

*Olga Wyzga***Tasks of school and teachers in times of refugees' crisis****Introduction**

The dramatic events of everyday life on the Poland's eastern border, without losing sight of other hot spots on the world map, provide a background to the question of a moral nature – the question about the tasks of school, education and teachers who meet students affected by traumatic war experiences everyday. An absolutely crucial area for the adaptation of refugees in our society is the proper functioning of schools and the professionalism of teachers and pedagogues employed in them.

The last two years have not been kind for children all over the world. During this period, the UN and UNICEF are pointing to several serious crises that have hit children and young people the hardest. One of the significant ones that affected the whole world was the COVID-19 pandemic. Next one is the situation in Yemen. For many Yemeni children, life has become hell. Years of armed conflict, economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of humanitarian aid are putting Yemenis on the brink of collapse, and an increasing number of children is at risk of starvation. Currently, this is the biggest humanitarian crisis in the twenty-first century.

In 2021, children in Palestine experienced a violent escalation of the conflict. Many people lost their lives and families were broken up, and all of that had a dramatic impact on the youngest. In the Gaza Strip, schools and medical facilities were destroyed, and houses and office buildings were razed to the ground. Many families have been displaced. Schools, houses and buildings in Israel were also destroyed.

Afghanistan has so far been one of the most dangerous places to live in the whole world. Along with the escalation of the conflict in 2021, the situation has become even more desperate, especially for children. Conflict, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe. Too many children in Afghanistan have seen events and situations that no child should ever experience.

It is hard not to mention the crises in South Sudan, Palestine and finally the situation that began in February 2022, i.e. the war in Ukraine.

The brutal aggression of Russia caused a mass escape of Ukrainian citizens and the appearance in our country of a large group of people with wartime refugee experience. The people who survived the bombings, who may have been hiding in basements, who perhaps have seen death, or who perhaps "only" traveled into the unknown for three days with a crowd of terrified other refugees.

Children, young people with such a baggage of experiences and emotions are entering the Polish school, which by definition is a safe place, but for them it is unknown, unfamiliar place, perhaps arousing anxiety or fears.

According to the Polish educational law, every child aged from 7 years old till 18 years old, who is staying in Poland is a subject to a compulsory schooling or compulsory education under penalty of sanctions against guardians. These rules also apply to children who do not have Polish citizenship, including children who fled to Polish before the war. In the face of such a situation, questions arise about the tasks of the Polish school in times of refugees' crisis.

Research and discussion / Amplification

School as a new place of functioning for refugee students is another dose of emotions. Being in a new place, in new environment, could be another factor exacerbating the crisis of war refugee children because it is a consequence of an aggravating, extremely difficult event that took place in their lives.

According to L.M. Bammer, a crisis is a state of disorganization in which people experience frustration of important life goals or a violation of their life cycles, as well as the unreliability of methods for coping with stressors. (Bammer: 1985)

B.E. Gilliland, R.K. James believe that a crisis is a kind of perception by an individual of an event or situation as an unbearable difficulty that exceeds a person's coping mechanisms. According to these authors, a crisis can cause serious disorders of human functioning in the affective, cognitive and behavioral areas. (B.E. Gilliland, R.K. James:1993)

Referring to various psychological concepts, W. Badura-Madej characterizes the crisis as a temporary state of internal imbalance, caused by some critical event, requiring significant decisions. (Badura-Madej:1996)

To sum up, the crisis should be seen as an obstacle to the achievement of life goals or as a decisive state for the further fate of the individual, which can often be accompanied by stress, trauma and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Trauma is psychological injury caused by events that go beyond the ordinary social order which gives people a sense of security, meaning, control, and connection with others.

PTSD is a condition that occurs as a consequence of a frightening, life-threatening, physical or emotional event. A survivor of such an event often has persistent, frightening thoughts and memories associated with it.

Trauma and PTSD may occur after an event that:

- took place in the life of a child,
- took place in the life of a person closely related to the child,
- the child observed as a witness.

Examples of events whose occurrence in a child's life can cause trauma, PTSD (even when the child was "only" a witness and not a participant or subject of these events) are:

- serious accidents (car, train, plane),
- the elements (floods, earthquakes),
- man-made tragedies (terrorist attacks, war),
- attack, physical violence (assault, torture, kidnapping, etc.),
- harassment or sexual assault,
- psychological violence.

