



PSYCHOLOGICAL
TRAUMA AND ITS IM-
PACT ON DAILY SCHOOL
LIFE

TRAUMA
AND
SCHOOL

In order that we are better pre-
pared for challenging situations
at school

Marianne Herzog

Cover picture: Symbol for the 'safe place', Table decoration für the celebration of 30 years of shelter for women suffering of domestic violence in Aargau, Switzerland

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Foreword

As the coordinators of the Erasmus+ project 'YESTER-MORROW' we are very grateful for the possibility of obtaining greater knowledge of ways to help students to cope with traumatic experiences. In addition ways for teachers to understand their own reactions connected with difficult situations in their work.

In our partner schools we have valued investigating our 'safe places' and being able to reflect deeper about the topic.

The picture book 'Lily, Ben and Omid' by Marianne Herzog, which is connected with the project, has been used by some of our teachers, and the children have shown a great understanding of the meaning of a 'safe place'. Some of the children could also easily identify with the characters in the book. The teachers find the approach inspiring and are very motivated to continue working with the book and its important topic.

Many thanks to Marianne Herzog and Johanna Hersberger for suggesting trauma pedagogy as a topic for our project and for sharing their knowledge with all the partner schools. We would also like to thank all the partners for adding their knowledge and for being prepared to share it with other European schools.

Cecilia Henriksson, Anna-Karin Berg Knutz, Sweden,
Coordinator of the Erasmus+-project YESTERMORROW

Introduction

Six European schools applied for Erasmus+ in early 2015, submitting the project 'YESTERMORROW' with the main focus on the mental health of students. At the time nobody could have known just how much evidence for this topic might be available within a few months. With the arrival of refugees more knowledge is needed on how to cope with trauma, and this accumulated knowledge will benefit other students too.

When we work with pupils and students, we encounter situations in which we cannot understand a reaction or a disturbing behaviour. There are also situations, which provoke in us, as teachers and social workers, strong negative feelings. We are even surprised about the strength of these emotions and sometimes we, too, cannot understand them.

The surprising reaction of our students, or indeed our own strong reactions, can arise from a psychological trauma experienced by the student a long time ago.

Reading and talking about psychological trauma can be difficult. It seems that pictures appear in the mind's eye of students, friends and colleagues, or images of our own lives. It nevertheless gives us the chance to classify difficult memories or even to better come to terms with them.

Although teachers and social workers are not engaged in therapy, it is nevertheless important to identify these experiences, for example by supervision or with cooperation among teachers, like it is done in the YESTERMORROW-project. This facilitates the work with students

and benefits all parties. This kind of pedagogy is called 'Traumapädagogik' in the German language (trauma pedagogy). It is a pedagogy, which identifies transference phenomena and organic cerebral effects, based on the resources provided and establishes the 'safe place' for all players. Trauma pedagogy provides a relief for all students, teachers and social workers, and reduces conflicts.

I am happy to support this project as an expert, together with my very appreciated colleague Dr. Johanna Hersberger, Master of Advanced Studies in Psychotherapy MAS, lecturer at the University for Applied Studies FHNW, Basel, Switzerland, psychotherapist and specialist in trauma. We will support our colleagues in different schools spread around Europe.

I would like this brochure to help to disseminate what we know about psychological trauma, and to create a daily school life with less conflict and stress. The topic is complex; and this brochure can only cover certain aspects. However, it should help professionals to deal with disturbing situations in school, to celebrate the positivity of working with young people and to base their actions on the resources provided. The content of this brochure is based on the lectures at 'Schweizer Institut für Psychotraumatologie', SIPT, Winterthur, and on my experiences as a lecturer at different universities of applied sciences, my part-time job as a counsellor for traumatised children from abroad in the Education Department Basel, Switzerland, and as a former teacher and specialist in traumatised children.

I would like to thank all the people who have helped me with this brochure; my gratitude goes to my former stu-

dents and especially to my colleagues of the YESTER-MORROW project who help to identify valuable examples on how to create a 'safe place' in schools. Please see www.yestermorrow.eu.

Marianne Herzog

‘A traumatic event or situation creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms the individual’s ability to cope.’

Monika Dreiner, Psychotherapeutist ¹

1. Does the human being always act in a reasonable way?

Since the Age of Enlightenment 250 years ago, we perceive the human being as a creature of reason. This is expressed in the citation: ‘Cogito, ergo sum’.

Today, thanks to functional brain imaging and neurobiological science, we know that most actions are regulated by rationality, but that experiences of profound threat cause actions which cannot deliberately be influenced. This is not caused by illness, but happens due to a survival mechanism.

We know today that the limbic system, of which the amygdala is part, can provoke neurobiological reactions via the cerebral cortex, very quickly and without detour. The cerebral cortex control is switched off to avoid delay, as this could be deadly.

A person who suffered an acute, transient disturbance leading to a longer-term syndrome has this information stored in his or her amygdala. This information cannot be consciously accessed. However, the amygdala can be triggered to react by sensations similar to the traumatic

¹ Dreiner, M. Trauma – was tun? (o.J.), Köln: Zentrum für Trauma- und Konfliktmanagement (ZTK) GmbH

experience. This starts the neurobiological mechanism, which is automatic, and cannot be controlled or regulated even in the apparent absence of a threat. Consequently, unexpected behaviours may surface, sometimes in inappropriate situations. These reactions can seem strange and often illogical.

