SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN COMING FROM UKRAINE
BASED ON ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION BOARD WEBSITES
IN POLAND

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Streszczenie: Po wybuchu wojny Rosji z Ukrainą rząd polski podjął natychmiastowe działania w celu przyjęcia i udzielenia pomocy dzieciom z terenów dotkniętych konfliktem zbrojnym. Zgodnie z polskim prawem każde małoletnie dziecko cudzoziemców ma prawo do bezpłatnej nauki oraz pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej. Cel omawianych badań jest ustalenie, jakie informacje o wsparciu dla dzieci pochodzących z Ukrainy pojawiły się w pierwszych tygodniach wojny na stronach internetowych szesnastu kuratoriów oświaty w Polsce. Do zebrania danych wykorzystano netnografię, natomiast do ich analizy zastosowano metodę analizy dokumentów. Na podstawie przeanalizowanych dokumentów można zidentyfikować trzy główne podmioty wsparcia, które tworzą instytucje rządowe i organizacje pozarządowe oraz wolontariusze. Formy wsparcia obejmują zarówno indywidualne aktywności (porady, diagnozy, konsultacje), jak i zbiorowe (warsztaty, szkolenia, konferencje). Oferowana pomoc wymaga od realizujących ją nauczycieli, pedagogów, psychologów wysokich kompetencji międzykulturowych, niezbędnych do dialogu z drugim człowiekiem.

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Abstract: After the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the Polish government took immediate action to receive and help children from areas affected by the armed conflict. Under the Polish law, every underage foreign child has the right to a free education and psychological-pedagogical assistance. The goal of this article is to establish what information about support for children coming from Ukraine was published in the first weeks of the war on the websites of the sixteen school boards throughout Poland. Internet sources and the document analysis method for gathering and analyzing data were used in this study. The authors have identified three main sources of support: that offered by governmental institutions, by non-governmental organizations, and by volunteers. The forms of support are both individual activities (advice, diagnosis, consultations) and collective activities (workshops, training, conferences). Teachers, pedagogues, and psychologists who support the migrant children and families need to have high intercultural competencies, which are crucial for intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: migration, war in Ukraine, psychological-pedagogical assistance, education board websites, intercultural competences, dialogue

Introduction

Mass migration is not a new phenomenon, although for the past few years its intensity has been particularly strong and it has become a cause for concern in many societies (Bauman 2016, pp. 12–15). Looking at the history of nations, we can see that migration has been associated with the fulfillment of various needs, such as improving one’s livelihood (“migrating for bread”). But just as often migration involves seeking protection from violence, enslavement, or war (Kula 2014, p. 10). Ryszard Kapuściński wrote, “It is hard to justify wars; I think everyone loses them, because it is a defeat for the human being. It exposes his inability to come to terms, to empathize with the Other, to be kind and reasonable.”

On February 24, 2022, the media reported on the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops. Numerous reception and information points were set up along the Polish-Ukrainian border to provide basic assistance to refugees. As stated on the official Twitter (now called X) profile of the Border Guard (#Support UA, Twitter, Border Guard), more than 3.5 million refugees from Ukraine have crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border since the day of Russia’s aggression through May 26, 2022. The majority have been mothers with children, and most do not know the Polish language. In Polish kindergartens alone, by October 3, 2022, there were more than 41,000 children from Ukraine (Szplit, Tamborska 2022, p.145). Polish legislation guarantees any foreign child who is not of legal adult age the right to a free education and psychological-pedagogical assistance. Poland has created an extremely flexible system for admitting Ukrainian students to Polish schools. Children can take advantage of remote education and further their education in the Ukrainian system,
or study in the Polish system, in preparatory or class divisions (lecture by Minister Przemysław Czarnek at the Akademia Kultury Społecznej i Medialnej, 2022).

The implementation of compulsory schooling by children with war trauma requires, first and foremost, that they feel safe and calm. Very often, after exposure to a physical or psychological traumatic event, which war undoubtedly is, serious anxiety disorders develop. This can result in significant limitations in social functioning. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) causes the traumatic experience to be re-experienced by the person through recurring memories. Very often, individuals suffering from a past trauma avoid places, sounds, and smells that remind them of the traumatic event. Thus, various ways are being sought to effectively help those affected by PTSD (Zimbardo et al., Levine 2015). In view of the situation caused by Russia’s war with Ukraine and the arrival of preschool and school-age children in our country, it has become necessary to analyze their situation in the context of the support that the Ministry of Education and Science has organized for them within the Polish school system.

