

REFUGEE PERSPECTIVES ON PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SWITZERLAND: UKRAINIANS' DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF INCLUSION

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is actively shaping today's global and European humanitarian politics. Europe opens its doors to refugees from different parts of the globe whenever a new displacement crisis occurs. In the social-political context of the large displacement of the civilian population by the war in Ukraine, that started in February 2022, European countries recognized a vital necessity to rapidly accommodate and integrate large numbers of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. Displaced children are always the most affected group due to their age, extreme vulnerability to stress and trauma, and limited or none host-country language proficiency. The urgent need to integrate displaced Ukrainian schoolchildren in the European education system to ensure the continuity of their education as well as their emotional well-being was one of the challenges European countries have been responding to since the early spring of 2022.

Activation, in March 2022, of the previously unused Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) by European countries provided newly arrived Ukrainians with fast-track access to legal status and as a result, employment, social services, and benefits, among which was access to schooling for their children. According to the TPD, displaced children under 18 have access to education in the EU under the same conditions as their own nationals and EU citizens¹.

Education is one of the displaced children's absolute necessities ensuring their gradual return to a normal life. Children, like adults, "carry with them the individual and collective grief of war, destruction, violence, and separation. They need shelter, protection and to recover from the traumatic experiences they have been exposed to before, during and after fleeing their

¹ EC Staff Working Document on Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: considerations, key principles, and practices for the school year 2022–2023. Publications Office of the European Union. 2022. P. 1–2. URL: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/310985>

country. Children need quick access to education and training, to continue their learning and regain a sense of normality”².

The European Commission Staff Working Document on supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education, of June 30, 2022, points out *continuity* of education as a vital factor of the inclusion process understood as including displaced children in the host-country non-segregated mainstream education system³, which is thought to help “prepare children for all possible future developments – to return to Ukraine after a temporary period at an EU school, or to develop long-term plans to stay in the EU, if needed”⁴. Among the most relevant factors of inclusion programs, the Document identifies learning a new language, familiarizing with a new environment, maintaining proficiency in their own language, keeping in touch with their home and Ukrainian culture⁵.

Showing extraordinary solidarity in meeting the challenge of inclusion of displaced Ukrainian children in European education system, EU Member States have been working on their effective strategies, exploring opportunities and practices for the school year 2022–2023 regarding the peculiarities of their national educational programs and curriculum design. “As the situation differs among Member States in terms of pressure, preparedness and existing capacity constraints, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. And as the situation remains fluid and complex, it remains to plan for different scenarios”⁶.

The Staff Working Document of June 30, 2022, emphasizes that “successful and meaningful inclusion of displaced learners in quality education programs is not only about enabling them to learn, but also requires action to address their social and emotional needs alongside their academic support needs”⁷, in which it was guided by the refugee education integration model outlined in the OECD Report of 2019⁸. Only the combination of these three dimensions can ensure smooth and effective

² Cerna, L. Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries. OECD Education Working Papers. 2019. № 203, OECD Publishing, Paris. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en>. 5

³ EC Staff Working Document on Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: considerations, key principles, and practices for the school year 2022–2023. P. 6. Publications Office of the European Union. 2022. URL: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/310985>

⁴ [ibid.]

⁵ [ibid., p. 2]

⁶ [ibid., p. 3]

⁷ [ibid., p. 4]

⁸ Cerna, L. Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries. OECD Education Working Papers. 2019. № 203, OECD Publishing, Paris. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en>. 5

educational integration sought by European education authorities and community.

The commonly deployed practices and approaches to inclusion of displaced schoolchildren in Member States include immediate enrolment in host-country schools; hybrid, specialized and binational models of parallel education; mandatory initial placement of all displaced children in the integration classes; full-time remote learning following the Ukrainian curriculum, etc.⁹

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as of August 3, 2022, and based on UNESCO 2022 data¹⁰, approaches to inclusion of the displaced Ukrainian schoolchildren vary greatly. For example, Finland and Sweden tailor individualized learning plans to refugee students, based on their needs, previous education, and current social/family situation. In Romania, refugee students can enroll in one of the 55 schools offering instruction in Ukrainian. Teachers in standard Romanian schools are also encouraged to provide instruction in Ukrainian when they are able to do so. In Portugal, Ukrainian textbooks are made available to refugee students, and bilingual Ukrainian-Portuguese children's books and textbooks have been produced to provide continuity of learning while developing familiarity with the Portuguese language. Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain are offering 'bridging' or transition classes where refugee students can learn the host country language and familiarize themselves with the local education system, as well as receiving psychological support. In the United Kingdom and France, targeted language support is provided by full immersion programs established to introduce refugee students to the basics of the host country curriculum. This can take the form of short daily classes with a host country language teacher or support from a teaching assistant who speaks the student's mother tongue or otherwise has experience teaching non-native speakers in standard classes¹¹.

According to OECD working papers on refugee education, "while there is a growing body of research on the integration of immigrants, policy-relevant research on refugee children and youth from an educational perspective is rather limited, fragmented and case specific"¹². Referring to the refugee crisis of 2014-2015, OECD analyst L.Cerna points out the

⁹ UNESCO. URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/countries>

¹⁰ [ibid.]

¹¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. URL: <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/en/>

¹² Cerna, L. Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries. OECD Education Working Papers. 2019. № 203, OECD Publishing, Paris. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en>. 5

insufficiency of the detailed surveys and research projects focusing on the *current* wave of refugees that would allow for cross-country comparisons¹³. This remark is absolutely justified, since the synchronization of inclusion and initial adaptation of refugee learners with the direct in-country or/and cross-country study of these processes is difficult to implement, and conclusions are most often drawn on the basis of past experience. L.Cerna also underlines that “evaluations of practices and policies that support the integration of refugee students are often missing, which makes it difficult to assess whether they are successful”¹⁴.

The **main objectives** of the research project initiated by University of Teacher Education Zug, Switzerland, were to understand the displaced Ukrainian students’ perspectives on Swiss primary school and explore diverse experiences of their inclusion, which enabled us to estimate how successful the displaced Ukrainian children are in their integration in the Swiss primary education and what factors affect the integration process.

The field we contribute to hasn’t been explored yet because of the new ethnicity of the studied refugee group, a very recent event of displacement, and limited accessibility of the displaced primary school children for in-depth research. In addition, the novelty of the research is in the time frame. The study concurrent with the initial process of integration of displaced children made it possible to observe their primary experiences, very first impressions and perceptions – always the strongest and quite often misleading – but in both cases informative and valuable for empirical research.

We see our researcher’s role in contributing to the field of Refugee Pedagogy, by providing the international education community with the Ukrainian refugee perspectives on primary education in Switzerland (based on the data derived from the project implemented in the Canton of Zug in 2022-23 academic year), as well as in adding to a multidimensional assessment of the process of refugee integration in the new educational environment.

Advocating a refugee-centered perspective in education, Anita H. Fabos, Professor of International Development, Community, and Environment at Clark University, MA, US, suggests more scholars from refugee backgrounds are incorporated into educational programs and projects as the people with professional training and expertise as well as first-hand experience of forced migration can help Refugee researchers rethink history

¹³ [ibid., p. 4]

¹⁴ [ibid., p. 4]

and policy from the perspective of those displaced¹⁵. This observation seems to be well grounded as to understand the chief concerns of the ethnically new group forced to displacement, as well as the true reasons for their possible misunderstanding or rejection of certain new rules and norms, a researcher must be fully aware of their cultural identity, peculiarities of their culture, social rules, and norms inherent in their mentality and worldview, expressed in their behavior and attitudes. With this in mind, we believe that involvement of a Ukrainian researcher with first-hand experience of displacement, into the project, ensured accessibility of the target group, effective researcher-respondents communication due to the common mother tongue and ‘familiar’ communication setting, the novelty of the interview framework and technique. The researcher’s familiarity with the investigated domain, derived from her own teaching experience, as well as her professional linguistic expertise, allowed for more flexibility in using probe questions to elude the relevant information and provided a deeper insight into the whys of the obtained data.

1. Research prerequisites

International pedagogical discourse on the inclusion of ethnically diverse refugee groups in educational systems of OECD countries focuses on institutional factors that influence educational opportunities of refugee children (Crul, 2019¹⁶; Bourgonje, 2010¹⁷; Katsounari, 2020¹⁸), refugee education approaches and strategies in Europe (ITIRE, 2020¹⁹); affected school biographies of adolescent refugees (Homuth, 2020²⁰), tutoring

¹⁵ Fabos, A. A refugee-centered perspective. Forced Migration Review. Refugee Studies Center, University of Oxford. 2019. URL: A refugee-centred perspective – ORA – Oxford University Research Archive

¹⁶ Crul, M., Lelie, F., Biner, Ö. et al. How the different policies and school systems affect the inclusion of Syrian refugee children in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey. 2019. CMS 7 (10). URL: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0110-6>

¹⁷ Bourgonje, P. Education for refugee and asylum-seeking children in OECD countries. Case studies from Australia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Brussel: Education International. 2010. URL: [Study_on_Education_for_refugees_and_asylum_seeking_children_in_OECD_countries_EN.pdf](#)

¹⁸ Katsounari, I. Refugee Children Education in Cyprus: Policy Brief. 2020. URL: (PDF) Refugee Children Education in Cyprus: Policy Brief | Ioanna Katsounari – Academia.edu

¹⁹ ITIRE. Improving teaching to improve refugee children education. An overview of refugee education in Europe. Edited by Fabio Dovigo. Aarhus University. 2020. URL: https://projects.au.dk/fileadmin/ingen_mappe_valgt/ITIRE-Report.pdf

²⁰ Homuth, C., Will, G., Von Maurice, J. Broken School Biographies of Adolescent Refugees in Germany. Refugees in Canada and Germany: From Research to Policies and Practice (GESIS-Schriftenreihe, 25). Köln: GESIS – Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften. 2020. P. 123–142.

practices (Avery, 2017²¹), psychological needs, possible post-traumatic reactions and experiences of displaced children (Montgomery 2011²²; Sullivan, Simonson, 2016²³; Mantel, 2022²⁴), refugee students' experiences in different educational settings (Nilsson, Axelsson, 2013²⁵), refugee parents' involvement in their children's school (McBrien, 2011²⁶), etc.

A large body of research carried out on refugee education refers to different ethnic groups, different periods of forced migration, different host-countries. The topic of Ukrainian refugees arose in the context of the war in Ukraine 2022 and is quite new for Refugee Pedagogy. Though all refugee kids have similar characteristics and face similar challenges of adjusting to a different language, culture, and lifestyle, suffer high acculturation stress, disruption to family networks, negative stereotypes and discrimination²⁷, Ukrainian displaced learners differ in at least two ways: they were placed in a supportive and welcoming social context in many host countries; have an opportunity to continue their national schooling on-line, thus, in fact, following hybrid model of parallel education (classroom – in Switzerland and on-line, in Ukraine).

2. Methodology

The exploratory research project was carried out within the framework of a qualitative methodology. The main objectives of the research were to understand the displaced Ukrainians' perspectives on Swiss primary school

²¹ Avery, H. At the bridging point: Tutoring newly arrived students in Sweden. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 2017. 21(4). P. 404–415. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1197325>

²² Montgomery, A. "Trauma, exile and mental health in young refugees", *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*. 2011. Vol. 124. P. 1–46. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2011.01740.x>

²³ Sullivan, A., Simonson, G. "A systematic review of school-based social-emotional interventions for refugee and war-traumatised youth", *Review of Educational Research*. 2016. Vol. 86. P. 503-530. DOI: 10.3102/0034654315609419

²⁴ Mantel, C., Kohli, C. *Flucht-Trauma-Schule. 10 der häufigsten Fragen von Lehrpersonen*. Pädagogische Hochschule Zug. 2022. 29p. URL: <https://www.phzug.ch/10-der-haeufigsten-fragen-von-lehrpersonen>

²⁵ Nilsson, J., Axelsson, M. "Welcome to Sweden: Newly Arrived Students' Experiences of Pedagogical and Social Provision in Introductory and Regular Classes", *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*. 2013. Vol. 6/1. P. 137–164. URL: https://www.iejee.org/2013/01/01/01_01_nilsson_axelsson (ed.gov)

²⁶ McBrien, J. "The importance of context: Vietnamese, Somali, and Iranian refugee mothers discuss their resettled lives and involvement in their children's schools". *Compare: Journal of Comparative International Education*. 2011. Vol. 41. P. 75–90. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.523168>

²⁷ Cerna, L. *Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries*. OECD Education Working Papers. 2019. № 203, OECD Publishing, Paris. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en>. 5

and explore the diverse experiences of their inclusion. The research was based on two questions: 1) How do the displaced Ukrainian children and parents perceive Swiss primary school? and 2) How successful are the displaced Ukrainian children in their integration into Swiss primary education? To address the research questions, several sub-studies were conducted: semi-structured interviews with parents, narrative interviews with children, and classroom observation (Cohen, Manion, 2007²⁸; Berg 1989²⁹; Silverman 1993³⁰). Such triangulation of data collection enabled us to develop a truly holistic approach to the object of study and was justified by the researcher's aim to obtain extensive and reliable data.

