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PEACE EDUCATION IN EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOLING: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND SELECTED PEDAGOGICAL DETERMINANTS

**WYCHOWANIE DO POKOJU W EDUKACJI WCZESNOSZKOLNEJ. PERSPEKTYWA
NAUCZYCIELI I WYBRANE UWARUNKOWANIA PRACY PEDAGOGICZNEJ**

Streszczenie: Współczesność, naznaczona zaburzeniem poczucia bezpieczeństwa jednostek oraz mniejszych i większych grup społecznych, czyni wychowanie dzieci do pokoju szczególnym wyzwaniem pedagogicznym. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wniesienie wkładu do dyskusji na temat roli uwarunkowań edukacyjnych – w szczególności roli nauczyciela – w kształtowaniu postaw pokojowych wśród uczniów edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. Refleksja autorki opiera się na wynikach badań własnych przeprowadzonych wśród nauczycieli edukacji wczesnoszkolnej, koncentrujących się na znaczeniu wybranych czynników związanych z pracą nauczyciela w obszarze edukacji dla pokoju. Oceniane czynniki obejmowały zmienne wewnętrzne dotyczące predyspozycji poznawczych, osobowościowych i aksjologicznych nauczyciela, jak również elementy związane z jego działalnością dydaktyczną i społeczną.

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Słowa kluczowe: edukacja dla pokoju, edukacja wczesnoszkolna, rola nauczyciela, postawy uczniów

Abstract: Contemporary times, marked by a disturbed sense of security among individuals and both small and large social groups, have made raising children for peace a unique pedagogical challenge. The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion on the role of educational determinants – particularly the role of the teacher – in shaping peaceful attitudes among early school education students. The author's reflection is based on her own research conducted among early school education teachers, focusing on the significance of specific factors related to the teacher's work in the field of peace education. The factors assessed included internal variables concerning the teacher's cognitive, personality-related, and axiological predispositions, as well as elements related to their teaching and social engagement.

Key words: peace education, early primary education, teacher's role, student attitudes

Introduction

In times of intensified and uncontrolled digitalization of life, and the growing sense of insecurity on a global scale among individuals and social groups, educating children for peace from an early age gains particular significance and becomes an educational priority. Zygmunt Bauman (2003) points out that at no point in history have teachers faced a challenge comparable to that of today's breakthrough. Increasingly, there is a need to develop and implement a distinct research and praxeological field referred to as *peace education*, which, according to Agnieszka Piejka (2019), is a method of pedagogical reflection and action focused on educational tasks and challenges arising from concern for the world and humanity, aiming to build and sustain peace.

Peace education, as emphasized by the author, reflects the belief that education can serve as a constructive response to the disturbing and dangerous phenomena that characterize the contemporary world. Pedagogical activities rooted in peace education support the development of young people into conscious and responsible individuals capable of initiating positive change both in their personal lives and in their communities. This text seeks to identify effective methods of educating children for peace and to outline a mature yet dynamic concept of peace education in a changing world. Identifying and enhancing the key factors that underpin the development of peaceful attitudes may provide opportunities to raise socially engaged individuals and contribute to building a more peaceful world.

Responsibilities of the early school education teacher concerning education for peace

The implementation of peace education is not an easy pedagogical task. In the modern world, many social phenomena coexist in contradiction: ambivalent cultural attitudes, increasing levels of migration from economically disadvantaged regions, ongoing wars resulting in waves of refugees, and the persistent threat of terrorism (Cudak 2016). In this context, the need to cultivate a culture of peace – understood by Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2022) as a universal value, idea, and goal of education – becomes particularly relevant.

In practice, implementing peace education does not depend solely on the teacher's goodwill or personal beliefs. It is a formal educational obligation, as defined in core educational documents outlining the aims and content of instruction and the responsibilities related to promoting pro-peace attitudes. Henryk Cudak (2016) emphasizes the continuing importance of Jacques Delors' report (*Learning: the Treasure Within*, 2001), which articulates the foundations of peace education and seeks to translate them into educational practice. Appropriate attitudes toward others – both individuals and groups, nationally and internationally – should foster public awareness and reinforce the role of schools in shaping a comprehensive system of educational influences promoting peace.

