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FACILITATING LEARNING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

In adverse context such as armed conflict teachers and other education personnel need to foster relevant learning opportunities to help education seekers caught in crisis go back and stay in education. This call for quality education in country under martial law raises several questions about the instructional delivery mode that might prove the most appropriate to the university students. This paper provides an overview of two complementary instructional moves we might initiate as facilitators to achieve learning objectives in conflict-affected settings.

The instructional design initiatives are considered to be applied in English as second language classes in higher education institutions and may also be applicable in a wide range of subject matter disciplines in response to a military crisis. These moves in learning delivery mode require instructors to focus on compassion and empathy during their facilitation of learning. Yet, they not only serve a purpose of alleviating the psychological impact of armed conflict but can also make education system more resilient. Aim that is especially pertinent in context of fragility and insecurity. The instructional moves are based on a number of recent reviews,

surveys, interviews, documents, projects related to extreme learning. The work also draws upon our reflections on how people learn and teach during wartime.

Keywords: *education in emergency; instructional move; higher education institution; psychological support.*

Statement of the problem. Emergency situations such as armed conflicts, natural disasters and other humanitarian crises directly disrupt traditional educational settings. Amid military occupation, shelling, missiles, wailing of the air raid siren, blackout, internal displacement and family separation, the education sector must develop capacity for uninterrupted, quality learning opportunities. In response to the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 Ukraine's Ministry of Education has changed the algorithms for the External Independent Evaluation (EIE), entrance exams for MA programs: the Unified Entrance

Examination (UEE) in foreign languages and the Unified Professional Entrance Test (UP-ET), The State Final Attestation in 2022 [1]. Moreover, it has recommended introducing special studying conditions (individual schedules, academic leaves) for students serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the Territorial Defense. Under the current circumstances of war most educators are in constant contact, assisting, inspiring one another in search of various formal and non-formal education pathways to positively enhance learning. When considering education in crisis areas there is a pressing need to explore new forms of learning delivery by collecting and analyzing data on the organization of the education process during war-time.

Analysis of research and publications.

The article which appeared on 17 April 2022 on the website of the Guardian says that since Russia's invasion began, Teach for Ukraine has held workshops with psychologists to equip its teachers with techniques to support students during the war [2]. Teach for Ukraine is an organization that recruits and trains Ukrainians to teach in under-served schools. It is part of the Teach for All network, which includes Teach for America and Teach First in the United Kingdom. Julia Kosenchuk, a graduate student of the Department of Theory and History of Pedagogy in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University in her article "Finnish support for education in Ukraine during the conditions of war" investigates the organization of blended and distance learning in Ukraine with the help of "The All-Ukrainian Online School" national platform designed to make quality education available anywhere and anytime [3].

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was constituted in 2003 to facilitate the development of global minimum standards for education in emergencies. "Education in emergency (EIE) can be defined as set of project activities that allow structured learning to continue in situations of emergency, crisis or long-term instability" [4, p. 2]. INEE issued The Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies (MSEE), a handbook designed for use in crisis response in a range of situations, including disasters caused by natural hazards and conflict [5].

Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators (EASE) is an online course for educators and a collection of school-based, evidence-informed, curriculum-aligned, anxiety management and resilience-building classroom resources. EASE helps educators teach students strategies to address the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with anxiety, while also supporting social and

emotional learning and the mental health literacy of educators [6]. The Extreme Learning research team (Minkyung Kim, Eulho Jung, Abdullah Altuwaijri, Yurong Wang, and Curtis J Bonk) is documenting how people learn or teach online or with technology in extreme situations which stretch beyond traditional educational contexts (e.g., trains, boats, and war zones) [7].

Existing literature focuses on the key changes that take place in the organization of education process in preschool, secondary and higher education in response to war action; examines the negative effect of armed conflict on education and strongly states that conflict erodes educational progress. Yet, research on how to deliver quality education in the conditions of martial law is relatively scant. Minimal is known about changes educators should make in core instructional design principles to help students achieve their academic goals despite severe challenges. A gap this work seeks to fill.

The aim of the article is to highlight the worthwhile instructional design moves that can positively enhance formal learning in conflict-affected settings.

Methods. Searching for the proper instructional design moves outside of traditional educational contexts, we employ a content analysis. There are a series of surveys of educators and learners involved in extreme learning pursuits. By collecting and evaluating this data, we have revealed insights into the instructional moves that might help educators create appropriate classrooms where all students affected by war can succeed. Besides this content analysis, this research draws upon a personal account of how provide psychological support for language learners through learning activities.