The inductive method and theme-centered analysis of the obtained data were employed to reconstruct the collectively shared knowledge and experience, uncover areas of and reasons for major challenges and controversy, identify certain factors significantly affecting the process of primary school students' integration and learning.

When developing the interview questionnaire, we were guided by the EC Working Document (2022) on supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education, of June 30, 2022, which refers to the refugee education integration model outlined in the OECD Report of 2019³¹. Highlighted in the model, the *three dimensions* of successful and meaningful inclusion of displaced learners in quality education programs – learners' *learning*, *social*, and *emotional* needs – determined the key themes for the interview.

Thus, the 'learning needs' section combined the questions about what Ukrainian parents know about primary school in Switzerland, its structure, principles, and curriculum, whether they communicate with their children's teachers and get sufficient information about the children's progress at school, what the children like most about their schooling, and what learning-related challenges they face. The 'social needs' section contained the questions about how well Ukrainian primary students communicate with their school teachers and classmates, whether they have friends in their class/school and feel part of the group, what factors facilitate Ukrainian children's integration in the Swiss heterogeneous classroom community, etc. The 'emotional needs' section assumed the questions concerning the

²⁸ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. Research Methods in Education. Sixth edition. London and New York: Routledge. 2007. 638 p.

²⁹ Berg, B.L. Qualitative research methods for the social science (3rd ed.). Toronto: Allyn & Bacon. 1989.

³⁰ Silverman, D. Interpreting Qualitative Data. London: Sage. 1993.

³¹ Cerna, L. Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries. OECD Education Working Papers. 2019. № 203, OECD Publishing, Paris. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en>. 5

safety and emotional well-being of Ukrainian children at Swiss school. Parents were asked if they notice any changes in their children's usual behavior, if the children like going to school, what difficulties they have and how well they cope with them, etc.

The semi-structured interview data allowed for three-dimensional semantic analysis, in accordance with the idea of three-dimensional structure of experience, which includes practical, affective, and cognitive aspects. Thus, the interviewees described their first-hand experiences of Swiss primary schooling, expressed their emotions, quite often resorting to explicit and implicit comparisons, tried to interpret certain facts and situations. Though sometimes conflicting and suppressed, respondents' emotions and judgements were never imperceptible in a face-to-face interview since both verbal and non-verbal communication took place. Respondents' non-verbal responses were none the less important and signaled tacit assumptions that were immediately made explicit via unscheduled probes. Considering the target group's sensitivity and unawareness of the host-country realia and culture, we exploited the unscheduled prompts³² quite often to elicit clearer and more elaborate responses from the respondents, both parents and their children.

During the interviews, many respondents of the parents' sample admitted that they hadn't considered some aspects of the educational process of their children before and were no less interested than the interviewer herself in finding out what their children thought. Sometimes the parents' mere narrative was transformed into a dialogue between them and their children, a dialogue very interesting to observe and analyze. Thus, participant observation became a vital tool when interviewing the whole families as it allowed us to detect areas of some or much controversy on the suggested topics, among parents and children. The inductive approach to the research topic enabled us to obtain some unexpected answers and observe interesting behavior patterns revealing the interviewees' true perspectives on primary school. The analysis of the individual narratives revealed a variety of the respondents' personal experiences of Swiss primary schooling related to the individual educational and social background.

Besides, all children (with a single exception of the child with speech disorder) were asked to describe their typical school day, which enabled us to get a clearer idea of how young learners feel about their inclusion in the new educational environment; to see how differently they perceive their school, teachers, peers, new rules, etc., and how much of what they are exposed to at school is meaningful for them, and finally, to reveal different

³² Berg, B.L. *Qualitative research methods for the social science* (3rd ed.). Toronto: Allyn & Bacon. 1989.

scenarios of their integration. Narrative interviews with children allowed for three-dimensional reconstruction of their school experiences: their action and interaction at school, their feelings and emotions associated with these (inter)actions, and their comprehension of these (inter)actions. Descriptions of the school day given by different children varied greatly in terms of the amount of information they provided, the choice and number of the details they focused on, ability/inability to verbalize and name school realia, explain what they do in class, etc.

Additionally, in the advanced stage of data acquisition, when most of the interviews had already been conducted, we realized that descriptions of some facts provided by our respondents were similarly insufficient or vague for an accurate identification within the system of Swiss school structure, methods, and participants' roles. To find explanations for those school realia which many respondents, both children and parents, talked about but were unable to consistently and clearly define, some classroom observation was also done within the project, both in heterogeneous regular and integration classes.

3. Data Analysis

Sample description. The research was carried out across the Canton of Zug (which includes 11 municipalities or 'Gemeinden', each having their municipal schools). Samples of 24 displaced Ukrainian parents and 26 children of primary school age³³ were obtained by sending an information letter to municipal primary schools for distribution among parents as well as through parents' social networks.

We conducted 24 joint semi-structured interviews with parents and their children. In 2 cases the whole family (both parents and the child) were interviewed. Children were interviewed in the presence of a parent and with their full consent. All participants were anonymized in the further data analysis. Our respondents included parents aged 26–52, 22 mothers and 2 fathers, all of them staying in the Canton of Zug, where their children aged 7–12 have been attending cantonal primary schools in one of 5 municipalities since they were granted protection status (S permit) and registered in the Canton of Zug.

The parents' sample comprises parents of different social status, income, number of children in the family (3 of the interviewed families are large families with 3 to 6 children), educational and professional background, place of residence in Ukraine (we interviewed parents from 12 different cities of 10 regions of Ukraine). The sample is also varied in the conditions

³³ Note that in Ukraine, primary school lasts 4 years & comprises grades 1 to 4 (ca. age 6–9), whereas in the Canton of Zug, primary school (Primarschule) lasts 6 years & comprises grades 1 to 6 (ca. age 6–11/12).

of their accommodation in Switzerland (4 – privately accommodated, 4 – staying with their host-families, and 16 – collectively accommodated families); being displaced as a whole family with their father (8) or staying without the fathers who remain in Ukraine (16); post-displacement social-economic status – families who are fully on social provision (20) and who have found jobs in Switzerland and partially provide for their living (4); some level of German language proficiency as of the date of displacement (those who could speak German – 1, those who could speak English – 6, those who could speak German and English – 1, those who could speak none of foreign languages – 16).

The sample of children is varied in age (7 to 12); gender (10 girls and 16 boys); type of school attended in Ukraine (regular comprehensive, specializing in languages, private school with full-day care, nursery); type of post-displacement education scheme (regular Swiss class, integration class for Ukrainians, parallel learning scheme combining integration class and part-time learning in a regular Swiss class); period of inclusion in education in Switzerland by the moment of the interview (from 4 to 10 months); a foreign language competence prior to displacement; scholarly performance prior to displacement; post-displacement involvement in extra-curricular activities (sports, etc.).

Categorization of data. The perception of the Swiss primary education and its assessment by the Ukrainian respondents in most cases were influenced by both post-displacement factors (knowledge of the new school culture, type of school setting, effectiveness of communication between all participants of education process, uncertainty about life prospects, etc.) and pre-displacement factors (parents' expectations about education in the life of their children, educational and professional background of parents including their competence in foreign languages, social competences of children, foreign language competence of children, prior school experiences of children in Ukraine, etc.).

In the subsections that follow, we present the perspectives of both parents and their children expressed during the interviews. In categorization of the obtained data, we rely on those facts that were repeatedly emphasized by the respondents, though their evaluation of the identified facts were far from homogeneous.

3.1. School setting

Education schemes. The displaced children reported they were included in different classes: international DaZ (Deutsch als Zweitsprache / German as a second language) classes, integration classes for Ukrainians only, or regular Swiss classes. Most of them spent 2–3 months in integration classes, and then were transferred to regular Swiss classes. These children either

have some hours of additional individual instruction in the German language or join DaZ classes where they continue learning German in small international groups (scheme 1). The second group of children were placed in integration classes and stayed there for half a year or longer (scheme 2). Some municipalities have set up a scheme whereby the children who attend integration classes, can join regular Swiss classes two days a week, thus following two educational programs (scheme 3). Being exposed to a variety of inclusion schemes, Ukrainian primary schoolers report very different experiences, from the very successful to the completely frustrating. These experiences show that it is not merely German language competence that plays the main role in determining which scheme the child will follow. Other relevant factors include the availability/capacity of certain regular classes at schools in the area of the family accommodation, the lack of teachers for DaZ classes at schools, the child's ineligibility to be transferred to a regular Swiss class due to the lack of social competencies and, as a result, bad behavior (as assessed by Swiss school teachers). The interviewed parents also report their inability to choose or influence the choice of school or class for their children, as their opinions are not considered by the local school authorities. The interviews revealed that scheme 1 is more effective for integrating children and is better accepted by parents. Schemes 2 and 3 cause a lot of criticism from parents, do not contribute much to the integration of children, and are not perceived by many parents and children as an equivalent alternative to the Ukrainian school. Class observation done in all types of classes, where schemes 1–3 are implemented, confirmed the challenges reported by both parents and children.

Scheme 1. Regular class setting. Most children were placed in regular Swiss classes after a short stay (2–3 months) in the integration class. Here, it should be reminded that a regular class at a Swiss primary school is usually a heterogeneous class with an average of 19,4 students (a class of 24 students being considered large by Swiss standards³⁴). The stories of children placed in a regular classroom setting suggest two very different scenarios, which largely determine the displaced families' perspectives on the Swiss school.

Scenario 1. Children enacting this scenario, were able to quickly adapt to the new school setting and began to master a new education program. These are mainly children aged 7–8 who were initially placed in kindergarten, which was very helpful for their smooth entry into Swiss primary education, and then transferred to the first grade of school. Having no school experience prior to displacement, these kids don't have to struggle through transition period trying to figure out why the school rules they know

³⁴ Swiss Education Report 2023. P. 72. URL: [Swiss education report 2023 \(skbf-csre.ch\)](https://www.skbf-csre.ch)

no longer work. Also, these kids find great support from the teachers and report an exhilarating experience of being part of the heterogeneous classroom population, which they, to a greater extent than older children, perceive as natural. Favorable factors in this scenario prove to be the following: starting-school age of children, when learning is an interactive process with much time devoted to play; ongoing assistance in learning the school language; a smaller class size; full acceptance of and trust in the school by parents; parents with higher education background, competence in a foreign language and, sometimes, experience of working for international companies, in their employment history; parents' high motivation for integration; families in which both parents are displaced. Additionally, inclusion of the displaced kids in primary education at the age of starting school (7–8) coincides with the period of the transition for all kids, including heterogeneous Swiss kids' population, from pre-school to school environment, which brings about similar challenges and tensions of adjustment for all pre-schoolers. The collective transition factor minimizes the risk of not adjusting well to the first year at school and helps the displaced kids find their place in a new group.

Successful experience of a regular class setting for older children (aged 10–12), in all reported cases, correlates with their competence in a foreign language (English or German) by the moment of displacement, as well as at least one or several of the following factors: good socializing skills; having a friend among Swiss classmates (those friendships being generally developed through active participation in a common team sport and joint training); having a friend among foreign-language-speaking classmates with a migration background (or expats), communication with whom is only possible in the language they both speak (e.g. English), and learning German becomes a joint endeavor, a practical necessity that increases a displaced student's motivation for learning it; children with stronger self-efficacy beliefs; parents' competence in a foreign language (usually English); parents' high motivation for integration.

Scenario 2. Another, more numerous, group of children report the traumatic and humbling experience of the regular class setting. The main difficulties mentioned by these children are a) lack of communication with peers due to the lack of knowledge of the school language; b) meaningless learning, for the same reason; c) bullying and rejection of the child by the Swiss class (reported by children aged 10–12); d) difficulties in overcoming social and cultural barriers; e) difficulties in accepting the new school culture.

Parents of children affected by both physical and verbal intimidation in the regular class settings reported that children often cried, especially in the first months of their inclusion; became withdrawn; were reluctant to go to

school; would avoid communication with classmates after an intimidating situation; started to fight (although they had never fought before); kept on asking when they could finally go home. The children themselves said that they did not want to go to school; missed their friends and their Ukrainian school and would like to go home; admitted they had to fight to defend themselves; reported they did not find support from the teacher in dealing with bullies and resolving conflicts. Factors facilitating intimidation-affected students' adjustment to the regular class setting include their past experience of professional and competitive sports that helps the child stand up for themselves and increases their resilience to stress; the presence of other Ukrainian students with a similar displacement background, in their class or in school; communication with Ukrainian classmates as part of online learning; interaction with Ukrainian peers in places of collective accommodation of displaced families (for those who live there); involvement in some kind of sports activities beyond compulsory school; parental support; or the help of a child psychologist.