Improving the quality and relevance of educational practices requires ongoing reflection on pedagogical goals, methods, and content (Cudak 2016). According to the Delors report (2001), the teacher's role is not limited to transferring information but includes addressing specific challenges in educational contexts in ways that connect students' experiences to broader social realities. Through dialogue with students, teachers are expected to support the development of critical thinking, sound judgment, and a sense of personal responsibility – skills essential for lifelong learning and adapting to change.

Peace education is also embedded in the *Core Curriculum* (Regulation of the Minister of Education, June 28, 2024, *Journal of Laws*, July 5, 2024, Item 996). It emphasizes introducing students to the world of values – such as cooperation, solidarity, altruism, patriotism, and environmental responsibility – while fostering respectful social relationships, a sense of personal and collective identity, and openness toward others.

The educational process, grounded in communication and the exchange of perspectives, emotions, and experiences, holds significant potential as a tool for transforming individuals and communities. The unique relationship between teacher and student – direct and interpersonal – creates space for value formation and peace education. Within this context, several priorities emerge:

- First, developing critical thinking skills is essential, particularly in an age when individuals are overwhelmed by excessive stimuli.
- Second, cultivating a “future-oriented ethics”, grounded in the belief that the future is not predetermined, but open to choice and responsibility.
- Third, fostering civic attitudes, where citizenship is understood as the right and duty to act within and for one’s community – local, national, or global.
- Fourth, encouraging openness to the Other, which is especially important in multicultural societies and entails empathy, tolerance, and a strong sense of identity.
- Fifth, nurturing creativity and sensitivity, which support altruism, originality, emotional expressiveness, and the capacity to act empathetically and cooperatively with others (Piejka 2019).

Educational tasks are inherently linked to pedagogical work, as it is primarily teachers who introduce students to the world of values and shape the attitudes that underpin the culture of peace within educational institutions.

Teacher's predispositions and competencies that are useful in the process of building a culture of peace

A teacher's preparation for educational tasks is often described in terms of professional competencies. In the context of peace education, Robert Kwaśnica (2004) defines such competencies as practical-moral and distinguishes three types:

1. interpretive competencies – the ability to relate meaningfully to oneself, others, and the world;
2. moral competencies – the ability to engage in moral reflection, directed first toward oneself and then toward others in light of specific values;
3. communicative competencies – the ability to engage in dialogue with others and with oneself.

In the sensitive domain of peace education, it is also important to emphasize, following Irena Wojnar (2009), the significance of emotional predispositions – especially what she terms the *humanistic sensitivity of the teacher*, understood as a form of resonance and as the capacity to enter into the experiences of another person (i.e., empathy). These are, as Wojnar (2009, pp. 112–113) notes, existential competencies that go beyond subject-matter, didactic, or psychological preparation but are essential for working “with people, among people, and for people”.

In contemporary educational discourse, the concept of internal harmony is gaining attention, particularly in relation to professional effectiveness. Joanna Pękala (2024) defines internal harmony as the compatibility of feelings, actions, relationships, views, or interests – a state of equilibrium between forces that may be contradictory. In this context, the idea of intrapersonal harmony, understood as the ongoing process of integrating various spheres and goals of life into a coherent and functional whole, also becomes relevant. According to Pękala, a teacher's internal harmony plays a vital role in the implementation of multicultural education, in creating emotional and relational balance within the classroom, and in the broader functioning of the school within its environment. Internal balance, as suggested here, may significantly contribute to fostering harmony and peace in others.

The belief that teachers play a crucial role in building a culture of peace – within the school, the broader community, and in the lives of students – served as the main rationale for undertaking the research described in the following section.

Presenting the results of the author's research

Methodological assumptions

The aim of the study was to determine which factors early primary school teachers (grades I–III) consider most important in the process of shaping students' peaceful attitudes. The practical goal was to identify opportunities to improve the development of a school culture of peace. The study focused on teachers' reflections captured through a survey instrument designed by the author. The study had a pilot character. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and in the case of the online questionnaire the sample had an open-access nature, which means that no territorial criteria were applied. Therefore, the sample should be treated as a convenience–volunteer sample rather than a probabilistic one.

The questionnaire included four groups of factors:

1. Teachers' personal and mental qualities,
2. Didactic and educational work,
3. Classroom and school culture,
4. Engagement in the social environment.

Each group contained five statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale:

- 4 – very important
- 3 – important
- 2 – not very important
- 1 – rather unimportant

The main research question was:

Which factors in peace education are considered particularly important by early primary school teachers?