It is worth considering, therefore, whether Polish schools, teachers, students, and their parents/guardians are prepared for intercultural dialogue with the “Other” (Januszewska 2023). Indeed, the attitudes and behaviors of the school community are key to building and developing intercultural competence, which involves acting sensitively to the needs and expectations of individuals from other cultural backgrounds (Dobrowolska 2015, p. 10). Official documents are not enough to make the process involved in organizing support for children arriving from Ukraine due to the war truly effective. Intercultural communicative competence (as defined by Byram 2012) is especially needed, and so is ongoing support for representatives of institutions and entities that are designated to provide assistance. Interculturalism is the penetration and exchange of the values of different cultures. These are formed through interaction and education, which should aim at dialogue (Levey 2012, p. 218). According to Jerzy Nikitorowicz, dialogue as a means of communication is supposed to aid mutual learning, understanding, and supporting (2018, p. 84).

**Methodology**

Nowadays, the space associated with the internet is becoming an extension of real space and a kind of metamorphosis of it. “Virtual space” offers the possibility of unlimited expansion and interaction. Many social processes occur much faster and function simultaneously in both traditional and virtual reality (Przeclawska 2000). In the literature related to media a website, a web page is defined as a file or a set of related files written in HTML, located on a web server at a common address. A website can contain text information, graphics, videos, as well as references (links) to other places on the web (Jasionowicz 2006). It is worth noting that people use the internet selectively, with hypermedia and hyperlinks. Thus, we are aware that the analysis of entries from curatorial websites in the context of proposals for
support for children arriving from Ukraine is incomplete and needs to be expanded to include other fields of research that emerge from the numerous active links redirecting the reader to the websites of institutions or individuals involved in the organization of support, i.e.: psychological and pedagogical counseling centers or the Children’s Rights Advocate (in Polish, Rzecznik Praw Dziecka).

The research goal was to find out what support for Ukrainian children was organized by the education superintendency (curatorial) offices during the first month of Russia’s war with Ukraine, that is, from February 24, 2022, to March 24, 2022, based on an analysis of documents posted on the websites of all sixteen offices. The specific objectives are to answer the following three research questions:

1. What documents on support for children arriving from Ukraine have been posted on the websites of the sixteen educational (curatorial) offices in Poland?
2. Who organized and provided support for children arriving from Ukraine?
3. What form did the support provided to refugee children take?

Virtual ethnography—which is referred to in the literature as “network ethnography,” “digital ethnography,” “internet ethnography,” and “netnography,” was used to collect data from websites. As Dariusz Jemielniak points out, “virtual ethnography also indirectly expands knowledge about certain aspects of human life that do not necessarily reveal themselves in the non-virtual world, although they manifest themselves in online interactions” (2013, p. 99). The process of data collection is an extremely important stage of the work, as it requires organizing the collected material and archiving it (Kozinets 2012, pp. 153–155).

Entries from sixteen websites were archived and arranged in sixteen tables. The full group, meaning the websites of all sixteen curatorial offices, was selected for the study: the Lower Silesian Board of Education in Wroclaw, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Board of Education in Bydgoszcz (archived page; link redirecting to the website of the Ministry of Education and Science), Lubelskie Board of Education in Lublin, Lubuskie Board of Education in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Łódzkie Board of Education in Łódź, Małopolskie Board of Education in Kraków, Mazowieckie Board of Education in Warsaw, Opole Board of Education in Opole, Podkarpackie Board of Education in Rzeszów, Podlaskie Board of Education in Białystok, Pomeranian Board of Education in Gdańsk, Silesian Board of Education in Katowice, Świętokrzyskie Board of Education in Kielce, Warmian-Masurian Board of Education in Olsztyn, Greater Poland Board of Education in Poznań, and West Pomeranian Board of Education in Szczecin.

The study lasted six months, from March 2022 to July 2022. Archiving entries from curatorial websites took two months and consisted of copying the content of the entries or creating a screen clipping (banners, flyers), and then placing the titles of the entries alone in tables in chronological order from February 24 to March 24, 2022. The research work consisted of analyzing archived entries and documents, and returning to the curatorial websites to confirm their presence.
Official documents are a very diverse set of sources, which, as a rule, are generally findable and available. Documents that are products of specialized offices are created as a result of the continuous registration of events—events that occur in a certain rhythm as well as one-time events. Normative acts (laws, regulations, rules, guidelines, etc.) are a special type of document (Szaturn-Jaworska 2010). For the researcher, found documents can help in the search for answers to the research questions posed. Such a document, despite its imperfections, can be a valuable source of information (Luczewski, Bednarz-Lučzeska 2012, pp. 177–181).