Scheme 2. Integration class for Ukrainians. This scheme has brought about much controversy and argument among the Ukrainian parents. The outcomes of this scheme are determined by the five key factors reported by parents: 1) the age differentiation of the students in the classroom; 2) the duration of the program; 3) the effective/ineffective classroom management; 4) meaningful learning and meaningful teacher-student interaction in the classroom; 5) the opportunity to communicate with Swiss peers. Integration classes are perceived approvingly, if the students who attend them are grouped and taught according to their age and level of knowledge; if the integration class program lasts 2–4 months and is followed by the transition of a student to a regular Swiss class; if the integration class teachers are efficient in ensuring children's emotional well-being, discipline, and meaningful learning; if the communication with Swiss peers is part of the program. If one or more of the above conditions are not met, parents' perception of the integration class is much more disapproving. Below is the perspective of the mother whose three children (7, 11 and 12 years old) were placed in a mixed-age integration class for Ukrainian students for almost six months:

'We had problems with older boys. Teachers ask us why the kids misbehave. They are complaining about poor discipline. (...) But here, they have a completely different education system. Teachers try to do everything possible to have a way with our children, but our children are completely different, they are used to a completely different system, to different rules. They do not understand what teachers want from them, what they should do, why they are in the same class with smaller kids. They don't like it; it irritates them, their reactions are different. At first, one of our boys had

attacks of aggression, there were tantrums, both at home and with friends, and also at school. We even tried to find a psychologist, spent more time with the children, tried to help the son cope with the aggression. And he would ask 'why teachers are playing with us here, why they are babying us?' Their main principle here is 'kein Stress' and emotional comfort. But our children perceive it in a different way – they already feel like grown-ups, not just because of their age, but intellectually. The eldest son is physically older than his years, and already thinks differently, he has begun a transition period. Well, how can he be learning in the same class with eight-year-old children!?! Of course, the kids are very upset about this'. (P7)³⁵

There are cases, when integration class teachers decide on the age-based streaming of the students and share their roles accordingly. If the teacher is the one with migration background and Ukrainian speaking, it's beneficial for both the students and parents. Students benefit from meaningful learning (because they are explained in their native language what is expected and what is required from them at school), while parents have an opportunity to closely communicate with the teacher and get their feedback regularly.

Still, parents may not like such school setting if the child remains in the integration class for a long time, despite their sufficient progress in German, which enables them to fully understand teachers' instruction and speak quite fluently. Parents report that the narrow curriculum (the integration class academic program covers only two of the core subjects – German and maths) makes the child's school boring, badly affects their motivation to learn, and causes emotional problems, while a lack of communication with Swiss peers seriously hinders their integration. Particularly, it applies to the older children, with above-average verbal abilities and quite strong self-efficacy beliefs, who report missing a more challenging Ukrainian curriculum as well as a variety of extra-curricular activities whereby they could realize their capabilities and talents. E.g., 11-year-old Davyd (hereinafter all names of the respondents are anonymized and changed), who is fairly fluent in German eight months after starting his language classes and is taught only two subjects in his integration class, talks more about his Ukrainian school experience and says he continues to work on various projects on his own. His story suggests he does not realize his intellectual and critical faculties enough at school and would expect more from the Swiss curriculum:

'I like everything at school. I have no difficulties at all. But I wish I had sports and swimming. And also, you know, I have a project about space, and another one about animals. I work on my own projects, e.g., about guinea

³⁵ All quotations from parents and primary school students are designated by letters P (Parent) and S (Student), respectively. All interview fragments cited in this paper are translated by the author.

pigs, about dinosaurs, and horses. I have seven projects already. My last project was about different countries. We worked in groups of 5, and then made presentations about our country. I look for the information on the Internet and work on my projects. I would like to have some teamwork here as well. And also, I like reading very much. I am always reading books about animals. There are a lot of books at school'. (S26)

‘The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves’³⁶. Children with stronger self-efficacy do seek challenges that provide opportunities to expand their knowledge and competences and generate motivation. If they feel that they are under-challenged at school and cannot satisfy their aspirations, both scholastic and social, their motivation becomes lower.

Scheme 3. Parallel learning. This scheme assumes that at a certain stage of learning in the integration class, the child begins to attend the regular Swiss class once or twice a week, to get familiarized with the local education system and begin to integrate. The idea of such parallel learning is, in itself, good and constructive, and at the beginning is perceived enthusiastically by many children and parents. However, the outcomes of this approach do not always meet the expectations of both. Moreover, in some cases, the effect of parallel learning negatively affects the psychological and emotional well-being of the child. Placed in an integration class, children begin to get used to the new schedule and rules, to their Swiss teachers, make friends with classmates, start recovering a little from the stress they had experienced, gain a sense of security, team spirit, and attachment to the teachers. Though their knowledge of German is still quite poor, they learn the language of instruction, which ensures their meaningful learning. The language of peer communication in the classroom is still the students’ mother tongue since all of them are Ukrainians, which enables them to socialize and feel part of the group. And at this point, children are to join a regular Swiss class, for just a few lessons a day, in the morning or in the afternoon, where the school language is Swiss, which makes the learning less meaningful again. Their knowledge of German is still insufficient to feel comfortable and confident when communicating with Swiss peers who naturally speak Swiss German at school. Thus, instead of increased motivation for learning and smooth integration, the child develops rejection and fear of communication. Such are the cases when the successful experience of the integration class learning is followed by less successful or even frustrating experiences of the regular class setting. Parents who report the transition to parallel learning scheme being frustrating rather than beneficial for their kids, speak about the kids’

³⁶ Bandura, A. Perceived Self-Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning. *EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST*. 1993. 28(2). P. 117–148. URL: Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. (apa.org)

reluctance to go to regular Swiss classes, where they encounter great difficulties in communication with Swiss peers and comprehension of teachers' instruction, and therefore experience high emotional stress.

'It's difficult for my daughter to go to the Swiss class, she is always under stress. She has always been sociable, active, athletic, always in the spotlight. And here, in the Swiss class, she has big problems with communication. She simply does not communicate with anyone, because she does not understand them. She simply doesn't want to go, she used to cry a lot because of it. If she could, she wouldn't go there at all. She feels isolated there, alone, just an outcast, and therefore does not want to go. And in the integration class, where she understands everything, she likes it'. (P20)

'My daughter doesn't want to go to a Swiss school. I ask her 'Well, you don't want to, but you dreamed of learning languages, why don't you go?' and she says 'Dad, they speak Swiss, not even German. I don't understand anything'. As a father, I tell her that she should grin and bear it, just go and do everything that is offered here. I would go, suffer, but go, and she – is suffering, stressed, and doesn't want to go because she doesn't understand anything. If all our children were first taught German, so that there would be a smooth entry to their school program! After all, without a language, she doesn't receive any knowledge here. She is under stress and simply doesn't learn anything.' (P 21)

'I really like the attitude of Swiss teachers towards our children. They even learned carols, so that later they could sing them at the Christmas concert. I, myself, took part in the concert. We sang there and prepared treats. I like everything in the integration class. But I am very worried about the Swiss class. At first it was especially difficult. They put my daughter in the back desk, where she was sitting for the whole month, no one helped her, she just would come and sit there, and then would go home. Is there really no tutor to help the child? My daughter still worries a lot when she goes to a Swiss school, she cries, she is very uncomfortable there. She is like a hedgehog at the back desk, all by herself. I thought that the child would adapt, but no, everything is still the same'. (P19)

In the latter case, it is the role of the teacher that is the determining factor in strengthening the child's motivation for going to school. A few hours a week attended by the Ukrainian child are likely to be perceived by some teachers as complementary to the student's main scheme of learning and, thus, outside the area of a regular class teacher's responsibility, which might seriously affect the student's integration. Uninvited for active participation in the lessons and communication with peers, the child, in fact, turns out to be excluded from the classroom learning and integration process. Faced with exclusion, children ask their parents why they should go to the regular class if they don't understand and don't do anything there. Thus, students' as well

as parents' high expectations about the benefits of the regular Swiss class setting fail to be realized, and the school experience, which was supposed to increase a student's motivation and facilitate their inclusion, in fact, causes stress, alienation, and in the worst case, the child's rejection of school. Children with similarly painful experiences say they would rather stay in the integration class than be transferred to a regular Swiss class. They feel happier and more comfortable when socializing with their Ukrainian peers and report feeling excluded while attending regular Swiss classes.

3.2. School curriculum

Learn by experience. Benefits of the Swiss school. All parents find the Swiss primary school system very different from the Ukrainian one. Among the clear advantages of the Swiss school, they report safety, empirical learning method, very well-organized handicrafts and textiles lessons, increased focus on sports, breaks in the open air, variety of walking tours, familiarization of children with nature, great kindness of Swiss teachers, no pressure on children, equality in the classroom, individual approach to every child, prime importance placed on the child's well-being and emotional development, creative methods, friendly environment, well-organized classroom space. Interviews with children revealed their almost unanimous excitement about sports, the swimming-pool, lessons of visual arts and handicrafts, kind teachers, school buses, freedom they have at school, breaks in the open air, very well-equipped gyms and playgrounds, walking tours to farms, the variety of digital aids used in classroom setting.

'Here is a completely different approach. The system is interesting. Look, how they teach children here – through practice, through tactile knowledge of the world. For example, a ЯДС lesson (Я досліджую свім / I explore the world), as it is organized in Ukraine: the children are shown a potato, here is a seed, and now it has grown. And here, they go to the garden and plant a seed, and then they look at what has grown from it. They go on a walking tour, look at the leaves, at the pebbles.' (P3)

'I really like the creative approach to the learning process. If they study a man, they create a man. All parts of the body are studied creatively. They use a lot of illustrations and visual aids in classes.' (P7)

'My son really enjoyed the hike in the forest. He was allowed to take a knife with him, he could cut something, chop, do something. We do not allow him to take a knife at all, but here they allowed him, so he was very happy. He also likes the handicrafts. He brought some kind of cube from school, self-tapping screws. They screw something there, they make something.' (P12)

'There is a completely different system and approach. In the Ukrainian school, they are guided by the best student, the dull one is asked to go to a

second-rate school, not to slow down the learning process; in the Swiss school, they help the dull one so that there are no bad students.’ (P3)

‘Swiss school cares more about the emotional well-being and comfort of the child, and not about the high level of knowledge. I love it.’ (P9)

‘The main difference is in the educational process. There is less swotting, more attention is paid to the abilities of the child.’ (P5)

‘In the Ukrainian school the priority is knowledge, in the Swiss school – emotional development, the opportunity for the child to understand what he likes.’ (P23)

Easy School. Pros and Cons. Despite a considerable number of advantages of the Swiss primary school reported by the Ukrainian parents, all interviewed parents, without exception, consider the Swiss curriculum too easy and unchallenging in comparison with the Ukrainian one. However, opinions of the parents regarding the two curricula that differ much in complexity and set of subjects, vary greatly depending on the age of their child, the child’s pre-displacement school experience and academic performance, child’s perceived self-efficacy, parents’ expectations about the child’s education, parents’ understanding of the objectives and responsibilities of the Swiss primary school.

Parents of 1st-2nd grade students tend to see more advantages in a less challenging Swiss curriculum. They are happy that their children are not overloaded at school, have no homework, suffer no pressure or stress at school, don’t require the parents’ considerable assistance and involvement in educational process. This opinion is also shared by some parents with multiple children. A mother of three children (12, 10 and 5 years old) says:

‘The curriculum is better here, in Switzerland, it’s easier. I don’t like that in Ukraine they stuff children’s heads with everything, even with what is not needed at all. What is the most important thing in life? I have always told my sons that the most important thing is to grow up a good person, to know your goal and work towards it, to be a good husband, a good father. It would be better if there was a lesson where they taught how to be a good husband.’ (P9)

Still, most parents of older children report that the Swiss primary school curriculum is narrow and not challenging enough to motivate the children for learning, the knowledge they receive is insufficient for their age and grade, the school is more like kindergarten in its requirements and attitude to children. No doubt, when making such conclusions, parents rely on what their children say about the content of the subjects, the complexity of the material, how demanding teachers are, how well their Swiss peers perform. Despite limited grading practices and teachers’ evaluations of students’ scholastic performances in Swiss primary school, in their classroom work, displaced students receive some information about their capabilities from

the teachers and by comparing themselves with other students in the classroom. Parents whose children feel scholastically ahead of the class of their inclusion (except for the German language competence, which is *a priori* low or absent), report that their kids are under-challenged at school, are bored in the lessons, don't do anything at home, don't improve in mathematics and natural sciences. The mother of a 3rd grade student of a Swiss regular class, reports:

'What are they doing here? They collect snails, go to the forest, come home without a schoolbag, only twice a week with a schoolbag, when there is some homework. Everything here reminds me of kindergarten. In Ukraine, school is more difficult.' (P6:S: Grade 3_aged 10)

The mother of a 5th grade student of a Swiss regular class is very straightforward about her son's school experience:

'This is not education! They teach them to brush their teeth! Is this education? They do a lot of unnecessary things, but our kids are not three-year-olds! When my son tells me what they are doing at school, I am shocked. He tells me 'Mom, when will we go home? I'm getting dumb here.' My son was never a brilliant student, and here, they invited me to the school for three times already, just to say what a bright kid he is, how smart he is. They try to give him more challenging assignments to keep him engaged, but he still easily copes with them.' (P22:S: Grade 5_aged 11)

Parents of the children placed in the integration classes are especially concerned about the extremely simple curriculum, where the set of subjects is limited to only two – German and mathematics, while the latter does not correspond to the level of knowledge of the Ukrainian students. The mother of 7, 11 and 12-year-old students of the integration class for Ukrainians strongly disapproves of the fact that all her children were placed in one mixed class only because of the need to learn the language, regardless of their age and level of knowledge:

'Now all three children are in the same class, and the older ones are bored, there are no difficulties in mathematics, since the curriculum at the Ukrainian school is much ahead of the Swiss one. There, in the 5th grade, they are already studying geometry, fractions, units of measurement. And here, in the mixed class, they are given the multiplication table. The kids are just downgrading. Many parents don't like it. We talked about it with the teachers, but they couldn't do anything. We were told that until the children learned German, they would be taught in a mixed class. But there is no progress, they see it for themselves.' (P7)

Some parents, though unhappy about content imbalance in the integration class curriculum, fully understand why the curriculum focuses on language learning:

'Here the school is much easier, the 5th and 6th grades are easy, compared to the Ukrainian ones. There is no homework, the child is almost not busy since the school day ends at 12 o'clock. Mathematics is only thirty minutes, and German is 2 hours. They understand that here, to get a job, you, first of all, need a language, and then everything else. That's why the lessons are so different. The priority is the language!' (P24)

Others, in their effort to quickly familiarize the child with the mainstream subject-based curriculum, tend to overlook the possible negative consequences of the early transfer of a child to a regular class scheme related to the insufficient knowledge of the school language and, as a result, limited access to meaningful learning and interaction. More often, parents hope that their child will be able to adapt and cope with a more engaging curriculum well and underestimate the risks that await a child in a regular classroom for which their child may not be ready (see section 3.1.: Scheme 1. Scenario 2).