Sub-questions included:

1. What is the importance of the teacher's mental qualities in peace education?
2. Which elements of didactic and educational work are most valued?
3. How are classroom and school culture factors assessed?
4. How is social engagement perceived in relation to peace education?

Research Group Description

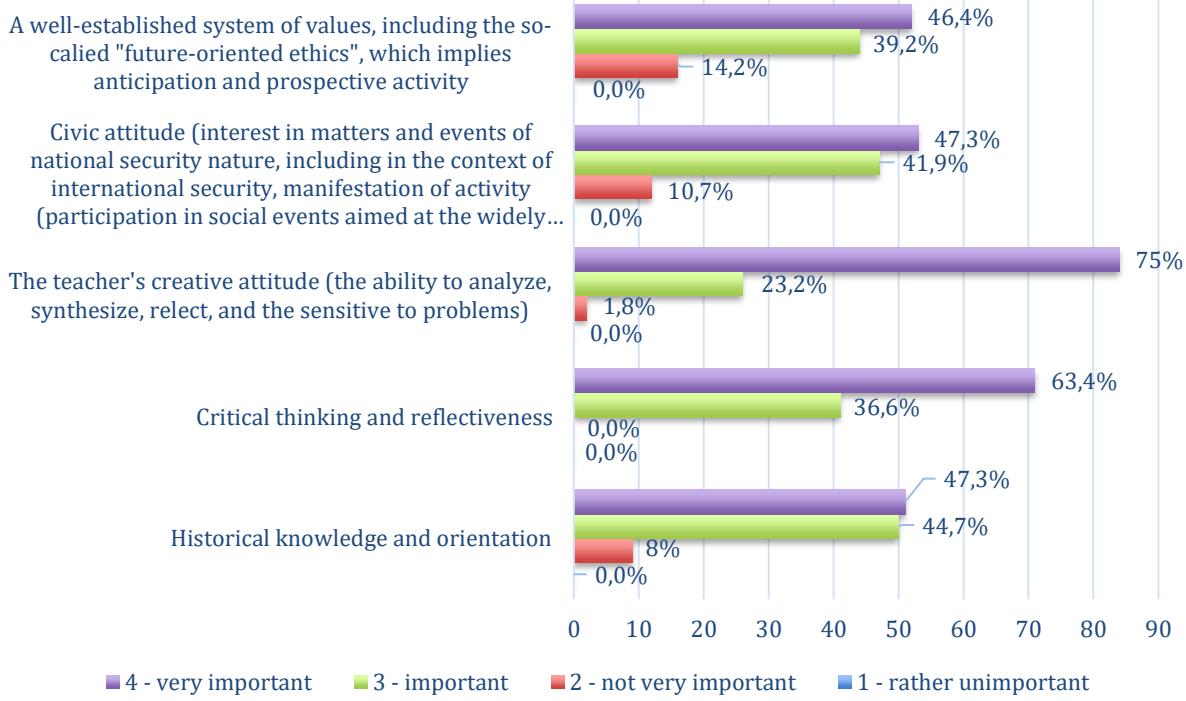
The study included 112 early primary school teachers. Data were collected through both online and in-person surveys. The majority of participants worked in urban schools (82%), with 18% representing rural schools. In terms of professional experience, 20% had less than 10 years of service, 45% between 10 and 20 years, and 35% more than 25 years.

Assessment of the determinants of education for peace in grades I-III

The collected data were analyzed in relation to four thematic areas identified in the survey instrument. Each area included five specific factors assessed by teachers using a four-point scale of importance. The following sections present the distribution of responses in each domain, beginning with the role of the teacher's mental qualities in peace education.