Presentation of the main material. Almost all students living in the midst of a war conflict experience psychological distress. War tension can't eliminate the persistent feelings of anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, irritability, or anger which affect students' ability to learn. Those stranded in affected or occupied areas seem either unwilling or unable to study. In an environment of insecurity and uncertainty, university attendance and education quality can decline. Yet, the value of education to those affected by emergency situations should not be underestimated and is consistently highlighted by psychologists as crucial in bringing stability, emotional and psychological protection.

Firstly, war creates chaos. Well planned, regular and predictable lessons give a sense of structure, direction and calm. The key for students achieving goals is through having habit and routines which create structure

and promote mental, physical and emotional health. As educators, we have an opportunity and an obligation to provide structures to help our students be safe, organised, more purposeful and thoughtful during course. When students have clear systems in place, class obligations, duties, and routine activities, it makes it significantly easier for them to stay on-task and make meaningful progress. Set routines are especially helpful when working with learners who are experiencing a traumatic event and need emotional support in regulating their emotions. "Education activities are important in establishing a regular routine daily schedules that create a familiar and comfortable rhythm and establish a sense of structure and purpose" [8, p. 11].

Secondly, war makes students move far apart in different directions. For those scattered all over the world (e.g. refugees, internally displaced, immigrated), lessons offer opportunities to stay connected with peers who share common academic goals and work collaboratively in the classroom. A sense of belonging to a learning community when students engage with peers, feel personally accepted, supported and valued by others contributes to greater student academic performance and correlates with greater student well-being, satisfaction, happiness. Thirdly, war makes people distressed. Lessons can provide emotional practical support to learners experiencing acute distress due to recent events. When you cut your finger, you put ointment and bandage on it to prevent infection. The same goes for emotional trauma. We take care of emotional injuries when they occur, so they do not become more damaging in the long run. So, psychological first aid should be made available by field workers, including health staff, teachers, or trained volunteers. This is where the instructional designer's role comes into play. In conflict situation like this currently faced in Ukraine, teachers having leadership skills and capable of working on their own initiative become the backbone of education systems. Zhushma Tetiana, a graduate student from National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute" in her article "Structure of leadership qualities of higher school's future teacher" stresses the importance of cultivating leadership qualities in higher education teachers during the process of building their professional competencies [9].

By taking initiative in contexts of fragility, crises or adversity, good leaders in higher education think on their feet and take appropriate action when encounter challenges like management of psychological distress, unwillingness and unreadiness to study. No

matter what your specific duties and responsibilities are, you need to handle learners who are unable to adapt quickly to new learning settings and find themselves in a stressful or difficult life situation. If you notice that distress interferes with learner's ability to study, it may be time to provide helpful support. "Supporting a person in such a situation, helping to find meaning in life, raising self-esteem, adaptation to new social conditions will largely depend on the professional behavior of social workers, their correct interaction with those in difficult situations" [10, 196].

Teacher is among the first to provide assistance as a first responder, social workers, a trusted first-aider, counsellor, a war conflict response worker, appropriate role model encouraging constructive coping. Instructional designer is paramount in the process of learning and the key to reaching learning goals, regardless of context and situation. Fuchyla Olena, Professor of Lviv Polytechnic National University in her article "Issues and challenges of distance education in higher education establishments: world experience" argues that "The last and the most important factor that stimulates learning was and is the pedagogical skill, because it is the teacher who can and should, using appropriate techniques and methods, encourage, stimulate and motivate students to learn, regardless of the use of technical means and software" [11, p. 32].

No doubt, as new settings occur, instructional mode need to be revised and adapted to accommodate these changes so that learners will be able to digest and retain the material in an effective manner. In times of conflict, learning facilitators are encouraged to reflect on what has worked well with their classes and modify their practice as necessary. They can choose which mode or combination of modes is most appropriate for their target learners. The INEE Minimum Standards Handbook contains 19 standards, each with accompanying key actions and guidance notes. Standard 3 "Instruction and Learning Processes" says that "Education in emergencies through to recovery should offer teachers in a formal education setting an opportunity for positive change. Teaching methods may be changed to be adaptable and acceptable to the context and should address the rights, needs, age, disabilities and capacities of learners" [5]. So, in conflict situation like this currently faced in Ukraine, it is up to instructional designer to initiate a range of practical instructional moves to manage intense emotions and promote a safe, calm learning environment that might prove optimal to learners trying to pursue an

education during a period of war. Much-needed psychological support to people in need should become a component of instructional design. Such a forced and urgent move you make in core instructional design principles is of paramount importance for learners and colleagues affected by war, to make sure they feel safe and able to overcome the negative effects that emergencies can have on them.