Speaking about the insufficient complexity of Swiss curriculum, parents often mention mathematics, which most of them consider an important subject that largely determines the level of knowledge of the child.

'The Ukrainian school program in mathematics is more difficult. In the 3rd grade of the Ukrainian school, children are already learning how to multiply and divide three-digit numbers by two-digit numbers in a column, but here in the 3rd grade they still do addition and subtraction.' (P10)

Most students report that mathematics is too easy and boring for them in Swiss school, the content and form of the assignments are different, the methods of arithmetical calculations are different and inconvenient, the multiplication table is taught in a different sequence and much later than in a Ukrainian school, etc. While quick learners with higher academic expectations and stronger self-efficacy beliefs are unhappy about their unchallenging mathematics curriculum, low-to-average performing students with lower academic expectations prior to their displacement, particularly those who have great difficulties in learning German and understanding teachers' instruction, are happy to emphasize that they perform on assignments and tests faster and better than their Swiss peers, and it is in mathematics that they feel more confident and receive praise from the teachers.

'I like mathematics, because I am the very first to hand in the completed tasks, and I do tests the fastest in the class. The teacher says 'Gut', sometimes he says 'Sehr Gut'.' (S13: Grade 2_aged 8)

'I like it when the teacher says I am good at maths. He says 'Gut'. I always get 'Gut' for the tests. We did a test last week. There were sixteen assignments. I got four points out of five. I want to be the first in maths.' (S15: Grade 4_aged 11)

Also, these students make it clear that teachers' evaluation of their performance is extremely important for them. Since they lack knowledge of the school language, they cannot demonstrate much of their knowledge and skills in most subjects requiring verbal competencies. Perception of doing well in maths enhances their self-satisfaction and self-esteem, and generates motivation for learning. And although children are well aware that they perform better not because they have acquired a new skill or expanded their knowledge but because they repeat what they have already learned, they are happy to seize a wonderful opportunity to get recognition and praise in the classroom.

'In maths, I'm the first to hand in tests in the class! Mom, in fact, we learned the entire multiplication table in the Ukrainian school! I can't do division well, but everything else is fine. I'd like them to give us marks here! In maths, swimming, sports, and drawing, I would have highest marks!' (S13: Grade2_aged 8)

'I am doing well at school. Only three kids in my class speak English as well as I do, and everyone else either does not know it or knows very little. And the teacher says, 'Good job', when I do the multiplication faster than everyone else – I already learned everything in the 4th grade [in Ukraine].' (S20: Grade 5_aged 11)

Regardless of age, performance accomplishments, favorite subjects, curriculum design, etc., only those children who understand *what* they are told and taught in the classroom report that they like school.

'Now I like school. It used to be difficult when my German was bad. I didn't like it a couple of months ago, but now it's just awesome! I've been getting it for two weeks now. After the holidays it started working. My German is better now, and I began to understand everything that I did not understand before. I already understand 70 percent in all lessons. It's dictations that 'kill' me: you hear everything, but you can't write it down in any way. But this is just the beginning. My progress is fast.' (S14: Grade 5_aged 12)

Thus, it is meaningful learning that greatly affects the perception of school by students. Once learning becomes meaningful, there is higher motivation for learning and a genuine appreciation and excitement of school.

'Today we had three different lessons. First, I was reading for thirty minutes. This is not a lesson, just this month we read a lot, this month is devoted to reading. Then I did the maths on the computer, then I prepared the presentation of my poster. Do you know how children learn about different professions here? They can go to the place their parents work, for example. They just watch them doing their work, then read about this profession on the Internet. It's called Zukunftstag. Everyone chooses a job

for themselves, what they want to be. Three students chose a doctor, I chose a gardener. On the Internet, we find out how long you need to study for this job, what you need to know for this job, how many hours they work, how much they get paid for this job. A gardener can get 5'000 CHF a month, and you must work eight hours a day.' (S14: Grade 5_aged 12)

Favorite lessons. In the interview, we asked the children what their favorite subjects were in Ukrainian school, and what subjects they like most in Swiss school. Mathematics, English, Ukrainian language and literature, geography, natural studies, and sports were reported favorite lessons in Ukrainian school by most primary students. Sports (including swimming), handicrafts and textiles, visual arts, and German were reported favorite in Swiss school by most Ukrainian children. So, we see a distinct shift in children's preferences from sciences towards sports, handicrafts, and visual arts. These data well correlate with the main strengths of the Ukrainian and Swiss primary school curricula, as reported by both parents and children. The responses of children revealed some interesting facts: (a) Those children who reported mathematics to be their favorite subject in Ukrainian school, say that in Swiss school they like sports, handicrafts, and German because mathematics is too simple and boring for them. (b) No child reported the Ukrainian equivalent of the handicrafts lesson to be their favorite in Ukrainian school, while almost all children mentioned it among favorite lessons in Swiss school. (c) More self-organized and motivated Ukrainian students demonstrate an increasing interest in German and report it among their favorite lessons. They tend to take advantage of the academically less-challenging primary school curriculum, to learn German, which is essential for their meaningful learning, communication, and socialization. These are mostly 10 to 12-year-olds with high self-esteem and high self-efficacy in mathematics, natural sciences, and English.

Visual arts and Textiles, as well as Handicrafts, were reported by all interviewed primary students among their favorite lessons. The children described these lessons with much detail, telling what they drew or created, and if it was possible, demonstrated crafts made by their own hands. They were joyfully sharing the impressions about weaving, knitting, embroidering, modeling, sewing on a sewing machine, practicing papier-mâché, cutting wood with a saw, carving some stone figures etc., expressing admiration at some effects of the mastered techniques. This unanimity of opinion is easy to understand. First, most children admitted that they had never before had such an opportunity to try their hand at various crafts and practical skills at school. Second, arts lessons, like sports, are a place where they feel safe and happy, suffer no stress caused by communication barrier or exclusion. Being a universally recognized means of dealing with

posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, ADHD, fear, etc., arts turn to have potential therapeutic effect on displaced children³⁷.

Many parents report their children being happy when they make something with their hands at school. It's arts and handicrafts lessons that turn out to be a kind of 'comfort zone', where children experience less stress from not knowing the school language. The father of a 10-year-old student says:

'My daughter likes handicrafts lessons. After the handicrafts, the daughter comes home happy, always brings something that she made with her own hands. And there is no need to say much in these lessons. There is no language – and that's it, she likes it!' (P21)

When invited to describe their school day, many children asked if they could describe the day, they had a sports or arts lesson, because it was their favorite day. Talking about his school day, 11-year-old Illya distinguishes between mathematics and German on the one hand, and 'something interesting', on the other. He gives the most exhaustive explanation a researcher could expect: *'Mathematics is boring. German is difficult. The rest is fun.'* (S20)

What is taught at school? Ukrainian parents' perspectives on the new education system are based primarily on their knowledge of this system, so the question of *what* parents know about the Swiss school and its methods was the key one for the research. Parents (who can speak German or English and tend to establish some communication with school teachers) say that their communication primarily concerns the child's attendance, reasons for the child's being absent from school, some short feedback on their performance and behavior, the program of upcoming school events. Information about the school's inner structure, 'unsaid' conventional rules, the role of a teacher and school in general (i.e., develop social competences, teach norms of behavior, responsibilities and self-discipline, instill in students the love for nature, develop a variety of practical skills necessary for the future life, ensure fair division of students by the beginning of the secondary school, etc.) is not delivered to parents directly and officially, leaving them confused and skeptical about Swiss primary school true values. The most skeptical parents are those whose children had 2 to 4 years of school before displacement, studied in big cities, attended specialized schools, showed high academic performance, have high motivation for learning. The mother of an 11-year-old student with high education expectations, thinks that *'They don't teach anything in Swiss schools. It's a Disneyland'*. Such assessment of primary school education by the parent is

³⁷ Schouten, K., Knipscheer, J. Trauma-Focused Art Therapy in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Pilot Study. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*. 2018. 20 (1). P. 1–17. URL: (PDF) Trauma-Focused Art Therapy in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Pilot Study (researchgate.net)

based largely on a comparison of requirements for the core academic subjects in the two national curricula, other equally important components of the educational process remaining underestimated. Few displaced parents know that for a Swiss teacher it's critical to teach a child how to communicate with others, how to speak to others, respect others, etc., which means that along with academic competences, Swiss primary school focuses much on *social competences*, such as social behavior, self-organization, social autonomy, independence, etc. It's social competencies of students that are considered by many primary school teachers to be important and can become the rationale for a decision, though not always fair and reasonable from the displaced parents' perspective, on placement of their child on a certain education scheme. When parents, who are not familiar with the Swiss education system, say that their children do nothing at school, feel bored, and do not understand what they are taught, we should admit, it is not only due to a lack of knowledge of the school language, but also, due to a lack of understanding of *what else*, in fact, is taught at school, besides the core subjects. As one of the Swiss regular class teachers has put it, 'Not everything is visible, it's somewhere in the air of the classroom'. The less visible the content of education is, the more likely it is to be miscomprehended and underestimated by both students and parents. In addition, new teaching methods are also often an invisible component of the educational process. It is sometimes difficult for the Ukrainian parents to correctly understand and appreciate the teacher's role, because they are familiar with a completely different methodology, and the point of reference in evaluating the new system, as well as the invisible essentials taught in the Swiss classroom, remains the Ukrainian school.

For example, many children reported that they often draw not only in visual arts lessons, but also in other lessons, including maths and languages. The average Ukrainian parent is likely to ask *why*, and in the absence of the definite logical answer (which their kids cannot give them), have an opinion that their children receive little knowledge at school and are mainly engaged in the activities which most parents associate with the kindergarten curriculum. Whereas all children were able to formulate what they usually do in visual arts lessons and what instructions their teachers give them (e.g., they practiced different techniques, such as drawing with pencils, chalk, ink, gouache, etc., learned to draw the head of an animal, learned to make a snow effect in a drawing, or a light and shadow effect, etc.), they failed to clearly explain *what* exactly and *why* they draw in other lessons, though they all, regardless of age, grade of study, or performance rate, admitted it to be a great fun. In fact, students were talking about '*coloring pictures*' (8-year-old child), '*various shapes and unusual patterns*' (9-year-old) or '*animalistic and geometric images*' (10-year-old), which seems strange from the point

of view of the Ukrainian primary school maths or foreign language curriculum. Further classroom observation made it possible to look at the pedagogical values of drawing incorporated in classroom teaching from a different angle and understand why children often fail to explain both the object and the purpose of drawing. One of the most obscure for children drawing practices is mandala practice, widely employed by the Swiss primary school teachers and not known to Ukrainian kids. If parents knew more about this widely spread practice, they would probably appreciate its meaning and educational role. Mandala practice is a good example of *what else* is taught at school along with the skills directly related to a particular subject. Thus, a mandala (from Sanskrit ‘circle’) is a geometric configuration of symbols, originally used for focusing attention of practitioners, as an aid to meditation. Re-introduced by C.G. Jung into modern Western thought, mandalas were ascribed the power of self-rebalancing, harmonization, restoring a previously existing order³⁸. Their wide use in classroom management due to “their calming effect on students and their ability to expand creativity” has been acknowledged by many teachers and researchers (Fitzell³⁹; Campenni, Hartman 2020⁴⁰). I was greatly impressed by the effectiveness of mandala practice in classroom management and its magic effects on the 2nd grade students. Mandalas helped the teacher calm down the noisy and agitated students after the music lesson and achieve much-sought self-concentration of students before doing some intellectually demanding tasks in maths. Students had time for peace and quiet, reflection and relaxation, for smooth switchover to a different classroom activity. Through coloring mandalas, students learn to be patient and persevering in completing the task, step-by-step bringing the task to an end (some mandala drawings are very complex and time-consuming); they develop sense of geometrical proportion and sense of beauty; they learn creativity since they create something never existing before as the choice of colors in doing mandalas is very individual. Mandala practices make children feel safe, quiet, concentrated, and ready to perceive information. The knowledge of *what* and *how* children are taught at Swiss school, as well as understanding of the educational goals (both strategic and practical) might help parents understand how much attention the Swiss school pays to the development of the child’s ability to organize their working time and efforts, control their emotions, distribute and restore energy, focus on the task, calmly and consciously switch attention, etc.