Chart 1. Assessment of the role of the mental qualities of the teacher in the education for peace process

I. The mental qualities of the teacher



Source: author's own research

The first domain of factors examined in the study focused on the teacher's mental and personal qualities. The results indicate the following:

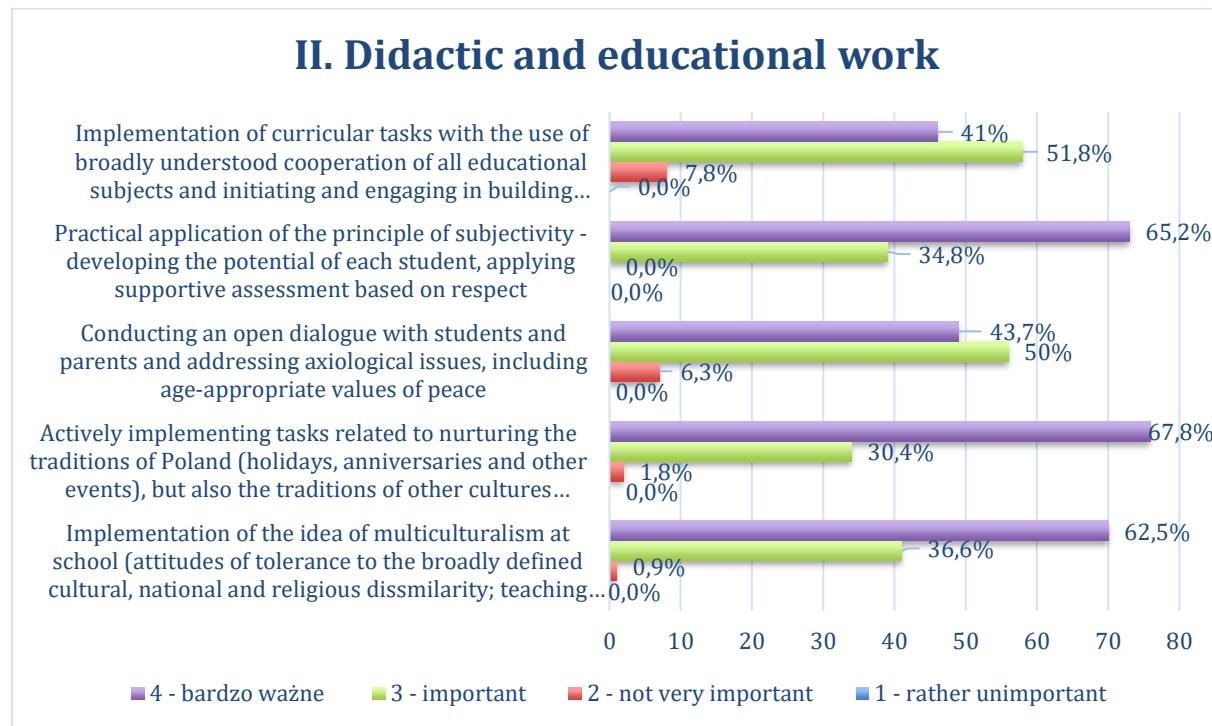
- Historical knowledge and orientation toward current issues related to global peace was considered very important by 47.3% of respondents, important by 44.7%, and not very important by 8%.
- Critical thinking and reflectiveness were rated as very important by 63.4% of teachers and important by 36.6%.
- The teacher's creative attitude—defined as the ability to analyze, synthesize, reflect, and remain sensitive to problems—was rated very important by 75% of respondents, important by 23.2%, and not very important by 1.8%.
- Civic attitude, including interest in national and international security issues and participation in socially engaged activities, was viewed as very important by 47.3% and important by 41.9%.
- A well-established system of values, including so-called future-oriented ethics (anticipation and prospective action), was identified as very important by 46.4% of respondents, important by 39.2%, and not very important by 14.2%.

Among the mental qualities of the teacher assessed in the study, the most significant were the creative attitude (indicated as very important by 75% of respondents) and the capacity for critical thinking and reflectiveness (63.4%). These qualities were understood as essential in fostering students' peace-oriented attitudes, as they reflect a teacher's openness, sensitivity to problems, and readiness to engage reflectively with both students and the world.

At the same time, slightly more variation appeared in the evaluation of other factors. Historical knowledge and awareness of global peace-related issues were viewed as less important by 8% of respondents, while 14.2% assigned relatively low importance to a well-established value system, including future-oriented ethics. Although these represent minority positions, they suggest that not all teachers equally emphasize the cognitive or axiological dimensions of peace education.

The second thematic area assessed in the study concerned didactic and educational practices that support the development of students' peaceful attitudes.