When children and youth are confronted with a situation that reminds them of a traumatic event, may experience very strong emotional, intellectual and physical disturbances in their normal functioning. Some of them may relive trauma over and over again in the form of nightmares and recurring memories during the day. They may also experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- sleep disturbances,
- depression,
- loss of interest in what previously gave pleasure and joy,
- irritation,
- increased level of aggression and even the use of violence,
- persistent avoidance of places and situations that evoke certain memories,
- intrusively recurring images, smells, sounds and feelings associated with the event (the impression that the traumatic event is happening again).

It is not a rule that every traumatized child will develop PTSD. Post-traumatic stress disorder is diagnosed only when the symptoms last longer than a month and negatively affect the child's life. In people with PTSD, symptoms usually appear within three months after the trauma, but they can also appear with some delay, such as months or years after the event.

Severe stress arouses strong emotions when a person suffers loss, harm or is in a situation of danger, emotions are a natural reaction. If a student, who escaped from the war, had to abandon everything known, parted with loved ones, goes to the school class – various emotional but also physical reactions during the lessons should be expected, e.g.:

- crying,
- outbursts of anger,
- aggression,

- anxiety,
- panic attacks,
- reluctance to take any action,
- apathy, lack of commitment,
- fatigue, sleepiness, exhaustion,
- problems with memory and concentration,
- somatic pains and ailments,
- reduced attention to hygiene.

In this situation, finding themselves in a new school is an extremely difficult challenge for children from Ukraine, consisting not only in overcoming the language barrier. At the beginning, it may even turn out that the Polish-Ukrainian agreement at the level of the language is not very difficult – as some words and phrases sound similar, and with a little good will a lot can be explained or shown. However, it can be difficult to assimilate social patterns, rules of behavior. These patterns are something that every person soaks up from childhood watching their parents, other children, taking the guidance of adults in various everyday situations. They concern dress, food, communication, duties, what we call personal culture, hygiene, what is allowed, what is right, etc.

Educational, caring and pedagogic tasks of the school

The tasks of the Polish school are defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and the applicable provisions of the educational law, i.e. among others *the Education Law Act, the Act introducing the Education Law, the Regulation on the organization of psychological and pedagogical assistance in kindergartens, schools and institutions, the Core Curriculum of General Education*.

According to the statement of the Minister of Education and Science from 4th April 2022 it stems that 161,000 Ukrainian children have been admitted to the Polish education system since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Only 10% of this group learns in preparatory departments. This means that the vast majority have been included in the existing classes and together with Polish students execute the Polish Core Curriculum. Or at least it is trying, because the effectiveness of these activities already at the stage of assumptions raises many doubts and concerns.

In the countries of the European Union, two models of integration of newly arrived pupils dominate: the separation model (foreign pupils spend the first months or years learning a language) and the integration model (pupils are included in the educational process in the classroom from the very beginning, with additional language lessons of the host country). The latter model operates in Poland. According to the policy of the European Union and the Council of Europe – a foreign child has the right to free education in a new country. A reference to the education right can also be found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Poland, Article 70a of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland stipulates that education is obligatory

for everyone, including foreign children. The legal basis for admitting foreigners to kindergartens and schools in Poland are set out in the Education Law Act of 2016 and the Ministry of Education and Science (the Ministry, MEiN) Regulation of 2022.

1) Educational tasks of school

The appearance of students from Ukraine in Polish schools forces institutions to quickly implement the assumptions of inclusive education, meaning education that is able to ensure the availability of teaching and learning for all participants of this process. Inclusive education is an approach to the organization of the education system and the process of education and upbringing, aimed at all students, not only those who have learning disabilities. A key category of inclusive education is participation, which means that the student (MEiN: 2021):

- engages in group activities, deriving satisfaction from them and trying to provide this satisfaction to others;
- has a sense of influence on the changes taking place in his life (emphasizing the subjectivity of the learner);
- makes an effort to understand the transformations of reality as opposed to the attitude of cognitive withdrawal;
- is responsible for his or her life and also tries to take responsibility for the group(s) in which he/she operates (e.g. class, family, friends, local community, nation).

For children coming from Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science (MEiN) has prepared various opportunities to fulfill the obligation to attend school. The first of these is the continuation of education in the Ukrainian system in a remote mode. On March 14, 2022, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science launched a special platform through which Ukrainian students can continue their education, using both real-time lessons and a digital version of textbooks, films and educational materials.

A parent or guardian of a child who wishes to choose this option only needs to submit a declaration to the municipality competent for the place of current residence. Some people, especially those who hope for a quick return to Ukraine, and those for whom learning in a Polish school would be too high a cost, especially mental, will benefit from this solution.