In the search for an answer to the first research question, the following documents were analyzed, among others: “Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of March 21, 2022, on the organization of education, upbringing, and care of children and adolescents who are citizens of Ukraine”; the Law of March 12, 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine; “Rules for the Admission of Foreigners to Polish Schools in the Context of the Current Situation in Ukraine”; as well as recommendations for teachers and school educators, practical tips for schools, welcome packets, letters from the Minister of Education and Science, and educational materials helpful in working with Ukrainian students.

Based on an analysis of the content of documents published on curatorial websites within a month of the outbreak of Russia’s war with Ukraine, it was possible to find answers to the second research problem concerning the organizers of support (government, NGOs, and volunteers) and its implementers (teachers, school counselors, students, parents and volunteers) and the third problem, which concerned the forms of support (consultations, workshops, training, conferences, language courses, creation of educational materials, assistance in caring for and teaching children).

Presented below are the various forms of support that governmental and non-governmental institutions organized, carried out by teachers, psychologists, educators, and volunteers undertaking individual as well as collective activities.

Support of schools, psychological and pedagogical counseling centers as well as teacher training institutions

A document prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science titled “How to Talk to Children and Students about the Situation in Ukraine: Recommendations for Teachers and School Educators,” was published in all sixteen Polish educational superintendencies immediately after the outbreak of the war. The text discusses various aspects of helping children from Ukraine. It particularly emphasizes the need to show empathy and provide a sense of security, as well as point out ways to cope with a psychologically difficult situation. Teachers were required to determine whether the student or his family needs help, and if so, they were expected to identify people and institutions able to provide appropriate support.
These recommendations highlighted the need to show proper respect to people of other nationalities and their culture, as well as the need to become familiar with the basic vocabulary in Ukrainian, Russian, and English to better communicate and help.

The education superintendents’ websites also offered assistance for Ukrainian children with special educational needs (deafness, blindness, motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or multiple disabilities). Remedial classes were organized for children with profound disabilities.

Many of the curatorial websites include information on support from teacher training institutions. For example, the Lower Silesian superintendency posted active links to the offers of local teacher training centers and psychological-pedagogical clinics on working with Ukrainian students. The training courses included, among other things, working with emotions, crisis intervention and assistance; supporting children with depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome; and improving intercultural competence. The Małopolska Board of Trustees posted an offer from the Małopolska Teacher Training Center (Małopolskiego Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli), which offered several training courses, of which the most noteworthy were those on improving teachers’ intercultural competence, devoted to the culture of our neighbors. The Silesian Board of Trustees in Katowice posted information about a series of free lectures under the common theme: “I Have a Student from the East in My Classroom,” prepared by the Teacher Training Center of the Polish Community Association (Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli Stowarzyszenie) and the Center for Polish Culture and Language at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Centrum Kultury i Języka Polskiego Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej). Particularly noteworthy is the presentation “Practical Tips for Welcoming Students from Ukraine to School” (Praktyczne wskazówki na przyjęcie uczniów z Ukrainy do szkoły) posted on the website of the school board of education in Katowice. It includes suggestions for conducting an initial interview about the child’s situation and ways to integrate Ukrainian children into the school community. The presentation also emphasizes the need to hire a multicultural assistant and includes useful links to the Polish Migration Forum website, among others.

In addition, the Board website includes the document “Example of a Welcome Packet for Ukrainian Refugees—Elementary School Students” (Przykład pakietu powitalnego dla uchodźców z Ukrainy—uczniów szkoły podstawowej). This packet included the calendar of the school year (holidays, days off); the daily school plan (school hours and breaks); a list of supplies needed at school (pen, notebook, drawing pad, etc.); guidelines for the use of the electronic diary; and information on the assistance available from teachers. It is worth noting that the information from this welcome packet has been translated into several languages.

The Świętokrzyskie Board of Education in Kielce has posted an entry on its website titled “How to Integrate Refugee Students into the School Community?” (Jak włączyć uczniów uchodźców do społeczności szkolnej?). This page links to the website...
of the Świętokrzyskie Center for Teacher Training (ŚCDN), where materials are available to help teachers and school officials integrate Ukrainian students into the school community (Dobrołowicz, Garbat 2022).

Support from NGOs and volunteers

Foundations, associations, publishers, and individuals who are no strangers to the plight of refugees fleeing war have actively joined in the effort to support children arriving from Ukraine. The Faces of Depression Foundation (Fundacja Twarze Depresji) offered free remote psychological and psychiatric assistance in Ukrainian for Ukrainian citizens. The Lustro Biblioteki, in agreement with Ukrainian publishers Видавництво Маміно and БараБука BaraBooka, has provided free children’s ebooks in Ukrainian.