Chart 2. Assessment of the role of factors of a didactic and educational nature in the process of education for peace



Source: author's own research

The second group of factors focused on didactic and educational work. Five specific factors were included in this group:

- Implementation of the idea of multiculturalism at school (attitudes of tolerance toward broadly defined cultural, national, and religious dissimilarity; teaching respect and appropriate attitudes toward the anthem, state, emblem, and flag) was assessed as follows: 62.5% of respondents said it was a very important factor, 36.6% said it was an important factor, while a marginal part (0.9%) said it was not very important.
- Actively implementing tasks related to nurturing the traditions of Poland (holidays, anniversaries, and other events), but also the traditions of other cultures (especially in multicultural classes or schools), was considered very important by 67.8% of respondents, important by 30.4%, and not very important by 1.8%.
- Conducting an open dialogue with students and parents and addressing axiological issues, including age-appropriate values of peace, was rated as very important by 50% of respondents, important by 43.7%, and not very important by 6.3%.
- Practical application of the principle of subjectivity – developing the potential of each student and applying supportive assessment based on respect – was considered very important by 65.2% of respondents and important by 34.8%.
- Implementation of curricular tasks involving broadly understood cooperation among all educational stakeholders and initiating or engaging in international educational cooperation was rated as very important by 41% of teachers, important by 51.8%, and not very important by 7.2%.

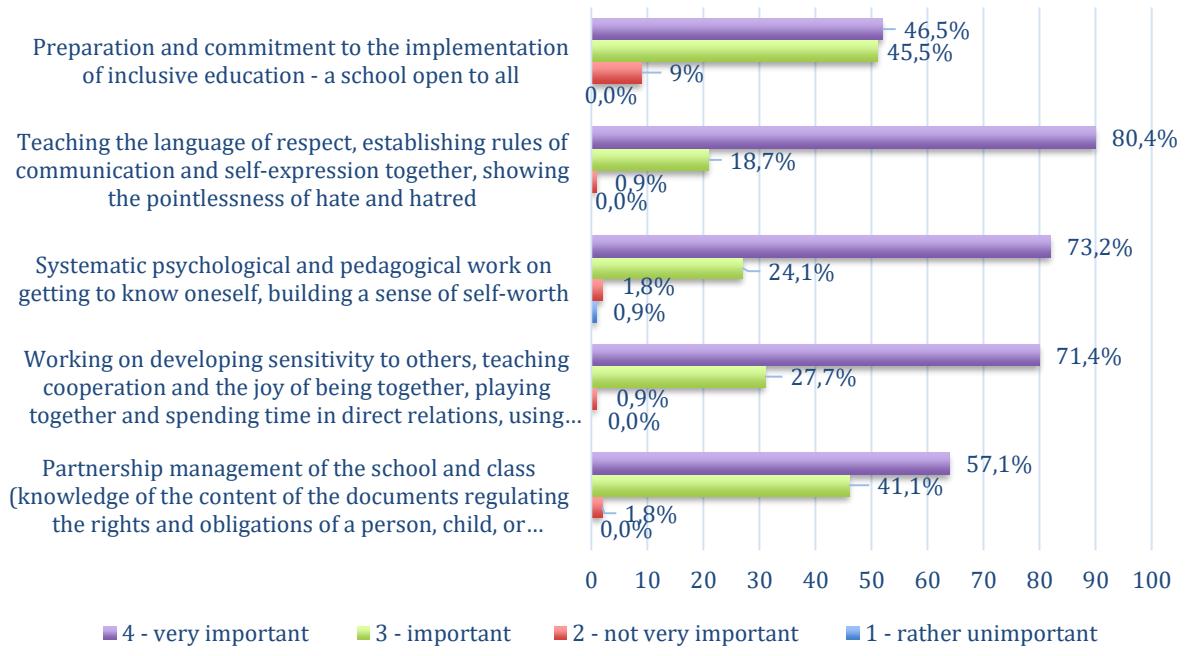
Based on the analysis of the data on the role of didactic and educational factors in the process of education for peace, the following tendencies are noted:

1. The three highest-rated factors (very important) were: active implementation of tasks related to the nurturing of Polish traditions (67.8%), practical application of the principle of subjectivity (65.2%), and implementation of the idea of multiculturalism at school (62.5%).
2. A small number of respondents rated two factors as not very important: conducting an open dialogue with students and parents and addressing axiological issues, including peace-related values (6.3%), and implementation of curricular tasks through broad cooperation and international educational initiatives (7.2%).

The third group of factors assessed in the study concerned elements of classroom and school culture that support the development of peaceful attitudes.