1.1. An example

The sports day is over and all the students are assembling in the sports hall for the award ceremony. It's extremely hot in the room and everybody is tired and exhausted. That's why Benjamin wants to leave the room, when a teacher he doesn't know bars his way and holds him back. Benjamin is triggered by this situation, his amygdala sends the order to fight, as it seems to recognise the situation. Benjamin rudely pushes the teacher back and a scuffle ensues. Benjamin has a good relationship with the social worker who has fortunately noted the incident. She positions herself in front of Benjamin but doesn't touch him. Several times she calls his name, and Benjamin's facial expression and bearing show that he is coming back from far away. He drops his fists. A few moments later he is shocked to have attacked a teacher.

Benjamin's massive and unexpected reaction to the teacher's intervention could indicate that the student is or was a victim of violence.

1.2. The Age of Enlightenment versus current research

The most recent research into neurobiological processes, which cannot be controlled consciously, has influenced expert opinion that a child suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder cannot easily be trained to develop new skills for handling threatening situations. In such situations the cerebral cortex, where the training information is stored, is deactivated.

Recent evidence has shown that information stored in the limbic system can be handed down to the offspring, a process called transgenerational transfer. Results of genetic research have also been published, which show that gene activity can be influenced by external factors, which, in turn, can be handed down too².

Within the next few years, research will bring an increase of knowledge on brain functions and psyche. But we already know that we need to challenge the dogma of the Enlightenment: 'Cogito, ergo sum', particularly where individuals with psychological trauma are concerned.

1.3. Activities in the brain, in images

As a specialist for trauma in the field of education it is my main concern to generate easily interpreted images of the highly complex activities in the brain. These help us to remember under pressure and to integrate this know-

² Francis, D. D. et al. (1999) "Maternal Care, Gene Expression, and the Development of Individual Differences in Stress Activities", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 896, no 1, <http://champagnelab.psych.columbia.edu/docs/champ11.pdf>, 21.2.2016

ledge into our actions. Images can be stored and retrieved better than words.

In the following model the throne is the symbol of power. Whoever is sitting on it, rules. Normally rationality governs, here presented as a bluish brain-like figure. An antenna is installed like a look-out man being on alert. The antenna is the symbol for the amygdala.



Reason is sitting on the throne and governs. Source: M.Herzog³

If the antenna detects danger, it rapidly triggers neurobiological processes which activate the primitive 'reptilian' brain. The bell symbolises the discharge of chemical messengers. Due to these the reptilian brain takes the lead. Here it is depicted at first as a sleeping

³ The photos of page 12 - 16 show objects belonging to the case 'Lily, Ben and Omid' which sustains the picture book with the same name. More information www.yestermorrow.eu

little lizard, then as a ruling lizard which figuratively pushes the rationality from the throne.



If the look-out man detects danger, the bell wakes up the lizard. The bell is the symbol for neurobiological processes, the lizard symbolises the reptilian brain. Source: M. Herzog

When the lizard sits on the throne it makes decisions at a great speed, which is an invaluable benefit. If, for instance, a branch is falling down, the reptilian brain guides us to intuitively move to avoid being hit.



When the lizard assumes the leadership, there are three reactions available: flight, fight and freeze. Source: M. Herzog

The disadvantage is that the lizard only has a limited behavioural repertoire: flight, fight or freeze. In our example with the falling branch this repertoire is sufficient. If, in contrast, the cerebral cortex was involved, it could provoke a deadly delay of our reactions.

When the danger is over, the lizard leaves the throne, cuddles up, falls asleep and surrenders the power to Reason.

For tens of thousands of years this process has been a very successful strategy to cope with deadly threats.

When Reason rules—figuratively speaking—it arranges experiences in books to make memories easily available. Rationality is a very reliable ‘librarian’. It always knows whether we reside in the ‘here and now’ or if something belongs to the past.



When Reason rules, it clearly arranges all experiences. Source: M. Herzog

This is completely different when the lizard is on the throne. It does not organise experiences. If, for instance, a baby was threatened by domestic violence or by perilous neglect, the memories of this are often incoherent and fragmented. These loose fragments can touch the antenna, and the look-out man alerts in circumstances when there is no objective threat. The memories have not been organised by Reason and can therefore not be understood in context—they cannot be linked to the past. Human beings with trauma keep finding themselves in situations where they behave as if they are under acute threat of life.



‘Lily, Ben und Omid’, when the look-out man alerts without an objective threat.⁴

Additionally people cannot be reached verbally when their lizard is in control. In this state they cannot listen, learn and remember. Especially in a school context this is extremely obstructive to learning. It is very important

⁴ Herzog, M., Hartmann Wittke, J (2016) Lily, Ben and Omid, Oberhof: Top Support

that the lizard surrenders the throne to Reason. We can help by giving these people the feeling of safety, in order to make the lizard surrender the throne or to avoid false alarm altogether.

The mediation of safety, the creation of a 'safe place' is a very important concern when dealing with people suffering mental dysfunction.

2. How often does psychological trauma occur?

We come across students with dysfunctions caused by trauma in all phases of education, because intelligence and trauma are not linked. We need to work on the assumption that in a standard class of 25 students, one or even more individuals are affected by trauma, with higher numbers in more inclusively run schools. Children and young people who have very exceptional and disturbing behaviour could be suffering from psychological trauma.