Students who have sufficient knowledge of the Polish language can join Polish classes. The decision to admit new pupils is the responsibility of the school heads. Like all foreigners so far, they are also guaranteed the opportunity to use additional Polish language lessons and compensatory lessons.

In the opinions of teachers, there are some doubts regarding the assumption that an eight-year-old student from Ukraine can be automatically enrolled in the second grade in a Polish primary school. Ukrainian primary school lasts nine years, and children begin education at the age of six. Even a cursory comparative analysis of the scope of content in mathematics or the broadly understood STEM block

shows that Ukrainian students have a much wider range of knowledge and skills than their peers in Poland. While the indicated competence allowances are not a key difficulty in the implementation of the Core Curriculum, the lack of knowledge of the Polish language, in which 100% of subject education takes place (this applies not only to Polish language lessons, but also geography, physics or artistic subjects, as well as a foreign language, e.g. English or German), is certainly such a problem. And this is a problem that affects three sides: Ukrainian students, Polish students and teachers.

An area that clearly needs to be strengthened in terms of activities undertaken by the school, teachers, specialists are the cross sectional competences of students, also referred to as transferable resources. They are divided into three categories (Knopik, Oszwa: 2017):

- cognitive – involving critical thinking, reasoning, analyzing and synthesizing, taking different perspectives on the perception of phenomena, etc.;
- intrapersonal – these include self-control, independence, management of personal resources, setting goals and setting ways to achieve them, emotional competences and strategies for coping with difficult situations, resistance to failures, understanding of one's own emotions, etc.;
- interpersonal – concerning social relations, the skills to communicate with others, cooperation, implementation of tasks in a group, dynamic assumption of roles in a team, negotiation, resolution of disputes, etc.

In the implementation of these difficult didactic tasks, teachers and school specialists must take care of appropriate and diverse teaching methods that will allow to stimulate various activities of students during the lesson. The use of polymethodicity seems to be a necessary task for achieving the objectives of education. Methods that activate students, including didactic games, problem methods and practical methods, always work in every situation. It is also extremely important in the implementation of the education process for teachers to take care of such didactic means that will allow them to work with a group with diverse educational needs in the formula of sharing a common field of attention, and not individualization consisting in providing each student with different material. And this task is very demanding. The assumptions of the universal design model in education (the so-called UDL model – *universal design for learning model*) and guidelines for the preparation of easy to read (ETR – *easy to read*) texts may be helpful.

2) Pedagogic and caring tasks of the school

A Ukrainian student suddenly torn out of the natural educational and cultural context in traumatic circumstances must find himself overnight in a new classroom, in which everyone usually already knows each other well and, what is more, communicates freely with each other. The natural first reaction according to Bennett's acculturation model is denial and defense (components of culture shock), which over time only (thanks to the activities of the subject itself and the favorable actions

of the environment) turn into acceptance, and even into adaptation or integration. (M.J. Bennett: 1993)

One of the educational tasks that teachers are facing is the need to develop the intercultural sensitivity of students so that they could become conscious citizens of the world. In this respect, the school should propose broadly understood eclecticism, implemented as part of a communicative approach. It would be necessary to move away from flawless mastery of the language system and focus on the ability to communicate effectively in a way that corresponds to a given situation. (Komorowska: 2003)

Shaping intercultural competence among students requires subjective treatment of each student, taking into account his individual educational needs. It also put emphasis on developing students' autonomy and self-study skills.

Children with different educational needs who are learning in one classroom begin to see that people are different, have various needs and limitations. They learn to help others, but also to accept their limitations, to copy with failures, which are an inseparable element of the education and upbringing process. A school that is sensitive to the needs of all students, including refugee students, develops an intercultural sensitivity. Direct contacts between pupils and other refugees who are experiencing similar difficulties and gradual reconnaissance in the new education system are helpful in this task.

In schools, care has also been taken to ensure that students learn about the principles of behavior at school adopted in our society and understand certain attitudes and requirements, as well as the customs, tastes and culture of their peers. In some schools, children from Ukraine are admitted to already existing classes with Polish students, which is to serve integration and better knowledge of the traditions and culture of our countries.

A very important care and educational task is the organization of psychological and pedagogical support for children of war refugees in the school.