Chart 3. Assessment of the role of factors of class and school culture in the education for peace process

III. Class and school culture



Source: author's own research

The third factor area analyzed concerns class and school culture. Thus:

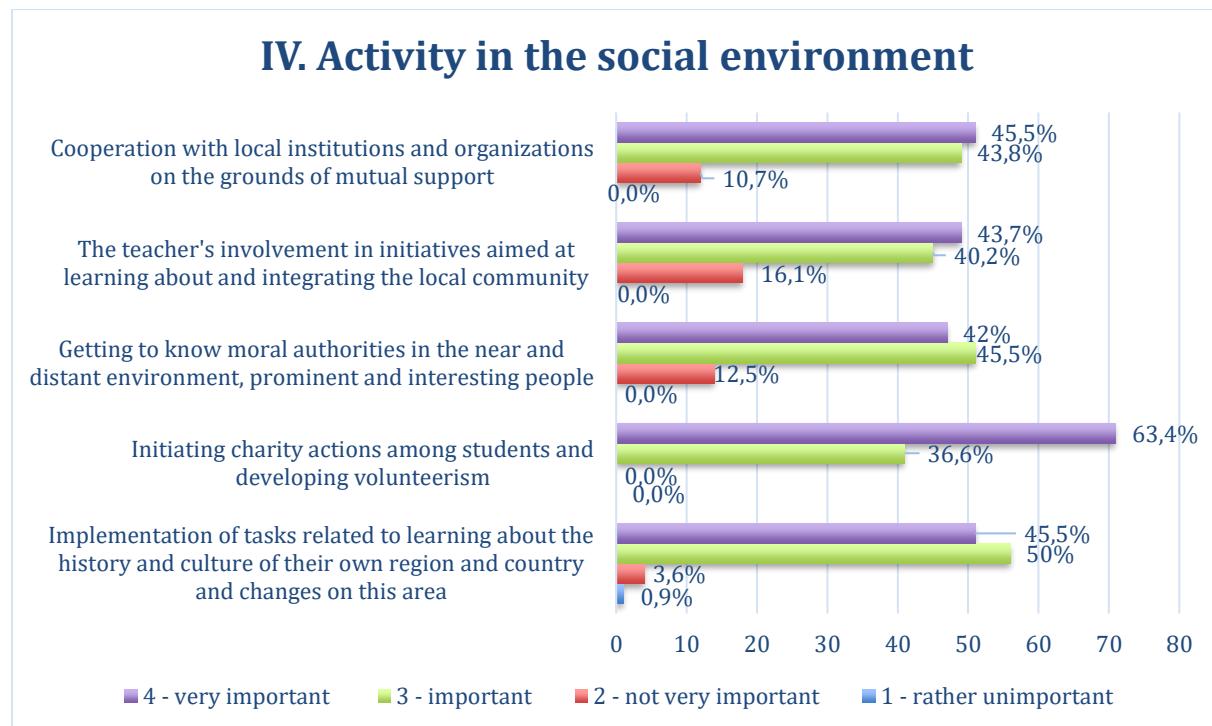
- Partnership management of the school and class (knowledge of the content of the documents regulating the rights and obligations of a person, child, or student, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, school regulations, and others) was considered a very important factor by 57.1%, an important factor by 41.1%, and a not very important factor by only 1.8%.
- Working on developing sensitivity to others, teaching cooperation and the joy of being together, playing together, and spending time in direct relations using direct communication, was considered a very important factor by 71.4% and an important factor by 27.7%.
- Systematic psychological and pedagogical work on getting to know oneself and building a sense of self-worth was considered a very important factor by 73.2% of respondents, an important factor by 24.1%, not very important by 1.8%, and rather unimportant by 0.9%.
- Teaching the language of respect, establishing rules of communication and self-expression together, and showing the pointlessness of hate and hatred was rated very high: 80.4% of teachers said that this factor was very important, 18.7% an important factor, and 0.9% of teachers described it as not very important.

- Preparation and commitment to the implementation of inclusive education – a school open to all – was also a significant factor for the respondents in the process of education for peace, with 46.5% of respondents rating this factor as very important, 45.5% as important, and 9% as not very important.