Among children and young people who live in care, approximately 75% have experienced a psycho-social trauma.⁵

Trauma pedagogy, however, does not just deal with the effects of trauma. The knowledge of psychological processes and their integration into pedagogical theory can

⁵ Schmid, M. (2012): Vortrag psychisch belastete Heimkinder: Eine kooperative Herausforderung. Häufigkeit von Traumata (Schmid zit. nach Jaritz, Wiesinger, Schmid, 2008)

stabilise children under mental strain and thereby prevent the effects of trauma.

A secure attachment is the most important factor that protects a human being from psychological trauma. When we come across children and young people with signs of traumatic disorder, there is often a history of insecure attachment (avoidant and ambivalent attachment or disorganised attachment classification). A secure attachment could otherwise have prevented the establishment of trauma⁶. Among experts nowadays the lack of a secure attachment is judged to be a psychosocial trauma.

A secure attachment can only be developed with a person who responds in appropriate and sensitive ways. Sensitivity is defined as the prompt and appropriate reaction of adults to the baby's needs and actions.³

Refugees have often experienced war, destruction, displacement, death, being taken hostage and being on the run. Nevertheless, it is possible that due to their parents' sensitivity the children manage to establish a secure attachment. This will help them to cope with their traumatic experiences. There even is a good chance that they will heal with minimal or no scarring.

Unfortunately most children who suffered psychosocial trauma in early childhood do not have the chance to build a protective secure attachment. Their traumas are often caused by parents and/or other significant people.

⁶ Brisch, K.H., Hrsg. (2017) Bindungstraumatisierungen, Wenn Bindungspersonen zu Tätern werden, page 154 et al. Stuttgart: Klett-Gotta

But it is important to point out that nobody ever decided to be a bad mother or a bad father. More often than not they themselves have experienced trauma as children and could therefore not ensure a secure attachment. Those helpless parents need support and should be involved in the work with their children.

Despite some indications, predictions about the future effects of psychological trauma—whether they become a chronic stress disorder or will be healed—are not possible in individual cases. This makes it all the more important to treat these children with a lot of empathy and sensitivity, based on the available knowledge about secure attachment and trauma.⁷

⁷ Köhler-Saretzki, Th., (2014): Sichere Kinder brauchen starke Wurzeln. Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner

3. What are the causes of psychological trauma?

3.1. Acute psychological injury

As professionals working with children and young people, we are regularly confronted with both current and recent psychological trauma. Many of them are obvious from outside:

- Illness and death in the family
- Accident
- Natural disaster
- Divorce, separation, loss
- War
- Loss of parental employment

There are other factors that can impact on a child's mental health, but these are often social taboos:

- Neglect
- Bullying
- Sexual abuse
- Violence (especially in their own family)

While there is support and compassion in cases of the first category—sometimes there is even a professional care-team involved—there is often minimal or no response in cases of the second category due to the covert nature of these causes. Sometimes professionals lack the motivation or courage to even investigate the signs.

Not all individuals who experience a traumatic event will actually suffer from a chronic psychological trauma. Out of three people who have experienced a trauma, one will

recover spontaneously, the second can be helped with appropriate support and the third will statistically suffer from a chronic traumatic stress disorder. Appropriate support gauges the needs of the traumatised individual. They require a person who listens, who gives them the feeling 'I am here for you', and, very importantly, validates their status as a victim. However, the difficult situation itself should not be discussed, if this is not the wish of the victim. If it was discussed at the wrong moment in time, recovery may be prolonged, creating chronic psychological trauma. This is what statistically happens to one person out of three.

This division into thirds (Cologne risk index⁸) was ascertained during an investigation into victims of violence. Whether a victim becomes chronically ill depends on the type of traumatic experience, too. Sexual abuse in early childhood, for example, almost always leads to long-term traumatic disorder. A further important factor is the question of repetition. If a victim has experienced repetitive psychological damage rather than one traumatising incident, the consequences are even graver. Being a witness to a traumatic incident can provoke long-term damage even without direct involvement. It is important to work from the assumption that children are particularly vulnerable, and vulnerability increases the younger they are.

⁸ Fischer, G., Riedesser, P. (2009): Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie. Gewaltkriminalität. (S. 341 – 356). München: Ernst Reinhardt, GmbH & Co KG

Most traumatic experiences do not take place in school. Bullying is an exception as it is a frequent issue in educational organisations and often linked directly to the school environment. Heads of schools as well as staff carry much responsibility. Bullying issues can provoke difficult situations at school, because as a head of a school, as a teacher, or as a social worker, we may be part of the system, which causes or nourishes such behaviours. Bullying is always a leadership problem, and it can be difficult to have the courage to initiate an investigation. Bullying should not be underestimated. It can lead to serious psychological trauma. Cyber bullying increases this problem further.⁹

3.2. Previous traumatic experiences, which became chronic

At school we often have to deal with previous psychological traumas, the causes of which are not evident, because the causal event took place a long time ago, and because taboos prevent them coming to the surface. As teaching staff and social workers we are confronted with longer-term syndromes of psychological trauma.

Previous trauma has the same causes as acute trauma. However, neglect in early childhood is an additional factor, which must be emphasized because of its huge impact. The quality of attachment is created during pregnancy and the first years of life, therefore when teachers

⁹ Fischer, G., Riedesser, P. (2009): Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie. Mobbing. (S. 371 - 378). München: Ernst Reinhardt. Although bullying is being explained in the adult field, the content can be transferred to the sphere of schools.

encounter these students, they encounter previous trauma.