When it comes to instructional design initiatives that might offer guidance as to how a learner can be supported emotionally during times of crisis or trauma, the main focus is talk therapy, positive distractions, fellowship, customisation. These together form the instructional moves which might help students in formal education stay on track during and after disasters or other traumatic events

1. *Talk therapy.* Deliver instructional materials in the form of talk therapy. When communicating with learners affected by war conflict, do not pretend that nothing happened, do not ignore the topic of war. For a person who has experienced a terrible event, it is important that the severity of the situation and the suffering are recognized. Talk therapy as an instructional move aims to release tension, rather than keeping it inside. By talking about our feelings, we are able to organize and make sense of them in a way that reduces stress and improves emotions. Provide a venue for expression through talking. Students must be given a space to discuss how they feel. You may think that words are superfluous, but silence can hurt as well as careless words. Silence creates a vacuum effect in which a person is left alone with their distress. Simply giving someone space to talk, and listening to how they're feeling, can be really helpful in itself. Here are some tips to scaffold such supportive talking:

- ask questions about learners' experience;
- listen and respond to their situation with compassion. Be attentive to their mood, tone and behavior and give them a chance to express how they are feeling;
- express support, empathy, acceptance, understanding and caring. Sympathize, but avoid words that emphasize the victim's position. Instead, emphasize the strengths, those that helped a person survive, cope and take care of themselves and others in an acute crisis. Express admiration, say what you are proud of in human behavior;
- give everyone their undivided attention. Stay calm. Be patient. Ask questions to clarify or better understand their experiences. Verbally summarize or reflect on what they have said;

- try not to make assumptions. Allow them to say what they feel without judgment. Do not judge what a person has done or not done and what he or she feels. Do not generalize. Don't tell them how to feel;

- do not say that you understand what the person has gone through. Do not compare a person's situation with other worse situations. Avoid words that devalue a person's losses, make his feelings insignificant. Look at each situation of suffering as unique as it is [12];

- provide reassurance and encouragement. Give verbal praise for successful progress or accomplishment. Affirmations in class routine intend to reduce negative thoughts, make learners feel less worried and help increase their self-esteem. Feeling good about yourself, being less stressed and more confident help learners develop coping skills and handle adversity;

- practice optimistic thinking. Limit exposure to images of the war and the chaotic, unfiltered world of social media. Put the negative into perspective. View challenges as learning opportunities and focus on the things you can control instead of dwelling on what you cannot change. Conrad Hughes, Professor Philosophy at the International School of Geneva, La Grande Boissière, in his article "How to educate in a time of conflict" from the website "The international educator" states that instead of arguing about political decisions and discussing military actions, the teacher's task is to bring the discussion to a higher, a more general, transcendent level of moral imperative that encompasses the overarching values we agree or disagree with [13].

2. *Positive distraction.* Deliver instructional materials in the form of positive distraction. Positive distraction in terms of instructional move might be defined as an assignment that "elicits positive feelings and holds attention without taxing or stressing the individual, thereby blocking worrisome thoughts" [14, 102]. Positive distraction as an instructional move aims to redirect your thoughts away from distressing feelings and reinforce learners' hope in times of crisis. They come in formal, non-formal or informal forms, including learning activities, specific assignments (additional, alternative and/or complementary to formal program) which regulate emotions by redirecting thoughts in appropriate ways and result in improving knowledge, skills, competencies and/or qualification. You might distract learners' mind by watching their favorite video or a clip from a movie they enjoy, or anything else you know will increase positive emotions. Regardless of the situation or circumstance, there is always a

way to respond to and interact with students in a positive way.

Brovarska Ilona, lecturer of the department of English philology and methods of teaching the English language from Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy claims that “it is worth discussing the usage of humour and games in a ESL class as a tool against excessive anxiety. Jokes, for instance, when utilized appropriately and sensitively, may become an efficacious tool in the teacher’s methodological arsenal, as it can create an optimal environment for learning and reduce stress” [15, 88].

3. *Fellowship*. Foster a sense of fellowship in your classes through doing some friendship-focused activities and shared projects. The word fellowship refers to doing something together, having something in common, participating in a common interest. Fellowship as an instructional move aims to do a range of purposeful activities together (including under/postgraduate research, self-designed projects) and participate together in subject matter expertise. Having affective commitment to a particular, narrow field of expertise, seekers of higher education are more likely to develop engagement in the classroom. It’s easier to stay on track when you experience mutual acceptance among peers, accountability, kindness towards others, emotional attachment, affiliation that prevent isolation and loneliness, boost happiness and reduce stress. Fellowshiping can aid in our “healing” process as it increases a sense of purpose, maintains social skills, stimulates positive thoughts and interactions.