Concluding the results regarding the importance of factors from the field of class and school culture in the process of education for peace, it is worth emphasizing that the following three factors were considered very important by the majority of respondents: teaching the language of respect, establishing rules of communication and self-expression together, and showing the pointlessness of hate and hatred (80.4%); systematic psychological and pedagogical work on learning about oneself and building a sense of self-worth (73.2%); and working on developing sensitivity to others, teaching cooperation and the joy of being together, playing together, and spending time in direct relations using direct communication (71.4%).

The fourth and final group of factors analyzed in the study concerned activities undertaken by the teacher in the social environment that support peace education.

Chart 4. Evaluation of the role of factors from the area of activity in the social environment in the education for peace process



Source: author's own research

Factors from the group on activity in the social environment as conditions of the process of educating a child for peace were assessed by the surveyed teachers as follows:

- Implementation of tasks related to learning about the history and culture of their own region and country, and changes in this area, was considered a very important factor by 45.5% of teachers, an important factor by 50%, and not very important by 3.6%. A small number of respondents also considered it rather unimportant.
- Getting to know moral authorities in the near and distant environment, including prominent and interesting individuals, was considered a very important factor by 42% of respondents, important by 45.5%, and not very important by 12.5%.
- Initiating charity actions among students and developing volunteerism was rated quite highly: 63.4% of teachers considered this factor very important, and 36.6% regarded it as important.
- The teacher's involvement in initiatives aimed at learning about and integrating the local community was assessed as very important by 43.7% of teachers, important by 45.5%, and not very important by 16.1%.
- Cooperation with local institutions and organizations on the basis of mutual support was considered a very important factor by 45.5% of respondents, an important factor by 43.8%, and not very important by 10.7%.

Summarizing the assessment of factors related to activity in the social environment, it can be emphasized that initiating charity actions and developing volunteerism was explicitly recognized as important: 63.4% of teachers considered it a very important factor, and 36.6% an important one. In contrast, some teachers regarded as not very important such factors as: involvement in local community initiatives (16.1%), getting to know moral authorities (12.5%), and cooperation with local institutions (10.7%).

Conclusions of own research and summary

The most important factors (rated as *very important* in the process of education for peace – above 65%) are:

- teaching the language of respect, establishing rules of communication and self-expression together, and showing the pointlessness of hate and hatred – 80.4%;
- the teacher's creative attitude (the ability to analyze, synthesize, reflect, and be sensitive to problems) – 75%;
- systematic psychological and pedagogical work on getting to know oneself and building a sense of self-worth – 73.2%;

- working on developing sensitivity to others, teaching cooperation and the joy of being together, playing together, and spending time in direct relations using direct communication – 71.4%;
- actively implementing tasks related to nurturing the traditions of Poland (holidays, anniversaries, and other events), as well as the traditions of other cultures (especially in multicultural classes or schools) – 67.8%;
- practical application of the principle of subjectivity – developing the potential of each student and applying supportive, respectful assessment – 65.2%.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning three additional factors rated quite highly: critical thinking and reflectiveness – 63.4% of respondents rated this as a very important factor, and 36.6% as important; the implementation of the idea of multiculturalism at school – 62.5% considered it very important; and initiating charity actions among students and developing volunteerism – 63.4% of teachers rated this factor as very important, and 36.6% as important. It is interesting to note that the factor of a well-established system of values, including the so-called *future-oriented ethics* (which implies anticipation and prospective activity), was considered *not very important* by 14.2% of respondents. Factors related to building a class and school culture were rated significantly high overall.

The research was conducted as a pilot study, but it clearly demonstrated that teachers perceive education as a space of opportunity for peacebuilding. A teacher's positive thinking opens them to possibilities and actions with students, contributing to a sense of agency and reinforcing the belief that shaping pro-peace attitudes is both meaningful and achievable. The school is an environment and institution that mediates between the individual and the wider world. It is rooted in communal life, which naturally creates situations in which the child is introduced to the world of values – among which the value of peace holds a significant place.

Knowledge of the determinants of the teacher's work in the area of peace education appears important; however, it is the teacher's level of theoretical, and above all, philosophical and ideological reflection on education that enables a broader, contextual understanding of peace. This understanding makes it possible to grasp the essence of these phenomena and to engage creatively in the educational process. The general theoretical and philosophical preparation of teachers should provide in-depth insight into the complexity of contemporary civilizational and cultural realities so that the implementation of various components of peace education does not become vulnerable to superficial actions or manipulation, but remains meaningful and grounded in understanding.

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