- ***Neglect in early childhood***^{10 11}
- Illness and death in the family
- Neglect
- Accident
- Bullying
- Sexual abuse
- Violence (especially in their own family)
- War
- Natural disaster
- Divorce, separation, loss
- Loss of a parental employment

It is important that pedagogic professionals are aware of trauma and its impacts, and can identify possible post-traumatic disorders. This identification brings relief to all involved, and makes proper support possible.

¹⁰ Fischer, G., Riedesser, P. (2009): Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie. Kindheitstrauma. (S. 286 - 326). München: Ernst Reinhardt.

¹¹ Brisch, K.H., Hrsg, (2017) Bindungstraumatisierungen, Wenn Bindungspersonen zu Tätern werden, page 154 et al. Stuttgart: Klett-Gotta

4. Identification of psychological trauma in a school setting

4.1. General

The following behaviours can be indications of trauma. It may not be the case that all the following points are evident, and they may vary:

- Aggression, for no apparent reason
- Increased state of alertness
- Vigilance
- Lack of awareness of boundaries, promiscuity or premature sexualisation
- Day-dreaming
- Existence in different ego-states
- Lies and truth are mixed up
- Insomnia
- Lack of interest
- Retreating to an earlier developmental stage
- Lack of response
- Apathy
- Complaints of pain
- Self-harming
- Eating disorders
- Lack of confidence, low self-esteem
- Anguish
- Self-tranquillisation (nicotine, alcohol, drugs, medicaments a.s.o.)¹²

¹² Dreiner. M., Trauma - was tun? (o.J.) Köln: Zentrum für Trauma- und Konfliktmanagement (ZTK) GmbH

4.2. Concrete references

4.2.1. Charged transference

Traumatised children confront us as teachers, therapists or social workers, with their trauma—whether we like it or not!

- Children with psychological trauma re-enact their stories in their daily life, including in school
- They transfer their traumatic experience of attachment

Typically, we have strong feelings ourselves when dealing with heavily traumatised children and young people. These are our reactions to transferred feelings. If we don't recognise them as transference, we risk illness through prolonged exposure. Supervision helps to identify and understand this dynamic, and to benefit from improved knowledge of the student and his or her problems. **Only if transference is recognised can a stable relationship be developed.**

The following example demonstrates the mechanism of transference. Felix, who is 15 years old, his mother, Mrs. K., her current partner who is not Felix's father, and his teacher meet to discuss his vocational future. Initially, the teacher notices that Mrs. K. brings a whole file of documents to the meeting, and takes notes of the discussion. The teacher feels a little uneasy about this. During the conversation Mrs. K. explains to the highly qualified teacher that her advice to students on how to write job applications is old fashioned and wrong. The teacher becomes annoyed about the criticism as she regards it as unfounded. She challenges Mrs. K., at which point Mrs. K.'s partner becomes involved, supporting Mrs. K.'s argument. Felix retreats into silence. The conversation

terminates on the agreement by all parties that Felix should go to a vocational trainer.

After the meeting the teacher is surprised about her continuing feelings of anger about the way the conversation went. She is not sure what has happened to cause this lingering uneasy feeling. A powerful transferential and counter-transferential dynamic has taken place between Mrs. K. and the teacher. The feeling that the teacher is not good enough is in fact Mrs. K.'s trauma—originating in her own history. Mrs. K. feels insecure and has a bad self-esteem due to having experienced strong devaluation of her person in her past. If the teacher is aware of this mechanism, she can quickly forget her anger, and she knows that she needs to offer support to Mrs. K. in future. She will stress the importance of Mrs. K.'s input and comment on how positive it is that Mrs. K. is so supportive of her son.

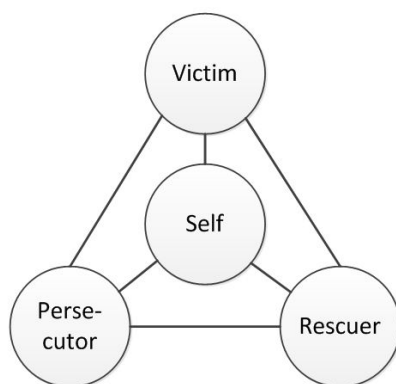


Fig.1. Transferential dynamic made the teacher be driven out of her 'self' into the role of the victim and by her own countertransferential dynamic she finds herself in the position of "persecutor".

(Diagram after the drama-triangle of Stephen Karpman (1968))

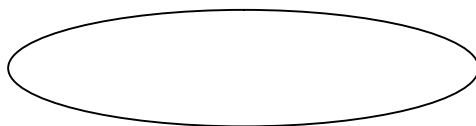
Transference can make us unconsciously assume the position of the rescuer, the persecutor, or even the victim. It is also possible to change from one position to another. In the example above, both the teacher and Mrs. K. assume the role of the victim as well as the persecutor.

Traumatised individuals have very encumbering transferences, which can cause massive countertransference. Regular supervision offers us awareness of this transferential dynamic. Only reflective practitioners can help others while retaining their own psychological stability.¹³

4.2.2. The rolled out carpet

People whose psychological injuries could not heal will—in an unconscious way—re-enact similar situation like that one which provoked the trauma. This is like a kind of self-healing-attempt of the soul hoping that this time the action leads to a happy end. In this case the trauma could be integrated and solved, imagine that the fragments would be transformed into a coherent text, made to a book and put on a shelf! But this attempt is normally not successful. The attempt is doomed to failure; mostly there is a retraumatisation instead of healing former traumatisation. The trauma is even strengthen and the turning in the ellipse is going on.

