - Polish, any foreign language (mostly English) and one selected subject (usually maths, history, geography or biology). In all, Poles take 3 to 5 exams: three compulsory and two optional subjects. Students also choose the level of exams: basic or extended. The latter is obligatory if you want to get to university because there are no separate entrance exams and secondary-school leavers are admitted to university on the basis of the score*

obtained from "Matura" Exams. Occasionally, some prestigious universities organize interviews or prepare aptitude tests.

Many people reflect on the sense of passing the Matura exam. There are some pros and cons of it. Is it really so important?

First of all, Matura creates enormous stress! Students, who decide to take it, are exposed to tremendous pressure. They need to meet teachers' requirements, who can sometimes be very strict. The youth's parents have very often high expectations of their children, *which* can additionally increase their fear, because they don't want to let them down.

Secondly, Matura doesn't teach anything practical. Students, who passed it, are taught only *theoretical knowledge* that has little application in everyday life. The Matura certificate doesn't mean that somebody will *achieve success in life*, have a good job, be a good spouse or *parent, let alone being able to solve everyday problems.*

Fortunately, there are also many advantages of passing such an exam.

The very important thing is that Matura gives the students a positive motivation to learning. They know that it's not easy to pass it, so they feel motivated to learn hard. They don't waste their time and try to prepare for it as well as it's possible. It's very profitable for them as learning anything usually comes much harder with age.

The next argument is that Matura certificates are a source of information for universities and employers. Thanks to well- passed exam, you are able to get to any university you want. It can also be a helpful document for employers, who want to be sure that you are a suitable candidate for the position that a given company has to offer.

Finally, Matura is a great lesson of adult life. The youth learns how much hard work it takes to *be successful*. They find out how to be responsible for themselves and that they have to face the consequences of their actions.

Summarising, I *think* that Matura is very useful and it gives us many new experiences. We face new situations, have to take responsibility of our behaviour and check our knowledge and our resistance to stressful moments. We can really get to know a lot about our personality.

Written by Karolina Zielińska, class 2 e

8. Bullying goes on in every school.

Pessimists say that nothing can be done, optimists suggest positive solutions. Present opinions of both groups.

Bullying *is* a form of aggression in which a person or a group tries to hurt or control another person. It can take place everywhere - at home, at the workplace or especially, at school. Pessimists say that nothing can be done to decrease bullying level in school, *whereas* the optimists suggest

positive solutions. I will present opinions of both groups in further *part of this* composition.

The first group mentioned *above* are the pessimists – these are people who don't believe in any solutions available and think that bullying is a natural process in every school. They find fighting against this issue without sense as there always will be in our society those envious, aggressive, *authoritarian*, feeling superior ones. What's more, no one can stop growing up children from pathological background, which are more likely to bully. Pessimists consider bullying as a part of school life and agree with such situation.

The latter group – optimists will never agree with view like this. They are trying to increase pupils' safety by conducting special programmes against bullying in school. In their opinion, the best measures which should have been taken to deal with this issue are: educating, monitoring and acting. Educating means to make it clear that bullying isn't acceptable with all its consequences and to teach children how to behave in case of being bullied. Next, monitoring – means to ensure pupils that they are in 'telling school' where bystanders are encouraged to report any incidents. It also means to have a school problem box and improve communicate channels between parents and teachers. The last measure – acting means to increase supervision on school corridors, improve school rules about *consequences of aggressive behaviour and organise some extracurricular* activities such as sport classes, to widen range of pupils' interests.

As we can see, there are many ways available to decrease – not to stop – bullying process in schools. They would be effective solutions if we had positive attitude while taking any action. We must remember that it is never too late for making the school environment better place for children.

Maria Pietruszka, class 3f

9. School Discipline

School discipline sometimes means *punishment for breaking school rules* rather than behaving within the school rules. However, generally, the aim of school discipline is to create a safe and happy learning environment in the classroom. Discipline is a necessary part of school life. Pupils must learn that if their behaviour is unacceptable, an appropriate punishment will follow.

Unfortunately, methods of maintaining discipline in schools are not always successful. The misbehaviour of children is common in all schools, although most schools managed to keep this within tolerable limits.. Many problems with modern schooling stem from the weakness in school discipline and if teachers exercised firm control over the classroom they would be able to teach more efficiently. School needs modern concepts of good discipline. Namely, when *it* comes to effective

discipline, it requires the "Golden rules", which must be clear, comprehensive and enforceable.

Children are supposed to stick to these rules by coming punctually and well-prepared for the lessons. They also have to be quiet, change shoes, contribute atmosphere, listen to the lecture and react. Although pupils are bored, they try not to show it.

They aren't allowed to disturb during the lesson, interrupt the teacher rudely, fidget on the chairs or use mobile phones as it distracts others' attention. Pupils mustn't chew the gum, play truant from school or skip lessons. Furthermore, they can't smoke cigarettes, take drugs, swear or behave in an aggressive way and use notes during tests.

Obviously, they need to be given a bit of freedom, so in some schools they don't have to tie back long hair and wear a uniform.

If school rules are broken, both teachers and pupils are faced with dark sides of education process such as bullying, smoking, drinking, drug taking and trafficking as well as cases of violent aggression. To solve these problems, monitoring is a great remedy. Schools should use video surveillance. I think it would be a wise expenditure. It's another set of eyes out there to help keep the school safe if something were to happen. Moreover, cameras deter crime and may lead some students to confess to infractions that weren't even caught on the security cameras. They also allow school security personnel to do more job-specific work, which saves money in the long run since the mundane tasks will be performed by the security system.

To sum up, for school discipline to be successful, we need to restore relationships between *parents and teachers who* need to work together to instill the importance of education into pupils of all ages. Finding discipline procedures that work is a job for students, parents, and teachers to explore together. In today's society, working together within the school and community will help teach children that working as a team can effectively solve the problem.

Written by Edyta Grądziel, class 1 c