Of particular note are the articles, lesson plans, and guides “Poland-Ukraine: Together at School” prepared by the Center for Civic Education (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej). The materials have been grouped into five areas (teaching about the war and its consequences; integration of groups, classes and schools and intercultural support; adaptation and psychological support of people from Ukraine; language challenges; systemic support of the school).

In addition, a registration form for educational support of Ukrainian children and young people has been made available on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science, through which educational assistance can be offered and its form specified. The entry stresses that support from those who speak East Slavic languages will be particularly valuable. Information about the creation of volunteer bases is also on the curatorial websites. It is worth mentioning that all the education superintendencies’ websites include an entry titled “Educational materials for use with Ukrainian students,” which links to the Integrated Education Platform (Zintegrowanej Platformy Edukacyjnej), which includes ebooks and online materials for teaching all subjects.

Applications

The Polish government, immediately after the outbreak of the war, took intensive measures to welcome and provide multifaceted assistance to children from war-affected areas. It established a Refugee Education Council (Radę ds. edukacji uchodźców) and held numerous on-site and online meetings to provide information about educational opportunities and psychological and pedagogical assistance for Ukrainian children.

The documents posted on the websites of the boards of education in Poland were made available in most cases in a tab containing current entries, which made it significantly more difficult to reach interesting materials, especially if they were published a few days earlier. The website of the Silesian Board of Education
in Katowice deserves special mention in terms of solutions facilitating access to the documents sought. In the active “Help for Ukraine” banner, six categories were created to organize the process of searching for information. In the context of ongoing research, it would be appropriate to consider the most user-friendly and practical way for foreigners to post documents on the curatorial website.

Based on archived entries and documents from the websites of sixteen school boards in Poland, it was possible to identify the implementers of support, i.e., institutions, organizations, and entities through which assistance was provided to children arriving from Ukraine. Support came from government institutions, but also non-governmental organizations, with volunteers actively involved in the activities of one and the other. Among the organizers of support, schools, psychological and pedagogical clinics, and teacher training centers, as well as foundations and associations play a particularly important role. Organized forms of support are both individual and collective (consultations, pedagogical-psychological diagnoses, workshops, conferences), which makes it possible to more effectively help children and families arriving from Ukraine.

Schools, psychological and pedagogical counseling centers, and public and non-public teacher training centers can play a significant role in the process of organizing support for students arriving from Ukraine, provided that the people implementing the guidelines have very high interpersonal competence (Madalińska-Michalak 2013, pp. 243–245). Meanwhile, based on researching and observing the work of Polish teachers, one can see a shortage of educators able to effectively provide pedagogical assistance to children and families arriving in Poland. A similar problem has been emerging for years in other countries, which face difficulties arising from the need to integrate large groups of regularly arriving immigrants into the educational system. What is termed “culturally adaptive teaching” (Hramiak 2015) requires teachers to be highly culturally sensitive and adapt the teaching process, which must meet the needs of culturally diverse students. Full integration of culturally diverse people requires specific teacher training (Watkins, Noble 2022) and the creation of curricula in which a multicultural perspective becomes an integral component as in Finland (Zilliacus 2017).

A separate issue that is extremely important in working with foreign children and their parents is the attitude of teachers toward interculturalism (cf. Yilmaz 2016). These require several changes, which should begin with the education system for school teaching staff. This system should build teachers’ cultural sensitivity and develop their intercultural competence (Dobrowolska 2015). Creating a space for the coexistence of cultures—i.e., supporting the assimilation processes of immigrants (Lesar et al. 2006)—requires organizing conditions for the acquisition of these competencies through, among other things, demonstrating the complexity of human destinies and forming attitudes of kindness (Barton, Ho 2020) and understanding between people from different cultures (Nikitorowicz 2020). It is necessary to be guided by tolerance and dialogue, which allow us to overcome
fears, stereotypes, and lead to a creative meeting, rather than to indifference or hostility (Nikitorowicz 2022). The process of forming intercultural competence is extremely complex and is based on knowledge and skills from various fields (pedagogy, psychology, sociology, etc.). The acquisition of intercultural competence can sometimes take a lifetime (Glazewska 2020). Therefore, it would be especially important to ensure a high level among teachers, educators, and psychologists who implement solutions to support the process of adaptation and integration of foreign children.

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