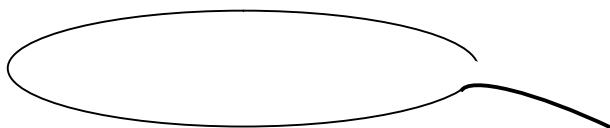
¹³ Weiß, W. (2008): Philipp sucht sein Ich. Zum pädagogischen Umgang mit Traumata in den Erziehungshilfen. S. 148 – 153. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa



As a metaphor a carpet is enrolled and there is even some glue on it as an invitation Persons their psychological injuries could not heal up, they will—in an unconscious way—re-enact similar situation like that one which provoked the trauma—unconsciously of course—to take a role in the re-enacting of the trauma.



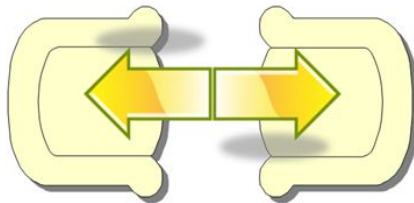
The knowledge about transferential dynamics, an important part of psychotraumatology, can help to find an exit out of this retraumatisation. This reduces the strain of all involved persons and helps to activate self-healing capacities.



The concept of the 'good reason' is a simple and powerful help to avoid the red carpet and to avoid to be part in

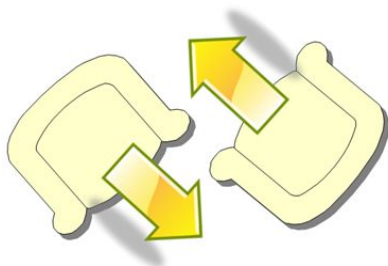
the re-enacting of the trauma. The sentence 'You might have a good reason that you...', which is at the same time an attitude, helps us to avoid the taking over of a role and we can remain in the position of the 'self'. Even thinking this sentence without speaking it out loudly is helpful.¹⁴

Although traumatised people have very powerful transference phenomena, those dynamics happen whenever people meet. It is advisable to reduce them as much as possible in schools. The numerous persons involved can turn them into phenomena which are of a high complexity and therefore not being controlled anymore. We can reduce them when we do not sit or stand directly in front of another person. That means that discussions can be very stressful with somebody standing in a door case due to transferences a position which is quite common at school.



Such a position provokes transference dynamics

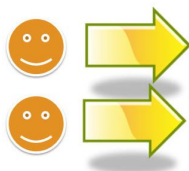
¹⁴ Ebel, A. (2006): Heilsamer Umgang mit traumatisierten Pflegekindern im Alltag, Skript zum Workshop, "Das Konzept des guten Grundes". FORUM: Internetzeitschrift des Landesverbandes für Kinder in Adoptiv- und Pflegefamilien S-H e.V. (KiAP) und der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sozialberatung und Psychotherapie (AGSP)



Such a position reduces transference dynamics

Transferences can be reduced in the classroom when the teacher is moving in front of the class while speaking and when he is not sitting on a chair lecturing.

It is recommended to go for a walk for difficult conversations, for instance on the schoolyard during a break. This procedure reduces the transference dynamics.



Walking helps to find solutions

4.2.3. Strange behaviour

There are student behaviours which we cannot understand. Examples are: Ayse, a 16 year old girl who insists on carrying her handbag even when she is cooking in the school camp. Reto, who refuses to touch the floor of the gymnastic hall with his bare feet. This behaviour persists, despite causing them problems.



Ayşe can't be without her handbag. Source: M. Herzog

In such cases it is important to be aware that a human being does nothing which has no purpose for himself. It is, however, possible that we cannot understand the meaning of others' behaviour. If such behaviour is related to a trauma, the victim can rarely tell us the background. Ayşe does not explain why she needs to retain her handbag, and Reto cannot tell us what has happened to prevent him from walking barefoot on the floor. But obviously their inappropriate behaviour provides them protection and safety.

It is important to integrate children when they exhibit unusual behaviour; pressure to desist from the unusual behaviour is not appropriate. It is never acceptable to blame the individual. On the contrary, it is necessary to build their self-confidence and self-esteem in order to encourage eventual independence from this kind of support. There is an important rule: **You are only allowed to add and not to remove.**



Reto is the only one wearing pumps so he can join the gymnastics lesson

In Ayse's case, it emerged that her parents were Kurdish refugees who escaped a genocidal regime. She was born in Switzerland, which would appear to be a safe place, but she nevertheless retained traumatic memories from her early childhood. Her experience as a refugee is evidenced by her need to retain her handbag with her at all times, even in gym lessons.

For daily school life, it is not always important to know the background. Care must be taken when parents are suspected of involvement, e.g. in cases of neglect, domestic violence, sexual abuse etc. In such cases it is advised to contact professionals and actions must be planned and agreed on them by professionals and superiors like heads of schools.

Bullying is a big issue in school context. It is important to pay attention to it. Adults are in charge to take immediate actions to stop it. Victims of bullying can have

experienced other traumatising incidents and the risk is too high that they get severely ill. Unrecognised transferences can cause that exactly this child was selected as a victim of bullying. Bullying can never be excused and always reveals a lack of leadership.

4.2.4. Clothes not appropriate for temperature

An indication of a persistent psychological trauma is, for example, when someone is dressed in over- or under-warm enough clothes. The reaction made sense in the moment of the traumatic event, which could have also been a physical injury, in order to reduce the sense of pain. When an individual is suffering a post-traumatic stress disorder, this insensitivity can still last. Body sensitivity is reduced; and pain, heat and cold will not be registered.