4. *Customisation*. Tailor lessons to the students. Customisation as an instructional move aims to change learning delivery according to the learner’s needs. From the teacher’s perspective customization is an instructional strategy that typically “allows learners to personalise learning by offering more than one way for them to learn” [16, p. 56]. Fortunately, there are a number academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs of individual students in wartime. We recommend amending course program goals if they are slightly unrealistic. Using customized course program is an excellent way to avoid being overwhelmed and help increase productivity throughout the year. Below are some options to help students in conflict-affected areas return to normal classroom instruction:

- tone down the testing;
- give students only one assignment at a time. Break learning tasks into small steps;
- differentiate instruction;

- give students many ways to show their knowledge;
- offer alternative homework ideas;
- set realistic expectations. Narrow down goals. Make your lessons goal-oriented. Focus on the task at hand.
- offer opportunities for students to catch up on missed course materials.

Here are four simple moves in the mode of delivery you can introduce in classes to help your students stay on-task and make meaningful progress during emergency remote education circumstances. One major aim of the instructional moves is providing a sense of safety, calm, social connectedness, hope, purpose and meaning. It’s especially important in times of stress or sadness as it keeps distressed learners on track in achieving their academic goals. Moreover, when learning is relevant and properly supported by these instructional moves, learners become more prepared to function well in the face of adversity. Being resilient, they can bounce back by effectively coping with mental stressors and challenges.

Prospects for further research. Designing learning experience goes beyond simply creating instructional materials and methods that most effectively help individuals achieve their academic goals, it carefully considers proper evaluation methods that will be adaptable to learning in war circumstances. Further research is needed to create appropriate and valid assessment type in online courses that might be employed in emergency learning. We also need time identify possible future research areas related to extreme and nontraditional learning.

Conclusions. Supporting the continuation of education in countries under martial law is an urgent development priority. War defines a new educational setting that requires instructors to revamp delivery mode to achieve a common instructional goal with learners who become especially vulnerable experiencing acute distress due to military action. Emotional and psychological support should be offered in higher education facilities through a range of practical instructional moves designed for learning in emergency environments.

We initiate a talk therapy and positive distraction to promote vulnerability reduction and adaptive capacity. Talk therapy as an instructional move aims to help a learner identify and resolve troubling emotions and thoughts through discussion and listening. Positive distraction as an instructional move aims to prevent a learner from giving their attention to distressing feelings through pleasant positive assignments that help regulate emotions. Fellowship as an instruc-

tional move aims to foster a feeling of mutual acceptance and support that can lower anxiety and distress, lead to empathy and actually improve learners' wellbeing through social connectedness and commitment to a particular field of study. Customisation as an instructional move aims to reduce the level of tension and anxiety, unwillingness to participate in a lesson through flexible classroom management and offering students more options to make choices in their way of learning.

The findings showed that application of talk therapy, positive distractions, fellowship, and customisation restore a sense of normalcy in the learning of those affected by disasters and foster positive, stress-free learning environment in EFL classroom that are key to students' academic success during war-time. By implementing these initiatives, we strengthen individual resilience amidst fragility and build a way for the education system to continue despite these adversities.

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СПРИЯННЯ НАВЧАННЮ В ЗОНАХ ВІЙСЬКОВИХ КОНФЛІКТІВ

У несприятливих умовах, таких як збройний конфлікт, викладачам та іншим працівникам освіти необхідно створювати відповідні можливості для навчання, щоб допомогти здобувачам освіти, які опинилися в кризовій ситуації, повернутися до навчання та продовжити його. Заклик до якісної освіти в країнах, що перебувають в умовах воєнного стану, піднімає низку питань щодо способу навчання, який може виявитися найбільш прийнятним для здобувачів вищої освіти.

У статті представлено огляд двох взаємодоповнюючих навчально-методичних підходів, які ми, викладачі, можемо ініціювати для досягнення навчальних цілей в умовах військового конфлікту. Навчальні ініціативи розглядаються як такі, що застосовуються на заняттях з англійської як другої мови у вищих навчальних закладах, а також можуть бути застосовані в широкому спектрі предметних дисциплін у відповідь на кризову ситуацію. Такі підходи до викла-

дання матеріалу вимагають від викладачів зосередження на співчутті та емпатії під час надання допомоги у навчанні. Проте, вони не лише слугують меті пом'якшення психологічного впливу збройного конфлікту, але й можуть зробити освітню систему більш стійкою. Це особливо актуально в умовах нестабільності та небезпеки.

Ініційовані підходи викладання базуються на низці останніх оглядів, опитувань, інтерв'ю, документів, проєктів, пов'язаних з екстремальним навчанням. Робота також спирається на роздуми про те, як люди навчаються і навчають під час війни.

Ключові слова. освіта в надзвичайних ситуаціях; навчально-методичний підхід; заклад вищої освіти; психологічна підтримка.

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