

SHARED READING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY WAR: ASSESSING ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

NADIYA PAVLYK

“Dialogues and Reading: Shared Reading for Ukrainian Young People” (DaR:ua), Aarhus University

Introduction

In the severe situation of declining human capital in Ukraine, war-affected youth need effective tools for supporting their educational and social needs.



Shared Reading involves group or family read-aloud sessions followed by discussion for educational, social, and therapeutic goals (Andersen & Nielsen, 2016). DaR:UA aims at introducing and testing the established Western Shared Reading methods in the context of war-affected youth in Ukraine.

Background

The AUFF-NOVA project “PUBLISH: Children’s books in the Russia-Ukraine War” has collected a corpus of over 100 Ukrainian war-themed children’s and young adult books published between 2014 and 2024. Based on selected books from this corpus, DaR:UA facilitates shared reading sessions to assess war-affected young readers’ responses to them.



Methodology

As a pilot study, DaR:UA conducted three online sessions with 47 Ukrainian adult readers, working in education, libraries, and youth services. Each included a focus group discussion, a reading of a war-related book, and a follow-up conversation. Sessions followed GDPR guidelines and were recorded. Topics addressed included professional experiences with youth during the war, perceptions of war themes in children’s literature, and the applicability of shared reading in their work.



Preliminary Results

Key patterns in participants’ responses to shared reading:



1) Drawing personal parallels through dialogue: *“This reminds me of my current situation. Most of our men are at war now, and she is waiting for him alone.”*

2) Interpreting content symbolically to reflect broader wartime realities, even when they diverge from the literal content of the text: *“This is about captivity. That line – ‘Never give up, dream!’ – sounds like something people say about prisoners of war or those who are missing.”*

3) Expressing hope and envisioning positive outcomes, fostering resilience: *“It’s always like that in life – everything will be fine, the main thing is not to give up.”*

4) Experiencing layered emotional responses: *“It’s like I want to cry, but at the same time something good is stirring inside me. So many feelings coming at once...”*

First Conclusion



Preliminary results suggest that shared reading has significant potential to enable emotional processing, meaning-making, exchange of lived experiences, and interpersonal connections amidst war and crisis:

“Thank you for working with our pain as flexibly as possible, for lifting from the bottom what we had been burying under all kinds of debris in order to forget and disappear.”

Furthermore, the results may offer insights into the future potential of integrating shared reading into educational, social, and youth policies.

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