³⁸ Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/>

³⁹ Fitzell, S. URL: <https://susanfitzell.com/>

⁴⁰ Campenni, C. & Hartman, A. The Effects of Completing Mandalas on Mood, Anxiety, and State Mindfulness: Art Therapy. 2020. 37:1. P. 25–33. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/>

3.3. Time setting

The school day. Among the things that are reported by parents as the most difficult for children to adjust to in the new school system is the school day. The mother of 8-year-old Oles doesn't understand what lessons children have at school:

'I can't understand at all what lessons they have at school except swimming, sport, and handicrafts.' (P2)

The mother of 11-year-old Yeva voices a most frequent point of view of Ukrainian mothers:

'It's one very lengthy lesson! At first, the daughter could not understand what it was, a lesson or a break. One flows smoothly into the other. The school day is not well-organized, is very long, with two hours' break for lunch. Because of this, Yeva comes home later than she used to in Ukraine and has little time to do something else after school. The daughter dreams of taking music lessons, which requires time...' (P1)

For many families, the long school day is very inconvenient for both the children and parents. In Ukraine, the school allows mothers, if they want, to work during the day and pick up children from school at the end of the working day, which is simply impossible to do in Switzerland. The mother of five children, four of whom are at primary school, says:

In Ukraine, everything was easy. The children were in kindergarten and school all day long. I managed to work. I continued working while on maternity leave. I coped easily since the education system, both preschool and school, was well-organized. Everything is different here. I'd like to work, but due to the kids' school timetable I can't. They have a very long lunch break. This break is very inconvenient. The kids come home, eat lunch, relax, but then they have to go back to school. Such is the system.

(P14)

'Since I am at home with my second child, so far everything is fine, but if I worked, then how would the daughter cope with her lunch at home? It would be very difficult!' (P8)

The children don't like their schedule either. Many parents report that their children complain about lengthy school, get tired in the lessons, protest, and even refuse to go to school in the afternoon. The mother of 11-year-old Valeriia, reports:

'It is unusual for me that children study in two shifts – first in the morning, then come home, then go back to school in the afternoon. At first, it was just impossible to send the daughter to school after lunch. It was just an ordeal for her to go through, to go to school. Sometimes she just wouldn't go. She would say 'I won't go, that's all! I don't understand why I should go again after lunch!' We were even reprimanded officially for missing school.' (P15)

The school day of a Swiss primary schooler does, in fact, differ much from a typical day of a primary student in Ukraine. Ukrainian primary schoolers' descriptions of their usual school day at Swiss school, in most cases, testified to obvious difficulties in understanding and accepting the new daily routine perceived by them as lacking in organization and dynamics. Almost all children speak of the long day at school with no strictly delineated lessons and breaks. Describing their usual day at Swiss school, Ukrainian students quite often don't refer to lessons as such, but rather to certain activities that alternate smoothly. 11-year-old Yeva, a 5th grade student of a regular class, describes with much detail what they do during the day, accentuating the duration of the activities, as well as the breaks that help Yeva determine certain lessons:

*'I arrived at the school. The girls and I waited outside for the teacher. We came into the classroom. **The first lesson lasted for an hour and a half without a break.** We were doing French – reading, singing songs in French, writing a lot. We learnt kinship terms in French – mother, father, grandmother, grandfather. 'La soeur de mon pere est ma tante' – my father's sister is my aunt. Then we had a **pause**. We ate tangerines there [...]. Then we had German. We learnt consonants, single and double consonants ... well, those that are doubled. The topic was new, I quickly understood it, I did everything quickly. I'm generally good at thinking. There were many examples, they had to be grouped into columns. Then there was a **pause**. Everyone went home, and I stayed at school and ate there. In the dining-room. Walked a little, then went on to study. After a **pause**, the bell rang, and we stood and waited until the teacher came. Again, we did a little French, practiced, sang a song. **For about 15 minutes.** Then we were drawing something **until three o'clock**. In ink. We were making patterns. Then another **pause**, outside, **until 3:15**. Then we came back and were making a printed drawing of a rhinoceros, **until 4 o'clock**. It was necessary to make it beautiful with all sorts of small drawings inside the big rhinoceros. Then I went to the bus stop.'* (S2: Grade 5_aged 11)

8-year-old Bohdan, a 2nd grade student of a mixed integration class, could clearly discern neither the lessons nor the time frame of the activities:

'I woke up, got up, brushed my teeth, changed, had my breakfast, got on the bus, went to school. There was sports lesson, then I read, wrote, we did the work... [and do you remember what exactly you were doing? – I was trying to specify] ... well, we were reading, writing, then we had sports, we played pirates there, and sometimes we play other games, played catch-up. Then I went to the bus, went home, then back to school... again, we wrote, read, they give us some paper to write on. I also made a craft, and there are body parts made of paper. And on the other side of the paper there are names of body parts.' (S5: Grade 2_aged 8)

Most children report they don't like their long school day and the very short breaks between the lessons:

'What I don't like most about school is that there is a short break, five-ten minutes, and then another lesson...' (S15: Grade 4_aged 11)

'I don't like a long lesson of an hour and a half and only a five-minute break. I get tired of sitting. I'd like to run.' (S9: Grade 4_aged 10)

'I like the break most of all, as I can relax after a long lesson. The lesson lasts an hour and a half, and the break is very short, only five minutes, you can only drink some water and play Lego. But it's very little time and it's hard to sit for an hour and a half.' (S20: Grade 5_aged 11)

The description of the school day by 12-year-old Marko, a 5th grade student of a regular class, starts with the indication of time:

'It lasted for six hours, without a big break!' (S14: Grade 5_aged 12)

To understand why so many Ukrainian students feel uncomfortable with their day schedule, it is necessary to consider two important facts: 1) the daily schedule they got used to in their pre-displacement school practice; 2) the fact of mastering, *de facto* two education programs, instead of one, since all Ukrainian students, with rare exceptions, continue their studies at a Ukrainian school.

As far as a typical school day in a regular comprehensive school in Ukraine is concerned, it contains 4 to 6 lessons which last 30–45 minutes each (depending on the grade of study) and alternate with 10–15-minute breaks, with the longest 20–30-minute lunchbreak in the middle of the day. According to the *Ukrainian National Sanitary Regulations for institutions of general secondary education № 2205*, of Sept. 25, 2020⁴¹, education of students of grades 1–4 (constituting the primary school in Ukraine) should be organized in the first shift; the school day should not start earlier than 8:00 a.m.; the continuous educational activity of students (the duration of educational classes) cannot exceed: in the 1st grade – 35 min., 2–4th grades – 40 min., 5–6th grades – 45 min.; long breaks (more than 30 min.) between classes are not allowed; the duration of breaks between classes for students of grades 1–4 is recommended to be at least 15 min., grades 5–6 – at least 10 min., long breaks – 30 min. (for taking meals); instead of one long break, two 20-minute breaks can be arranged after the second and third classes – for students of grades 1–4. Hygiene rules that draw up a schedule of educational classes state that the peak of mental activity in school-aged children falls on the interval from 10 to 12 o'clock, that is why educational activities that require significant mental effort for students of grades 1–4 should be conducted in the 2–3rd educational classes.

⁴¹ САНІТАРНИЙ РЕГЛАМЕНТ для закладів загальної середньої освіти: затв. Наказом Міністерства охорони здоров'я України від 25 вересня 2020 р. № 2205. URL: Про затвердження Санітарного ре... | від 25.09.2020 № 2205 (rada.gov.ua)

Allowable total quantity hours (of classes) of students' weekly load for 5-day school week are the following: for grade 1–20, grade 2–22, grades 3–4–23, grade 5–28, grade 6–31. Thus, the change in the usual and well-established learning schedule, followed by Ukrainian students prior to displacement, brings about great difficulties for them and requires extra physical and mental effort to readjust to the new system.

Additionally, at the time when the Swiss primary schoolers end their school day, the active schooling of the Ukrainian children continues, and given the more academically challenging requirements of the Ukrainian primary school curriculum, the afternoon part of the day becomes the most active and stressful for many children, requiring greater mental effort and concentration of attention. According to the *Ukrainian National Sanitary Regulations for institutions of general secondary education*, in the conditions of martial law, for students who, while abroad, are receiving education in the afternoon shift in a distance form, classes must start no later than 4:00 p.m.⁴²

It is not surprising that children get tired faster, are often reluctant to go to school after a two-hour lunchbreak, and rush home after the end of the lessons. Their school day is stretched in time, they spend the first part of the day, which is the peak of their mental activity, at a Swiss school, trying to learn the language and integrate, and during the afternoon hours, are forced to catch up with their native curriculum and perform on assignments and tests, in order to be transferred to the next class in Ukraine.

3.4. School culture

At the initial stage of inclusion, it's not only the language barrier but also the absence of knowledge about school rules, school structure, school functions, principles of classroom management, rules of teacher-student and teacher-parent interaction, etc., which affect the perception of school by displaced learners. Conventionalized in every country, learnt from generations of parents who were, in their past, educated by the same system as their children, national school culture is something that is very well understood and taken for granted by the local population and miscomprehended by the refugee population both parents and children. What they know about school comes from their school experience in their home country. Their school expectations correlate with what they have known from their pre-displacement experience. In many cases parents are not helpful in children's adjusting to the new educational system just as they themselves don't know much about it and their knowledge is very

⁴² САНИТАРНИЙ РЕГЛАМЕНТ для закладів загальної середньої освіти: затв. Наказом Міністерства охорони здоров'я України від 25 вересня 2020 р. № 2205. URL: Про затвердження Санітарного ре... | від 25.09.2020 № 2205 (rada.gov.ua)

superficial, or what they know does not fit their conventional knowledge about school and that's why is badly misunderstood, opposed, or not accepted at all.

Parents' responses show that they don't get sufficient information about Swiss school. As a rule, parents are introduced to the new system at the very start of their children's inclusion and informed about the school lessons, schedule, oncoming school events, things their children are supposed to bring to school to be equipped for the lessons (e.g., a lunch box, changing shoes, sportswear, swimming-pool necessities, etc.). Many parents say they met the teacher in person only once, at the very beginning of the child's studies and talked to them through an interpreter. Others mention the intermediary and informative role of a social worker.

'At the very beginning of school, there was a conversation with a social worker who introduced us to the week schedule. I learned that children study English, and from grade 5, French. The school has a swimming-pool. For half a day, children study the main program, and for the remaining half they may go to the pool, have sports, visual arts, handicrafts lessons. There are also additional classes in German.' (P11)

Ukrainian parents, like many other non-Swiss parents, who are not familiar with the Swiss education system, are unlikely to know or, if they do, are ready to accept the principles on which Swiss primary education is built. For example, many parents find it difficult to get used to the fact that they are no longer actively involved in the child's school life and can neither communicate closely with the teacher nor influence school-related decisions. While the Ukrainian school is likely to recognize an active role of parents and exercise 'partnership pedagogy'⁴³ or 'family-school partnership'⁴⁴, the Swiss one is perceived to require absolute trust in the teachers' authority and expertise. As one Swiss primary school teacher has put it, 'teachers are here not to please the parents, but to support the kids', which suggests that a Ukrainian parent must entrust their child to the school and be patient. The fundamental difference in the extent of parental involvement in the child's education often causes misunderstanding between displaced parents and local teachers and/or school officials, and ultimately has a destructive effect on children, reducing motivation and impeding the integration of the latter.

⁴³ Нова українська школа. Концептуальні засади реформування середньої школи. URL: <https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/zagalna%20serednya/nova-ukrainska-shkola-compressed.pdf>

⁴⁴ Willemsse, T.M., Thompson, I., Vanderlinde, R., Mutton, T. Family-school partnerships: a challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. 2018. Vol. 44 (3). P. 252–257. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465545>

Another frequent complaint from displaced parents related to the peculiarities of the Swiss school is why the child should go to school if they are sick, unless they have a high fever, and why it is necessary to inform the teacher every day of the absence of the child and confirm their illness, which, from the point of view of parents, implies both the school's distrust of parents and frivolous attitude to the health of the child. Issues related to the health of children are traditionally a priority for Ukrainian parents, and the fact that a sick child stays and recovers at home is the norm in Ukraine.

Similarly, it is generally accepted norm in Ukraine that primary school children do homework after school, which is set in all subjects and regularly. Therefore, the absence of homework at school is perceived as a deviation from the norm and disapproved by many parents, who are used to the fact that children have something to do after school.