Psychological and pedagogical support is directly defined in the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 9 August 2017 on the principles of organization and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and institutions (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 1280). This document defines the scope of psychological and pedagogical assistance: *Psychological and pedagogical assistance provided to a student in a kindergarten, school and institution consists in recognizing and satisfying individual developmental and educational needs of the student and recognizing the individual psychophysical abilities of the student and environmental factors affecting his functioning in the kindergarten, school and institution, in order to support the development potential of the student and create conditions for his active and full participation in the life of the kindergarten, school and institution and in the social environment.* In addition, that regulation indicates that the need to provide psychological and pedagogical support to pupils/students in a kindergarten, school and institution results in particular from factors such

as: disability, social maladjustment, risk of social maladjustment, behavioural or emotional disorders, special aptitudes, specific learning difficulties, competence deficits and language impairments, chronic illness, crisis or traumatic situations, educational failures, environmental negligence related to the living situation of the student and his family, the way of spending free time and environmental contacts, adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences or changes in the educational environment, including those related to previous education abroad.

Students from Ukraine who have emotional problems related to the experience of war or refugees may additionally encounter various learning difficulties conditioned by problems that they have already faced in their country, e.g. dyslexia, disability or illness. As a result, these children may reveal very diverse, sometimes extreme reactions. From withdrawal, tearfulness, apathy, to irritability, tantrums, or even aggressive behavior.

Even children who have not experienced traumatic experiences may experience negative effects of changing the environment, separation with colleagues, breaking off friendships, etc. Therefore, in the first period of learning, an important task of teachers is:

- observing these students,
- monitoring their progress,
- conversations with parents, guardians.

In case when it was identified that difficulties requiring specialist support occurred, additional support should be provided to Ukrainian children and young people in the form of classes in the field of psychological and pedagogical support. Adequate assistance at school should also be provided to gifted pupils.

Such assistance does not require obtaining a document from a psychological and pedagogical clinic. It may be undertaken on the basis of a diagnosis made by teachers and specialists working in the school where the assisted student is staying. This will allow for quick intervention and in a short time can improve the functioning of the student. If the actions taken at the school do not bring the expected results, then the student should be referred to the counseling center. In terms of providing assistance to students, it is also necessary to properly prepare teachers and specialists, for whom the current situation is as extreme as for other participants in school life. It is worth that the school head takes care of: the opportunity to participate in trainings, provides the opportunity to consult with specialists, e.g. from a psychological and pedagogical clinic, has knowledge about various forms supporting school's activities.

There are many initiatives and projects supporting schools in their teaching, upbringing and caring tasks, including organization of psychological and pedagogical help for students.

Only in 2022, thanks to the cooperation of the City of Cracow with UNICEF, unique places were created. SŁOŃCE – Słoneczne Przestrzenie Wsparcia (*SUN – Sunny Spaces of Support*) consists of eight places in different locations in Cracow,

where both children from Ukraine and their Polish peers can benefit from the help of psychologists, pedagogues and speech therapists. They are also places full of additional activities for parents, teachers and multicultural assistants. The guarantee of high-quality care offered by *Słoneczne Przestrzenie Wsparcia (Sunny Spaces of Support)* is based on many years of experience of self-government psychological and pedagogical counseling centers which implement the educational policy of the City of Cracow in the field of specialist assistance and care for children and adolescents. Special support in *Słoneczne Przestrzenie Wsparcia (Sunny Spaces of Support)* is directed to children with adaptation, emotional or developmental problems, as well as to children and students with special educational needs and their guardians. Care in those spaces is dedicated not only for children, but also parents and teachers are covered.

Słoneczne Przestrzenie Wsparcia (Sunny Spaces of Support) are offering a wide range of assistance, which is selected on a very individual basis. Workshops and additional consultations are organized. The proposed activities include, among others, meetings related to speech and language therapy, art therapy workshops, meetings supporting psychomotor development and meetings that support finding oneself in a new environment. Specialists employed in the *Słoneczne Przestrzenie Wsparcia (Sunny Spaces of Support)* exchange their experiences and information in order to make sure that people in need could receive the most appropriate form of help.

Another example of good practice in helping children from Ukraine is the Educational and Therapeutic Center, which was established in cooperation with the local government of Cracow and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The center is integrative and is dedicated for both Polish and Ukrainian children. Children with special educational needs, e.g. with autism, are looked after here. This facility is not only a school. Children are also provided with the care of rehabilitators, physiotherapists, nurses and psychologists. Both students and their families are provided with psychological support. The concept of this center is a response to the diagnosed social needs of students with disabilities, therefore it also includes integration activities, e.g. work with the family of a student with a disability, psychological and social support, building a support network, etc. Thanks to the presence of students from Poland and Ukraine (and other countries, in case of need), the Center has a multicultural and multilingual community of 22 students, but ultimately the facility can accommodate 40 students.