It occurs, that traumatised children do not wear clothes which are warm enough in cold weather. Source M. Herzog

4.2.5. Age-inappropriate behaviour

Children and young people with a post traumatic disorder will often retreat to an earlier stage of development. This can appear as babyish speech, or soiling of bedding. It might equally be 'acting', for example, a student who hides in the classroom under his jacket like a baby, on the principle: 'If I cannot see you, you cannot see me either.' In this case a trauma is quite evident, but behaviours may vary. Physically rendering themselves 'small' is a self-protective mechanism.



This student obviously retreats into an earlier stage of development. Source M. Herzog

Such peculiarity of course can have different causes but nevertheless it could be a hint of a trauma. Retreating in an earlier stage of their life human beings can try to provide the shelter they did not get at this stage of development.

4.2.6. Aggression

With a trauma an individual becomes emotionally vulnerable; very often little is needed to provoke an aggressive reaction. The highly sensitive antenna provokes false alarm because of those fragments of former incidents. The past is mingling up with the present and therefore traumatised people feel in danger even there is no threat out of an independent perspective.

To reduce intolerable stress, violence is often a resort. This can take the form of bullying, self-harm or violence against others, animals or objects.

This individual needs a safe environment. A teacher or social worker needs to give the feeling of protection, safety and reliability, and to ensure that there is no abuse and bullying by class colleagues. On the other hand it is important to ensure the 'safe place' to the peers as well that they are protected.

4.2.7. 'Freezing'

There are three patterns of reactions in case of a heavy actual strain, freeze is one of them. Fight and flight are easy to recognize not so the status of freeze. Very often we are not aware of it because it is less evident at school, students in a freeze-status do not disrupt lessons. Nevertheless, it reveals a severe strain which has to be lowered to avoid a longer-term syndrome of a psychological trauma.



This student is overwhelmed by his family situation and the additional stress of a vocational training resulting in the state of freeze. He withdrew into himself and for instance touched work-pieces which he should compound with the back of his hands which made the task impossible to accomplish. Source: M. Herzog

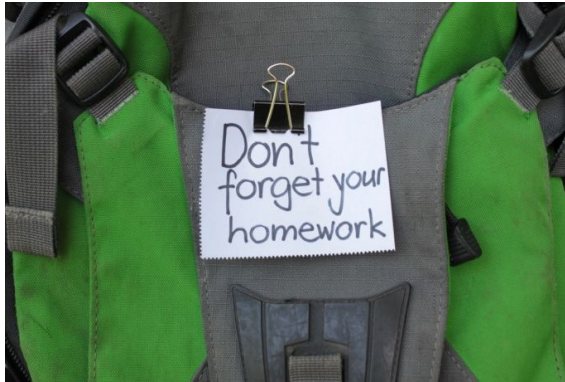
4.2.8. Poor memory

If a student frequently exhibits memory deficit, along with the above-mentioned behaviours, this may indicate dissociation. Dissociation is the attempt to obliterate the traumatic experiences from the memory, therefore the affected individual unconsciously changes his awareness and attitude. Negative emotions are dissipated.

Dissociation from the moment of a traumatic experience can lead to forgetfulness in other circumstances, which may be about harmless things such as homework¹⁵. That was the case with a very intelligent but severely trauma-

¹⁵ Barwinski, R. (2010): Die erinnerte Wirklichkeit. In Barwinski, R., Bering, R., Fischer, G., Wurmser, L. (Hrsg). Dissoziation und Verdrängung als Ursachen für die Unfähigkeit, sich an traumatische Situationen zu erinnern (Seite 19 – 33) Kröning: Asanger

tised 16 year old boy. The question: 'What do you need to help you to remember your homework?' led to an easy solution; the student put a note onto his backpack: 'Don't forget the homework' which was successful.



The note helps to remember the homework. It was the student's idea. Source M. Herzog

This example reveals that it is important to cooperate with traumatised students to find good solutions. In a way there are experts of themselves and are able to give hints what they need to be stabilised. They feel be taken seriously what they give them back the feeling of efficacy.

Of course it would never be ok to have the boy walked through town with this note in case he could be bullied. In this case it is evident to find another solution to remember the homework.

5. Principles in addressing trauma in pedagogical work

5.1. General

- Reduction of additional stress
 - Safety
 - Consideration of transference and counter-transference
 - Relationship work
 - Respect for life- and acclimatisation-achievement
 - Belief in the individual
- } stabilisation

5.2. The relief method in work with traumatised young people

As a teacher you can suppose that a certain student may be traumatised. Safe diagnoses must be made by experts. Nevertheless, the attitude of a teacher who respects the following basic rules is very relieving for all students, especially those with psychological trauma.

- to be respectful, serious and transparent
- to communicate a sense of security
- presence
- care
- to stimulate
- to give hope
- to comfort
- to be accessible (within transparent limits)
- to monitor the emotions of the class and individual students
- to consider transference and counter-transference

- not working more than the student involved to solve problems¹⁶

5.3. Practical examples to be used with traumatised students

5.3.1. 'Safe place'

It is important that students feel comfortable and secure in the classroom. This is important for all students, but particularly for traumatised children. A good atmosphere, no bullying (if possible) and transparency are critical. Decisions should be understood, routines established and followed, and traditions are important. All these factors guarantee stability and security.