A serious challenge to the Ukrainian students' successful adjustment to the Swiss regular school also comes from certain cultural barriers encountered by them. Thus, a highly sensitive issue for a fair number of children became the girls'/boys' joint showers after sports or swimming lessons, which are the norm for a Swiss school. Unaccustomed to and much embarrassed by such school norm, some Ukrainian children refused to attend swimming lessons.

In addition to compulsory school, in the daily routine of most Ukrainian students there are necessarily some extracurricular activities including various sports, arts, music, dance, theater, additional language courses, children's educational centers, etc. Extracurriculars are an integral part of any student's life and very important in terms of comprehensive development of the child, their socialization, gaining professional and emotional experience. Most interviewed parents report from 2 to 5 extracurricular activities which their children were involved in before the displacement, and admit they are extremely concerned that their children do not have the same opportunities to engage in similar extracurriculars in their host-country.

It is also very illustrative that when asked what they miss the most from their Ukrainian school life, children unanimously reported they missed their friends (classmates, teachers); extracurricular activities and facilities (favorite sports club, school sports ground etc.); school cafeteria (the answers are cited here in the order of their frequency). While the most frequent answer, much expected and predictable, indicates a lack of communication (see more details in section 3.5), the two others suggest kids' strong place attachment, i.e., 'the bonding that occurs between

individuals and their meaningful environments'⁴⁵, and emphasize the 'specificity of certain places and the prominence of their social and physical elements'⁴⁶. Unexpectedly frequent reference to *a school cafeteria* proves that a school for a child is not only a place where they learn, but above all an atmosphere, a feeling of a place where they spend a very important part of the school day and feel happy. Many children described their school cafeteria and food, talked about how much they miss the smell of the cafeteria, the delicious smell and taste of their favorite pies and buns. The transition to perceptual descriptions indicates the degree of children's attachment to the described place, the significance of the school cafeteria in a Ukrainian schoolchild's worldview, recognition of the cafeteria as a place without which the perception of the school is incomplete. The school cafeteria is part of the Ukrainian school culture and having lunch at school is the norm for any Ukrainian student. Hence, many children report they don't like going home for lunch and say they would prefer to stay and eat at school.

Still, a multitude of traditions and rules advocated by the Swiss primary school are highly appreciated by most Ukrainian parents and children.

Self-reliance. Benefits of safe environment. Self-reliance is one of the most important competencies developed and cultivated by Swiss primary school in a variety of ways. Most non-Swiss parents appreciate that Swiss school teaches self-reliance even to the little kids. In Switzerland it is possible due to the kids-friendly environment and adults, first of all, drivers. An example of how Swiss kids are entrusted with getting to/from school by themselves, unattended by parents, was reported the biggest surprise by every Ukrainian parent we have interviewed.

'We live in H., a quiet, peaceful place. We could never think we would let our son go to school alone. In our hometown, we would take him by the hand. We would never let him go to school himself! Here, he gets on his bicycle and goes anywhere, to school, from school. Here, he's become independent! And we know he's totally safe. Here, we see small kids going to school on their own. It is not common here to attend kids on their way to school. They go to school on their own!' (P4)

'My daughter goes to school by herself. I am not worried at all! Is it possible to let the child go somewhere in Ukraine?! No! And we drove her to school and from school by car from door to door, every day!' (P3)

Children, on their part, report they enjoy being allowed to go to school on their own. Exercising a skill of self-reliance enhances their self-

⁴⁵ Scannell, L., Gifford, R. Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. 2010. Vol. 30. P. 1–10. URL: Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework (uvic.ca)

⁴⁶ [ibid.]

confidence and self-esteem. 11-year-old Yan talks in detail and not without pleasure about his everyday itinerary to school:

‘I get up in the morning and go to school. First by bus to the station in S., then by train to D., where I always fasten my bike at the bike stand. I get on my bike and go to school. Always by myself. When the day is long, I go this way twice.’ (S23: Grade 5_aged 11)

Self-reliance and emotional well-being. One of the most controversial issues discussed by Ukrainian parents and provoking much of their criticism, is no or little homework given at school. The little-or-no-homework approach adopted by many Swiss primary schools is considered by many parents a big drawback of Swiss education. Still, there are some parents, who approve of the idea of little homework and explain it by the child-oriented, but not parent-oriented school curriculum. They say they like it when children are taught to learn on their own instead of relying on the parents’ assistance. They are happy that kids do most assignments at school under the supervision of the teacher who guides them on their way to academic independence. However, the approval of little-or-no-homework approach was mainly reported by those Ukrainian parents whose children just start primary school (Grades 1–2) and don’t pursue ambitious academic goals, or whose children have had negative experiences in the past where their emotional well-being was seriously threatened by school overload. Mother of 8-year-old Lilia, who goes to an integration class for Ukrainians, approvingly says:

‘Homework is not set at all or is very little, because here they only assign the task that the child can handle on their own. They give the task to the child, not to the parents! In Ukraine, the father helped Lilia a lot, explained mathematics to her because it was difficult. But not here – she must do everything herself.’ (P3)

The mother of 9-year-old Mykyta, who attends a regular Swiss class, reports:

‘My son worries less at Swiss school. In Ukraine, he was very worried about homework, they had a difficult program at school, then there was basketball – frequent training, as he was engaged professionally – then he would come home after training and do his homework. He was worried that he wouldn’t have time to do everything. The school load was much heavier. Now he is calm, more cheerful, has an interest in learning. This school is lacking much in complexity, but he is happier now.’ (P23)

The mother of 8-year-old Sofiya likes Swiss school for its study-rest balance:

‘What I like about Swiss school? I do like that there is a balance between study and leisure. Children study and play and have sports. In Ukraine, they are mostly busy with studies; kids don’t have time to relax, they are loaded

with lessons. They come from school, eat their lunch, and set to doing their homework. Sometimes we did homework until late at night. And then there were tears, skirmishes, stress... Here, daughter doesn't overwork. She is at school at 8 a.m. At 10 a.m. they have a snack, then run, jump, sometimes go swimming, then learn something, have some rest, then learn again, they aren't bored. There is a constant change of activity: study-rest-study. There is a balance! And children are happy and not bored!' (P8)

Freedom. Many children report they like the freedom in the Swiss school. Children report more freedom both in the classroom and during the breaks, in communication with the teacher and with classmates. Mother of 10-year-old Ihor and 12-year-old Danylo, who study in regular Swiss classes, recalls:

'In the beginning, the children, coming from school, would say: 'Mom, everything is allowed here! If you want to run, run, if you want to sing, sing!' They are even forced to run here. There are no barriers. They go out on the terrace and run. On the terrace they can run, eat, feel freedom. They feel completely free here! They like to feel relaxed, free. If you express your thoughts, no one will laugh.' (P9)

The mother of 9-year-old Daryna, who attends an integration class for Ukrainians, reports:

'In Ukraine, my daughter studied at NUS [New Ukrainian School], but it was still a typical regular school with much drilling and difficult tasks. Here my daughter likes that she can talk with friends during the lessons; there is more freedom here.' (P19)

Ukrainian children, especially those who were included in Swiss regular classes, immediately feel that the freedom at the Swiss school does not at all imply all-permissiveness, but is based on self-discipline, responsibility of every child, and the teacher's trust in all children.

'There is no independence in the Ukrainian school. They always trailed behind the teacher, walked anywhere in pairs. And here the son goes to school and from school on his own! During the breaks they are also free, independent' (P2).

'I like that everyone works on their own, doing their own tasks.' (S26: Grade 4_aged 11)

Breaks in the open air. Health-friendly environment. The positive aspects of breaks in the open air with the opportunity to eat a snack there, are pointed out by both children and parents. The father of 10-year-old Olesea, who attends an integration class for Ukrainians, reports:

'I really like it that children eat outside! It's great! The classrooms are stuffy, not aired enough, I remember the way it was in our schools – we spent all the time in a stuffy classroom. And the teacher would come into a stuffy

classroom and would start to get nervous. And here it's great! Everyone is told to go out and that's it! I would like it to be the same in Ukraine.' (P21)

9-year-old Mykyta, a 3rd grade student of a regular Swiss class, confessed:

'I didn't go outside in my school at all. I never went outside during breaks. And here I like that we can eat in the open air.' (S24: Grade 3_aged 9)

Any Ukrainian child with a Swiss school experience will say that rain is neither a problem nor an excuse to cancel a hike in the forest. The idea of keeping children away from rain and bad weather is conventionalized by the Ukrainian education both family and school but seems to be easily vetoed by the young Ukrainians who like it to have fun in the rain and not to be scolded for wet shoes.

Why sit in a circle? Classroom management. Classroom setting as well as classroom management are also quite different in Ukrainian and Swiss schools. Recent research suggests that 'the set-up of the classroom space shapes instructor pedagogy, choice of activities, an on-task student behavior'⁴⁷. While it's common practice in the Ukrainian primary school classroom to have children seated directed towards the teacher and the blackboard, the Swiss classroom offers a wide variety of classroom arrangements: U-shaped, group pods, circle, or combination of these, 'which ensure more differentiated, or individualized, instruction and assignments, more flexibility in students' engagement, focus and participation'⁴⁸. It's not at all surprising, that students accustomed to the fixed classroom set-up and teacher-centered pedagogy, experience some difficulties in readjusting to more flexible classroom setting and student-centered approach. Encountering certain restrictions on moving about or leaving the classroom during the lesson, in their pre-displacement classroom setting, Ukrainian kids are not only confused by the amount of freedom they have in a Swiss classroom, but also feel disoriented by the new instruction model which is directly related to the use of classroom space. Such, for example, is the special role attributed to the circle, the space for which is always found in a Swiss primary classroom. Sitting in a circle, children either receive another assignment from the teacher, or share the impressions with one another at the end of the school day, or have their class council, or *Klassenrat*, or

⁴⁷ Brooks, D. Christopher. Space and Consequences: The Impact of Different Formal Learning Spaces on Instructor and Student Behavior. *Journal of Learning Spaces*. 2012. 1(2). URL: EJ1152694.pdf (ed.gov)

⁴⁸ McCorskey, James C., McVetta, Rod W. Classroom seating arrangements: Instructional communication theory versus student preferences. *Communication Education*. 1978. 27 (2): 99–111. URL: [Classroom Seating Arrangements | Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning \(yale.edu\)](http://Classroom Seating Arrangements | Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning (yale.edu))

simply switch from one lesson to another. Usually, all children know what function is assigned to the circle and what instruction will follow. Ukrainian kids have to shift to the new classroom management and instruction model, which ‘assumes the new teacher-student and student-student relationship’⁴⁹. The fact that most displaced students mentioned the circle, although in different contexts, indicates that this realia has already become an integral part of their knowledge of the new school culture and is perceived as meaningful.

‘The teacher never shouts!’ The role of a teacher. I’d like to start this section with the words of a 12-year-old student of a regular Swiss class: *‘The teachers here are just awesome! For three months, Frau S. hasn’t shouted at anyone, hasn’t even scolded anyone! Teachers treat children like children, isn’t it logical?’* The 5th grade student’s reflection speaks for itself. What most Ukrainian parents and children *do* like in Swiss schools is the teachers. It’s the teacher who is responsible for creating an appropriate learning environment in the classroom and ensures effective classroom management. Both parents’ and children’s perspectives on Swiss school suggest a crucial role of a teacher in motivating students for learning and assume genuine appreciation of what Swiss teachers do for the displaced kids. Parents report they like Swiss teachers who show great empathy; show an interest in the ethnic background of the children; are encouraging and can see the strengths in the child; are creative and resourceful; kind and patient; open for parent-teacher communication. Children say they like that the teachers do not raise their voice at them, are *very* kind and always help, never scold them for mistakes. When asked to describe one of their teachers, students chose the one who notices their strengths; praises their progress and good performance in certain subjects (most often, in mathematics); speaks English to them to make the learning meaningful; makes them feel part of the class; exercises equity in the classroom; does not exclude them when delegating roles among students; has a sense of humor (the latter is often reported by the students with better comprehension skills in German).

Students report feeling unhappy and alienated at school when they can’t find the teacher’s support in sensitive or intimidating situations; when the teacher puts strong pressure on them to learn the school language faster; speaks exclusively German or Swiss German in the classroom; excludes them from certain classroom activities for not understanding the language of instruction; does not praise or encourage them for academic performance. Data analysis suggests that fear-free learning environment, teacher praise

⁴⁹ Fernandez, A., Huang, J., Rinaldo, V. Does Where a Student Sits Really Matter? – The Impact of Seating Locations on Student Classroom Learning. *International Journal of Applied Educational Studies*. 2011. 10(1). URL: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/>

and encouragement, as well as friendly and meaningful communication with the teacher, have a huge impact on the child's motivation for learning and perception of school, in general.