The center is run by the Foundation for the Support of Polish Culture and Language. Named after Mikołaj Rej, and in 2022 its tasks are financially supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (Educational portal, 2022)

According to Olechowska (2016), in the education process, it is essential to look for the golden mean between general guidelines and the possibility of fulfilling them here and now by specific people. The examples of good practices concerning help for refugee students show that great commitment and willingness to help.

Everyday life of teachers at school with a war refugee student

A teacher who is supposed to carry out those various tasks at school related to the presence of children from Ukraine at school often also faces a new situation, with a lot of thoughts in his head about the war and a large dose of emotions associated with it.

In addition, he or she does not see clear systemic solutions and lacks from substantive but also psychological support in daily work. Teachers are increasingly talking about the fatigue of helping or empathic fatigue.

E. Jarczewska-Gerc claims that the behaviors and emotions that teachers observe in themselves are consistent with the theory of social crisis. When a person suddenly encounters tragic images, relationships, incomprehensible suffering, he or she is shocked. He or she loses the sense of influence on the environment, as well as the impression that the world is fair. In order to regain the sense of influence, there is a phase of heroism, of helping at all costs.

The next phase is so-called honeymoon, when we experience positive emotions related to acting for the general good. Unfortunately, after this phase there is always disappointment with everyday life. Why do we feel disappointed? Because the war is not over, not everyone managed to help, all the time there are reports of rapes, murders, refugees that we have at home or whom we pass on the street, do not behave as we assumed.

Those insights lead to the so-called reconstruction phase, which consists in realizing, first, that refugees are not a homogeneous group, like any other ethnic or social group. Secondly, that alongside our ordinary life, evil is still happening abroad. Thirdly, we must revise our psychological and material capacities and weigh on one scale the desire to help and on the other our own life, into which the economic crisis and inflation are entering. This is a good starting point for changing value priorities and reorganizing life. Disappointment, because perhaps we were hoping for more gratitude, plus fatigue, burnout of aids can lead to depreciation of those we have supported so far. This is the natural reaction of the mind that seeks to reduce discomfort. However, it is socially better to put the matter clearly: you need to help further, although a separate question is whether I can and want to do it at the moment. (E. Jarczewska-Gerc: 2022)

The everyday life of teachers is not simple, because what is happening now goes beyond normal life and professional experiences. Wars in the world are constantly going on, but what is happening today on the east of our state border is way more difficult for us Poles because of the proximity of these events.

It is normal that in such a situation teachers feel helpless, lose motivation to work and more and more often wonder: why am I doing this, only to start working with children and for children again the next day.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Polish school, whether likes it or not, becomes an authentic laboratory of intercultural education, whereby it must ensure that this situation becomes an opportunity to develop cross sectional competences (otherwise known as transferable resources) of students, and not an opportunity to deepen the inefficiency of the system and point out mistakes and look for the guilty.

Today, we do not know how many refugees from Ukraine will stay permanently in Poland, and their children will continue their education in Polish schools. We also do not know how long the war will last and when it will be possible for Ukrainians to return to their cities and villages. In this situation, the maxim already known from the era of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic will work: Maslow before Bloom. It emphasizes that in the hierarchy of action's goals, in a crisis situation, priority should be given to satisfying the need for security, belonging, emotional balance, and only then to achieve the learning goals. This balance is also needed by Polish and Ukrainian students and teachers.

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Tasks of school and teachers in times of refugees' crisis

Abstract

Education in emergency and extremely difficult situations, during prolonged crises, is not only an opportunity for children and young people to acquire knowledge, skills, contributes to their development, but also strengthens their resistance to stress and negative emotions. Moreover, well-organized and delivered education could also provide direct physical and mental protection and could also be a source of life-saving knowledge and skills.

One of the main tasks of carrying out organized educational activities at an early stage of a crisis situation is to reduce the psychosocial impact of traumatic experiences on the mental condition of young people. Disturbances in everyday functioning, in stability, loss of home and often loss of parents or friends, and uncertainty, which are inextricably linked to the situation in which refugees find themselves, can adversely affect the physical, intellectual, mental and social development of children and youth. The priority task of the school and the teachers working in it in the era of the refugees' crisis is not only the necessity to ensure the development of Ukrainian children and youth, to create educational experiences that prevent exclusion, but also and perhaps above all – to provide hope for a better future and a sense of security and relative normality.

Key words: crisis, refugee student, didactic tasks, care and educational tasks of schools and teachers

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