The three children feeling good when arriving at a safe place.

Lily, Ben and Omid is a picture book about this topic. It is about three children who embark to find the 'safe place'

¹⁶ Source: 'The therapeutic style', by Bernd Frank, head of department Klinik Littenheid used with dissociating patients

and is suited for the work in the class room. There is additional material provided on www.yestermorrow.eu.¹⁷

During residential activity such as camping, the topic ‘a safe place’ remains important. The question ‘What do you need when you are not feeling so good?’ offers the student the chance to anticipate and choose something which gives security. This could be to retreat to a bench near the camp, or to solve a brainteaser, or to hold a conversation with a trusted person.

‘Only a “safe place” enables us to let go of the very effective survival strategies and to learn alternative patterns of behaviour.’

Dr. Marc Schmid, Leading Psychologist of the Psychiatric Ward for Children and Adolescents of the University Psychiatric Clinic (UPK) Basel¹⁸

5.3.1.1 More practical examples

In the Erasmus+ project of the EU, called YESTERMORROW¹⁹, each partner school of the six countries involved focused on improving the safe place for their students but also for everybody else who is involved in school life.

¹⁷ Rieser, C. (2016): Masterarbeit zur Qualifikation als Sonderpädagogin am Institut Spezielle Pädagogik und Psychologie in Basel, verfügbar auf marianne.herzog.com

¹⁸ Schmid, M. (2012): Komplex traumatisierte Kinder in der stationären Jugendhilfe und als Mandanten von Kinderanwälten. Referat Weiterbildung Kinderanwaltschaft

¹⁹ see more on www.yestermorrow.eu

5.3.1.2 Enhanced communication

Since 2015 some teachers of I.I.S Carlo Cattaneo (Rome, Italy), a vocational school, have experimented with using IT tools like WhatsApp in order to find an easy, fast and effective means of communication with their students who are between 18 and 25 years old. This as a result of a questionnaire on the level of 'well-being' perceived by the students in which the great majority of the answers to the question 'The use of socials with your teachers makes you / would make you feel safer?' was positive.

Consequently the teachers decided to create chats with each different class in spite of some initial fears that the private numbers could be abused and it might be an intrusion in a teacher's or student's private sphere.



Students and a teacher of I.I.S Carlo Cattaneo using their mobile phones. (Source Stefano Tommasucci)

It turned out that the effects were positive, there was not even one abuse, communication turned out to be effective and transparent. In many situations (strikes, per-

sonal problems, delay of public transports, sharing documents/communications etc.) it has proved to be very useful, it includes every class member and the relationships have improved.

Sometimes students use private numbers of teachers to tell them about personal problems that they might be ashamed of telling from face to face. In the meantime the majority of teachers have joined the chats and now they also use it to communicate among colleagues.

5.3.1.3 Consistency

Consistency in behaviour management is central to Marriotts School, another school involved in the YESTER-MORROW-project. One of their techniques is to count down from five to one in order for the class to be quiet showing the numbers with the fingers. All teachers and support staff use this and it is an effective behaviour management tool.



Maths teacher of Marriotts School, displaying her counting down hand. (Source Natalie Slade)

The consistency by all the staff give them the feeling of safety as well as the students. Additionally it is a technique involving two senses, sight and hearing.

5.3.1.4 Transitions provoke uncertainty

Transitions always raise the feeling of uncertainty. Mariotts School especially focus on the five minute gap between lessons. During this period there are two types of music played. The first music, called 'The Entertainer', lasts for three minutes. The music of the last two minutes is more urgent and the theme of 'Mission Impossible' is played and lets students know that they are in danger of being late to class.

In ZSEiO in Przemyśl, the Polish partner school, they focus on transitions, too, to enhance the feeling of safety in those moments. A special priority is the integration of new students and teachers at the beginning of the first year. For this reason, the school organises two events. The first one is an 'Integration Day' for a new class with the form tutor and the school counsellor. On this day there are no lessons and the students meet outside school. The new students present themselves and their expectations.

The form tutor and the school counsellor also talk about their expectations; respect, listening to each other, fairness. A bonfire and integration games help to implement these rules into daily school life.

The other annual event for all first year students is 'Rajd Elektronika', which is a walking trip. On the way the students have to find clues and work as a team (together with their form tutor) to solve the riddles.



Students at the bonfire (Source Joanna Omachel)

When they reach the destination, each class has to present themselves as a group in front of the other classes in the form of a song, short performance, or a poem, etc. There is also an award for the best group presentation. The headmaster officially accepts the students as members of the school community by giving them certificates.



Students presenting their certificates which visualise that they are part of the new school (Source Joanna Omachel)

All the students and the teachers have some hot soup and take part in integration games. This is a great tradition and an excellent way to welcome new students and make them feel good in the new school.

5.3.1.5 Celebration of traditions

An important method in the Swedish partner school in Leksand to create the safe place is the celebration of traditions. Throughout the year there are several recurrent events: Once or twice a year the class representatives help to organize smaller social activities for the class where pupils and parents can meet after school.

At Saint Valentine's Day a group of pupils organize the celebration of the day. The focus is friendship and being nice to each other, which includes a cake competition and also tasting the cakes in the end of the day.



Students creating Valentine's day cakes and bringing them to school for a competition (Source Cecilia Henriksson)

At the end of the school year they also have another day organized by the pupils with different outdoor activities,

during which the students work together in small groups mixed from different classes.