However, not all school settings allow teachers to ensure good student behavior and effective study in the classroom. Both tasks turned out to be especially challenging for the integration class teachers with no knowledge of the students' mother tongue (see section 3.1.: education scheme 2), who had to deal with a linguistically homogeneous mixed-age population of Ukrainian children with different levels of knowledge, different social status, and different pre-displacement school experience, who do not understand the language of instruction and, consequently, are difficult to manage and teach effectively in the classroom. Many parents, whose children were placed in large mixed classes for Ukrainians, report bad discipline in the classroom and inefficiency of the teachers. They say, their kids don't like school, don't learn anything, and often misbehave for attention. They also report being greatly concerned about the fact that their kids' educational and psychological needs are not met at school. Given the lack of meaningful teacher-student interaction in the mixed integration classroom, unless support from a teaching assistant who speaks the student's mother tongue is provided, protest behavior is one of the ways for the displaced kids to respond to a problem which cannot be otherwise identified by the teacher, as well as a great barrier encountered by teachers in doing their job effectively. Thus, discipline in the classroom achieved through effective classroom management significantly affects the learners' perspectives on their school. The discipline factor was mentioned by parents only in the context of large integration classes, which indicates that an effective learning environment is directly affected by the type of school setting (education scheme, the number, age, and composition of students in the class, the student-teacher ratio, bi-/multilingual teacher with the student's native language in their repertoire, availability of translation assistance in the classroom).

‘Guten Morgen, Frau Schmid!’ Mutual respect. Interviews with displaced students revealed that they appreciate, accept, and follow those school norms and practices which are helpful in establishing and maintaining good relationships in the classroom and don't interfere with their emotional well-being. Such is the Swiss school tradition to greet and say goodbye to the teacher by shaking their hand. A conventionalized ritual that combines verbal and tactile interaction, performs not only an important communicative, but also educational and social functions. This ritual is a very simple way to establish contact with the teacher at the beginning of the school day and keep it throughout the day; it is the direct and personal act of paying respect and gratitude to the teacher, as well as the act of reciprocity whereby kids get

respect and attention of the teacher, which is so necessary for developing a sense of belonging to the new group; it is a gesture that allows a child to feel an equal participant in teacher-student communication – a phenomenon that is rare in Ukrainian school practice. The importance attributed to this ritual by children shows how much they appreciate personal communication with the teacher in the classroom, as well as how much they value teacher-student relationships based on mutual respect. Mutual respect, exercised in the Swiss classroom through shaking hands with the teacher, makes the displaced kids happy, just as it leaves no room for teacher yelling in the classroom, frequently mentioned by the kids in the context of their pre-displacement school experience. Thus, good student-teacher relationships based on mutual respect and personal interaction are a vital factor in kids' perception of the Swiss school.

Acceptance of school culture. The study has showed that the acceptance of school culture by a child largely depends on the acceptance of this culture by parents. If the teacher is the main guide for the displaced student to a new school reality, parents, with their experience, knowledge, and stereotypes, like 'catalysts' or 'inhibitors', either facilitate or impede the child's adjustment to and acceptance of this reality. Parents, who have a foreign language competence, were displaced as a whole family, have long-term prospects of staying in Switzerland, and thus have stronger motivation for learning about a new culture and integrating in it, demonstrate greater awareness, appreciation, and acceptance of the new school reality. The mother of an 8-year-old student of a regular class, reports being interested in the new form of teacher-parent communication:

'I regularly communicate with the teacher through a system of 'yellow envelopes'. A piece of paper with a date is glued on the envelope, the teacher puts any information letter for parents in this envelope. Parents must sign it to notify the teacher that they have read the message. This is a sort of post for parents. The teacher can tell you what you need to have with you for some lesson of handicrafts; inform if a trip is postponed due to bad weather. This is a whole system, of course, and it is more complicated for a teacher than just writing one message for all parents in the parent group chat.' (P8)

The father of an 8-year-old student of an integration class, demonstrates full awareness and acceptance of what is going on at school:

'We prepare a morning snack for our son Znüni box, i.e., the snack eaten at 9:00-9:30 a.m., and a separate afternoon snack – Zvieri box, the snack eaten at around 4 p.m. Every morning they [children] come to school at 8:15 a.m. and spend 15 minutes in a special room, where they gather in the morning, communicate, play, 'wake up' and tune in to the school day.' (P4)

More skeptical and reluctant to accept the new school culture and, hence, less facilitating in the child's adjustment to it, are a) parents of children with

a very successful pre-displacement school experience, i.e., whose children studied in specialized schools that offered more advanced academic programs, or went to full-time private schools that met all the expectations of parents regarding their kids' education and all-day child engagement; these families tend to come from big cities where they had a fairly wide range of educational opportunities for their children; b) parents who accentuate temporary character of their stay in the host-country and as a result, temporary character of the new school, and what has a particularly detrimental effect on the adaptation of children to school, they concentrate on the child's difficulties rather than on benefits that could be gained from the new school experience.

Anyway, it takes time and effort to realize the importance of social mission of Swiss primary school. But understanding of the role primary school plays in the Swiss education system doesn't always guarantee its acceptance by all parents. Acceptance takes an even longer time and must be voluntary and conscious, based on strong motivation and social stability, which, in the case of forced displacement, are quite often missing factors.

3.5. Communication

Language. When asked about the biggest challenges they faced in the Swiss school, the displaced children reported language and classroom interaction: *language, the language barrier, communication with classmates, difficult curriculum because I don't understand anything, understanding tasks, I do not understand anything, I do not understand what they say and what they ask me, I don't know what and how to answer, I don't interact because I can't speak their language, it's difficult to communicate with peers, learning German.* Although children formulated their answers in different ways, the content of the answers was always language-related and suggested vital functions carried out by language – convey meanings, convey emotions, produce actions. 'Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs'⁵⁰. Language is the chief means of communication guiding kids through the new school culture and providing their entry to meaningful learning. Children are unhappy if they can't interact with peers, receive or share information, express their emotions and feelings, tell anyone in class about themselves, establish and maintain a social connection, become part of the group. We have already mentioned above that children begin to perceive school with approval only when they can understand and use the school language. Their

⁵⁰ McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. *Messages: Communication Skills Book*, 2nd ed. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications. 1995. P. 34–36.

paths to school language acquisition are very different and dependent on a variety of factors.

Unsuccessful language acquisition scenario. Children with less successful language-related experiences at Swiss school are those who could speak neither German nor English prior to displacement and had little progress in German during the integration class provision. Placed in a host-country school environment, they simply felt disengaged, frustrated at the lack of progress, and suffered great emotional stress. In the initial stage of inclusion, they normally used electronic translators to communicate with the teachers, bilingual classroom instructions (if available) designed and printed for the displaced students by their teachers. These instructions usually contained a few dozen simple phrases that could be used when needed.

‘Slow-learner’ students with no foreign language experience prior to displacement said that they did not perceive what they were being taught in the classroom. In lessons that require language competence, which are essentially all lessons except mathematics, sports, and visual arts, they often drew or played while their classmates were learning something. These children reported that to understand the teacher’s instructions, they just watched what others were doing and did the same. A lifeline for such children was communication with peers with migration background who spoke the same native language, if there were such a peer in their class. It was these children who helped translate the teachers’ instructions on what to do, where to go, etc. The children also pointed out that they liked having a native-speaking teaching assistant accompany them in class and give them extra German lessons. During the additional German lessons, the children did not feel excluded, they felt safe and less anxious. Many children also reported that even after learning some phrases in German, they did not dare to communicate with their classmates because the latter spoke ‘their own language’ (Swiss German) and would not switch to German or English in their presence. Most of these children reported feeling of otherness in the classroom. Unfavorable factors in this scenario are low verbal ability of the child, poor school performance prior to displacement, unsuccessful experience of learning German in the integration class, low personal and social confidence, low motivation, ‘can’t do’ attitude, parents’ lack of foreign language competence, lack of teacher-parent communication, for some reason the absence from the class of a child who speaks a common mother tongue and can help with translation (quite often referred to as ‘an only friend’ by the displaced children), lack of communication with local children outside the school.

Successful language acquisition scenario. Children with more successful language-related experiences at Swiss school are those who could speak German or English by the moment of inclusion or/and demonstrated

significant progress in German during the integration class inclusion. Cases of successful language acquisition were reported among both students who were transferred to the regular classes after a short-term integration class provision (scheme 1) and those (in rare cases) who stayed in the integration classes (scheme 2). In the latter case, the student's progress in German could be accelerated by a) translanguaging (the use of all the languages that individuals speak in a dynamic and integrated way in teaching and learning), if the teacher speaks the student's native language, b) free from a second foreign language (Swiss German) classroom interaction.

'Quick-learner' students with prior foreign language experience said that they could understand some of the teacher's instructions, appreciated those teachers who spoke English to them in the classroom to make their learning meaningful, tried to interact with their classmates. Still, some students reported that interaction with peers in the classroom was more successful than outside school, where local children communicate with one another in Swiss German, which caused discomfort and insecurity even for those children who reported feeling quite confident in the classroom. Favorable factors in this scenario are high verbal ability of the child, good or excellent school performance prior to displacement, studying at a specialized language school prior to displacement, successful experience of learning German in the integration class, increased personal and social confidence, 'can-do' attitude, communication with local children outside school (sharing sports, common hobbies, etc.), parents' foreign language competence.

Communication. Communication factor deserves close attention, since it is effective multi-channel communication that ensures displaced students' successful integration. Analysis of the collected data revealed that a young learner's adjustment to the new school is supported by at least four channels of communication, and dysfunction of either of them can slow down or impede integration. Each of these channels is considered in the sections that follow.

Classroom communication. Like meaningful learning, effective communication involves meaningful, context-related interaction. The mere fact of receiving information about the new school setting, curriculum, culture, and classmates by the displaced learners does not guarantee their effective communication. Displaced children are, in fact, children with language needs who are fully aware that they cannot be equal participants in classroom communication due to their incompetence in the school language, and therefore experience great discomfort and stress. Parents report the approval of any kind of supportive communication in the Swiss classroom environment: additional resources, differentiated tasks according to the child's verbal skills, extra support from a teaching assistant, visual support tools such as prompt cards, labels and pictures helping understand

instructions, bilingual instructions books aimed to equip a displaced learner with a list of useful phrases that may be needed in both personal and emergency communication (*Hallo. Grüezi. Mein Name ist ... Wie alt bist du? Ich fühle mich krank. Ich suche... Wo ist mein Klassenzimmer? Kannst Du es mir aufschreiben?* etc.). Some parents also mentioned a very welcoming first lesson which incorporated the elements of a Ukrainian child's home culture and language, as a sign of respect for their sense of identity.

It is the classroom communication that can help a child develop a sense of belonging to a new group. Without knowledge of the school language, it is extremely difficult to establish and maintain communication in the classroom, as reported by most displaced children. In failing to reach communication goals in the classroom, many children feel inferior to their classmates, are subdued and lacking in self-confidence. Parents of children who study in regular Swiss classes reported that at the very beginning their children often cried with frustration, doubted their resilience and adaptability, struggled to go to school. Parents admit that this period was marked by the kids' lowest emotional stability and highest stress. The primary school age is 'very important for a child's personality development'⁵¹, when they begin to realize themselves as individuals, learn to make decisions and be independent, start evaluating themselves and others, look for peer approval and their place in the group. Older children who have firm peer relationships and friendships established prior to displacement, more often report missing their Ukrainian friends, classes, and teachers. Forced displacement of children nullified many of their previous personal achievements and destroyed peer relationships. The need to establish new connections and reassert themselves in a new group whose language the child does not speak often affects their self-esteem and motivation. Children report that it is classroom communication that they consider the main difficulty they have to overcome every day. Those children who fail to find communication in the new classroom, can still find it in the Ukrainian class (though via on-line meetings) where they get their confidence back and experience a sense of belonging. It is significant that despite having to master two curricula instead of one, none of the displaced students expressed a desire to quit the Ukrainian school. Neither learning difficulties, nor double workload scare children as much as the risk of losing connections with their Ukrainian friends and class. During one interview, I witnessed an argument between a mother and her eleven-year-old son, who had been transferred to the parallel learning scheme, about whether the child

⁵¹ Soto, C. J., Tackett, J. L. Personality traits in childhood and adolescence: structure, development, and outcomes. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* 24. 2015. P. 358–362. DOI: 10.1177/0963721415589345.

feels part of his new class or not. The mother was absolutely sure and insisted that her son has some difficulties in adjusting to the Swiss regular class but is happy with the integration class, in which only Ukrainian kids study. She was very surprised when her son persisted that *his* class is the one in Ukraine: *'I feel part of the class only in my Ukrainian class, not in the one here, but in the one in Ukraine. And here I am just learning meantime'*. [Mother was trying to argue with her son]. *'Mom, how do you know!? I'm telling you that I feel part of the class only in Ukraine'*. In a further conversation with the boy, I got another confirmation of the child's position. When asked about the difference between Ukrainian and Swiss schools, he replied: *'In terms of complexity of subjects, it's easier in Swiss school, still, it's easier in Ukrainian school because I know everything there, and I know everyone in my class!'* (S20: Grade 5_aged 11).

Teacher-student communication. A major part in classroom communication is played by the teacher. A positive teacher-student relationship contributes to learning-supportive environment, a displaced student's motivation for learning, sense of security, and emotional well-being. Positive or negative experiences with a teacher have a direct impact on a child's perspective on school.

Displaced children reported that they like teachers who help cross cultural and language barriers between them and other children in the class, find time for individual communication, switch to English every time they see that the child does not understand and cannot perform on an equal basis with the class, are interested in how the child is coping, find such topics for conversations in the classroom that unite all children, create additional incentives to encourage classroom communication. One student enthusiastically told that during the 2022 World Cup, the whole class, together with the teacher, watched the current matches and discussed who supported which teams and why. During these discussions, the child learned how multicultural his class was and even where his teacher was from (S20: Grade 5_aged 11). Another student described his teacher in detail, including hairstyle, dressing style, mood, and said that *'L. is his favorite teacher, because he is very kind, always helps, always explains, always switches to English, if something is not clear'* (S15: Grade 4_aged 11).

Unpleasant experiences in teacher-student interaction – misunderstanding, lack of attention, indifference, injustice etc. – negatively affect the child's perception of school. Painful experiences linger on for long and abuse the child's trust in their teacher. Having no friends in the classroom, the child tries to find a friend in the teacher, especially if this child has already been faced with some kind of intimidation at school. If a child can't find a friend in their teacher, they experience a psychological barrier to communication in the classroom and feel excluded. One student

placed on the parallel learning scheme and attending afternoon classes in a regular Swiss setting reported that the teacher didn't notice her coming into the class and she had sat in the back of the classroom until the end of the day. Another student reported suffering injustice of being reprimanded by his teacher for using some rude language. A twelve-year-old boy was intimidated by his classmates into coming up to the teacher and saying a phrase, the meaning of which the boy did not understand. The phrase turned out to be indecent and the teacher scolded the student, but said nothing to the offenders, who mocked the child for not knowing the school language. Psychological trauma left the boy fearful of his classmates, lacking in confidence about his capabilities, unmotivated for further classroom interaction, suffering from the fact that he cannot stand up for himself and regain authority. The lack of support from the teacher and ignoring the situation of intimidation further strengthened the psychological barrier of the child, to overcome which, the child's parents had to turn to a psychologist. Cases of language-related pranks have been reported by other displaced students as well, but most of the cases were successfully addressed by the teacher, had no damaging psychological impact upon children, and did not disrupt classroom communication.

Displaced students with lower self-confidence, lacking in language and communicative competences, who have intimidation experiences and feel excluded in the classroom, tend to keep as close as possible to their teacher in hope to find some safety and justice. They seek attachment to the teacher, personal relationships, teacher's recognition of their progress and talents. Those with better developed language and communicative competences and unshattered self-confidence, rely more on themselves and their peers, are more focused on peer interaction, seek support and recognition from classmates, do not feel excluded, are passionate about learning new things. They more often perceive the teacher as a facilitator of the educational process, are effective in communication with teachers, more often notice and appreciate the teacher's sense of humor, are able to respond to jokes, interact with all participants of the classroom communication.

Peer communication. Communication with classmates is an indicator of the degree of integration of the child. The better the child communicates with classmates, the better they integrate, the more they enjoy going to school. Conversely, the more difficult it is for a child to build relationships in the classroom, the greater their reluctance to go to school, and the less quickly they integrate. Displaced students' experiences of peer communication in the classroom are largely related to their age; foreign language competence; a displaced peer acceptance/exclusion; friendships with Swiss peers; experience of intimidation by Swiss peers; the role of the teacher in handling and preventing conflicts among the students.

Teacher-parent communication. Parents who cannot speak German or English receive information about school from their children, social workers, other Ukrainian parents, from Internet, social networks. Their personal interaction with primary school teachers is possible only if parent-teacher communication is welcomed by the school and an interpreter is available.

Parents, who try to communicate with the teachers in English, report being incapable to discuss any serious or sensitive matters concerning their child's schooling due to insufficient level of either their own or the teacher's English competence. If the teacher-parent communication in English is possible and effective, parents report being more involved into their child's school life.

It should be noted that a Ukrainian parent usually knows everything about the school life of the child, since close and regular communication with a primary school teacher is a generally accepted norm. Communication with the teacher is extremely important and allows parents to fully control and participate in the life of children. It is a fundamental part of the Ukrainian primary school culture. It is quite natural that due to the abrupt shift from a familiar education paradigm to a foreign one, which brings about far less opportunity of everyday, or at least regular, communication with the teacher (for completely objective reasons, such as lack of knowledge of the language, or absent in the foreign school culture, norm of regular communication between parents and teachers, etc.), parents experience a lack of information, cannot control the process of the child's learning, and as a result, experience discomfort and stress.

Teacher-parent communication is an integral part of parental involvement and largely contributes to the learning-supportive environment, since only an informed parent can help a displaced child get adjusted to school and encourage their engagement. If the position of the teacher and the position of the parent are not aligned, the outcomes of schooling may not meet the expectations of the school, parents, and children. Conversely, if the parent's help is consistent with the school's efforts, the effect of learning is likely to bring satisfaction to both children and parents.

Student-parent communication. Student-parent communication is yet another factor affecting the perception of the school by the child. In the case of forced displacement children suffer from pre-displacement and post-displacement stress, emotional trauma, depression after separation from close relatives and best friends, stress from disruption of the usual daily routine, the psychological burden of new rules and requirements that must be met at school, fatigue from a double school load, irritation at failures in learning a foreign language, communication difficulties at school, shattered confidence, frustration of pursued goals, etc. All these problems are left to

children and parents to handle and require infinite patience of the parents. Parents who help the children focus on what they *can* do, on positive aspects and benefits of their school life, thereby communicate their confidence to the children and generate their motivation for learning and social interaction. Parents who hand their uncertainty down to the children, introduce their own worries about the school, or blame the new education system for something they themselves don't accept or disagree with, they are likely to encourage destructive behavior and diminish the child's motivation and self-efficacy beliefs.

4. Integration factors

Integration scenarios. Some Ukrainian children say that they like going to Swiss school despite the difficulties they have in understanding teachers' instructions and in communication with Swiss peers. They are characterized by average academic performance prior to displacement, report having some Swiss friends in class, talk about positive rather than negative aspects of their schooling, try to find self-assertion among their peers through better or faster performance in maths, growing interest in sports and extra-curricular activities. Their parents tend to be content with their kids' school, have absolute trust in the teachers, try to motivate and support their kids, say they cannot evaluate properly their children's school performance as they don't know what exactly their children do at school, admit that the two school curricula are too different to be compared. These parents tend to be more concerned about kids' safety and emotional well-being than high academic achievements.

Still, there are children, who openly say they don't like Swiss school because they either 1) do not understand anything or/and 2) feel excluded; 3) are bored; 4) have gone through an embarrassing experience or bullying in regular or integration classes; 5) have no friends among Swiss peers. All of them tend to be reluctant to go to school and admit they would choose a Ukrainian school if they had a choice. They increasingly miss their Ukrainian school, classmates, friends, and teachers, and keep asking their parents when they will go back home. Parents of these children often report their kids' desperate homesickness, tears, indifference, lack of interest in learning and any extracurricular activities, detachment, attacks of aggression and protesting behavior (especially in the first months of schooling). Particularly stressed among them are regular class students with a great language barrier and shameful experience of intimidation.

There are also a smaller group of children, who report they don't have any serious difficulties at school, communicate with their Swiss peers and have Swiss friends in class, developed a sense of belonging to the new class, enjoy going to school and understand what is expected from them at school.

This group of highly motivated children are characterized by strong self-discipline and self-organization, stronger self-efficacy, developed artistic or sports talent, higher than average academic performance prior to displacement, higher than average self-esteem, good knowledge of one foreign language (English or, in rare cases, German) at the moment of displacement, well developed verbal abilities. Almost in all cases, these students attended specialized language schools in Ukraine, took part in a number of extracurricular activities, or were professionally involved in sports. These students' group correlates with the parents who have higher education, represent well-to-do families, are knowledge or information workers, used to have well-paid jobs, possess knowledge of some foreign language (in most cases English, in rare cases – German, in a single case – both), report sufficient understanding of Swiss school system to provide their children with support and encouragement. Also, often, these are the cases when both parents are displaced, and the child doesn't suffer a forced separation from the father. And finally, these families come from bigger Ukrainian cities that are industrial, educational, and/or cultural centers.

Integration obstacles. Parents-related integration obstacles include talking much about going back home and thereby reinforcing the provisional nature of the host-country school; focusing on uncertainty rather than on the new learning opportunities; concentrating on the child's difficulties rather than on benefits that could be gained from the new school experience; underestimating the new school values and overestimating the child's capacities; exaggerated focus on the faults of the host-country education system (often due to the lack of sufficient knowledge or understanding of the priorities and principles of its organization); comparing the two schools, home and foreign, thus making the differences more vivid for the children.

Teacher-related integration obstacles include cases of injustice and the teacher's being not on the student's side in sensitive situations; lack of attention and non-differentiated approach to the displaced child; too high expectations about the school language acquisition by a child; the wrong interpretation of parents' increased need for communication with teachers.

Integration stimuli. The integration of a child in a new educational environment requires the joint efforts of teachers, school authorities, and parents. Parents-related factors that can facilitate a child's integration are: parents' focus on the benefits of the new educational program; understanding, accepting and communicating to the child the idea of school language acquisition as the pathway to wider academic knowledge and interpersonal communication with peers (in cases of longer inclusion in the integration classes); understanding and acceptance of the new school culture leading to support and guidance in the child's adjustment to it; shared with the child effort and experience of integration, e.g., through joint effort in a

foreign language learning, seeking to enlarge social networking, seeking opportunities for sports activities.

Teacher-related factors include teachers' flexibility in code-switching (from German to English if the student's home language cannot be integrated into the meaningful learning of the school language) in the classroom; acknowledging and encouraging student efforts; teachers' awareness of their crucial role in generating students' motivation for classroom interaction; teachers' awareness that they are perceived by the displaced students as friends and advocates who they unconditionally trust.

Some problems mentioned by displaced parents are certainly beyond teachers' responsibilities as they require some institutional solutions and can be addressed to school authorities. An integration-supporting provision, according to the parents' reports, might include timely and accurate diagnostics of the school language knowledge and other competencies of students who attend integration classes, to transfer them to the regular class scheme for further schooling; provision of age- and ability-appropriate school setting since hybrid mixed-age/-ability integration classes fail to prevent bullying and loss of motivation; more opportunities for out-of-school activities (sports, arts, etc.); informing parents, along with the students, about the new school culture to prevent miscomprehension; parents' engagement in school life of their kids.

CONCLUSIONS

All the education schemes provided by Swiss primary school for the displaced Ukrainian learners are perceived by them in accordance with their pre-displacement school experiences, post-displacement education expectations, personal characteristics, foreign language and social competences. The type of school setting greatly contributes to a learning-supportive environment, displaced students' motivation for learning, sense of security, emotional well-being, and integration.

Of the learners' basic needs that must be met to ensure their successful integration in the host-country primary education, the most difficult to address (at least at the initial stage of inclusion) have proven to be *learning* and *social needs*: school language acquisition, access to meaningful learning, communication, gaining sense of belonging and bonding.

Parents' educational and professional background as well as foreign language competence affect both their own perception and acceptance of the new school culture and their kids' adjustment to it. The *forced displacement* factor and *uncertainty* about life prospects have a marked negative effect on primary school learners' integration.

The results of the study might be beneficial for everyone involved in Ukrainian refugee education in OECD countries and seeking some

professional exchange on the Ukrainian schoolers' first-year integration outcomes, regarding the differences between the national Ukrainian and OECD countries' curricula for primary school and highly diverse vulnerability factors affecting displaced Ukrainian learners' inclusion. On the other hand, the observations made during the project implementation could be equally valuable for the Ukrainian pedagogical community, for which the mass forced migration of primary school children from Ukraine became a huge challenge of the war period. Today, primary school teachers adapt to a hybrid form of education, but in the future, when most of those who fled the war will return home, they must be prepared for teaching the population of kids with diverse experiences of OECD countries' primary education. Children's cross-cultural learning experience will increase the relevance of Ukrainian teachers' cross-cultural awareness and knowledge of how to deal with the young learners' re-shaped or 'transformed' expectations about their school. The latter concern is likely to encourage further international pedagogical research and exchange of teaching practices.

SUMMARY

Drawing on international pedagogical discourse on the inclusion of ethnically diverse refugee groups in the educational systems of OECD countries, the author examines Ukrainian refugees' perspectives on Swiss primary school and factors that promote or hinder their integration. The field we contribute to hasn't been explored yet because of the new ethnicity of the studied refugee group, a very recent event of displacement, and the limited accessibility of the displaced primary school children for in-depth research. The involvement of a Ukrainian researcher with first-hand experience of forced migration, into the project, ensured accessibility of the target group, effective researcher-respondents communication due to the common mother tongue and 'familiar' communication setting. The main objectives of the research project reported on by the author were to understand the displaced Ukrainians' perspectives on Swiss primary school and explore diverse experiences of their inclusion. The research was based on two questions: 1) How do the displaced Ukrainian children and parents perceive Swiss primary school? and 2) How successful are the displaced Ukrainian children in their integration into Swiss primary education? To address the research questions, several sub-studies were conducted: semi-structured interviews with parents, narrative interviews with primary school children, and classroom observation. Triangulation of data collection enabled the researcher to develop a truly holistic approach to the object of study and obtain extensive data which have thrown light on the many aspects

of Ukrainian learners' integration process and revealed the most relevant factors determining scenarios of successful and less successful inclusion.

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