Students in year nine training different dances. (Source Cecilia Henriksson)

All the he students of Leksand school in year nine have a dancing day. They learn how to behave on the dance floor and a couple of dances. In the evening there is a ball with a live band.

To build up social relationships among students there is one day every year, during which the students can choose different sports activities like hiking, slalom, curling or fishing. and also meet friends from other classes.

In the Romanian Șura Mică, another partner school of the YESTERMORROW-project, the school staff strengthen the positivity of traditions too. One of several projects is 'The Spring Carnival', a one day trip in order to get to know the environment and the country. There are other activities in which students are encouraged to prepare themselves in groups for a celebration such as

Christmas and Easter to build up good relationships among all students.



Sport activities to build up relationships. (Source Cecilia Henriksson)

5.3.1.6 Tutoring and Counselling

Students under mental strain find a 'safe place' in their own school mates in the Spanish partner school in



A tutor and his mate talking together. (Source Tomás Díaz Gómez)

Ceuta. School mates play the role of a personal tutor by listening to them, supporting them and acting as mediators in possible conflicts. Besides, they become the link between traumatised children and their teachers. These tutor students are chosen from higher groups or from the same age. And it means, at the same time, a way of making friends.

There is a professional team supporting health and well-being in the Swedish school in Leksand. It's easy for the students to get in touch with their school welfare officer since her room is in the centre of the school. In the team they also have a nurse, a study counsellor and several teachers for students with special needs. Important for the students' well-being is also the recreation leader in the cafeteria, the school assistant and the librarian. The headmistresses are available most of the days.



Leksand's school welfare officer. (Source Cecilia Henriksson)

If a student can't cope with the normal classroom situation they have a team working with smaller groups in another school building. They plan the school days ac-

ording to the students' difficulties and use different methods and content to create a safe place.

5.3.1.7 The toilets—a physically safe place

Marriotts School opened its new building in January 2013. The school has over 1150 students, over three floors; so many students interact with each other every day. A common source of anxiety for Marriotts students in the old school was the design of the toilets. This was a place of bullying and often students would not go to the toilet at all during the school day in order to avoid them. As you could see over the cubicle, students did not feel safe in them. Therefore one of the requirements for the new design was to have open style toilet facilities.

Sophia, a year eleven student said 'the old toilets made me feel paranoid about people looking over but the new ones are all enclosed, so I have more privacy and feel more safe'.



Marriotts open style toilets with completely enclosed cubicles.
(Source Natalie Slade)

As the pictures demonstrate, the new toilets are open-planned and well designed, so the washing area is safe and visible to all students and staff. There is CCTV in the washing area, so if there are any incidents, they can be recorded. The cubicles have doors that are completely enclosed but they can be opened by the site team with a special device. There is also a disabled toilet in every area, for students with physical needs.

5.3.2. Pedagogy with a therapeutical issue

Short songs, rhymes, sound bites and tongue twisters are pedagogically very effective. Repeating them helps to give structure to lessons and to ensure the feeling of being safe as well as fun to students. It helps to learn a foreign language.

Hopping, jumping and shaking help to remove an acute trauma with its excessive energy²⁰. Visiting nurseries, schools and day-care centres we are astonished about the subtle methods of teachers who very often intuitively access those interventions and achieve those therapeutical effects.²¹

5.3.3. Cooperation with parents

In families with other cultural backgrounds it can be difficult to send children to a psychiatrist or a psychologist in case of traumatisations. It is possible that in their countries those professionals do not exist or they might have been involved in the collaboration with a totalitarian re-

²⁰ Levine, P.A., Kline, M. (2010): Kinder vor seelischen Verletzungen schützen, dt. Ausgabe. München: Kösel

²¹ Croos-Müller, C. (2014): Kopf hoch. München: Kösel

game or even with tortures. Beside cultural boundaries there are often additionally linguistic boundaries.

Every culture knows about methods of dealing with physical and psychological injuries. It makes sense to ask parents with migrational background what they did when they were sad, agitated and in trouble: 'What would your grandfather or grandmother have recommended to reduce trouble and grief?' We can encourage them to cultivate such methods in our country too.

In African cultures singing is such a effective method, intoning songs for several voices, dancing empowers and has positive effects on mental health. Singing activates the hormone oxytocin, thereby evoking a feeling of happiness. That is why singing is so important at school.

Children can calm down when they lie down on the soil to feel the earth with their whole body.

In Arabic culture humming is widespread and important. Babies are carried on the belly of their mothers while she is humming. This vibration calms them down. Why not be generous as a teacher when a child is humming doing his work?

5.3.4. Focusing to avoid dissociation

To get students back to the 'here and now', which is important in our work with them, it is helpful to address them informally, for example: 'What a nice sweater! Where is it from?'

If there is a heavy traumatisation with dissociation, dissociation may be avoided through exercises requiring

intense focus. Therefore the student does not risk dissociation from the object of their fear.

These exercises can take the form of riddles, brainteasers, completion of drawings, or enlargement of a picture with a magnifying glass. A heavily traumatised boy, awaiting a transfer to alternative provision, magnified hundreds of comic characters over several weeks, spending more than fifty hours. This approach to stabilisation through focus helped him to leave positively.



This kind of work helped this young person to focus. (Source M. Herzog)

5.3.5. Humour

Laughter, when it is not at the expense of others, is good for the soul. When we can humorously cope with a situation, it always distances us from it, which gives relief to those involved.

5.3.6. Positive experiences restore self-esteem

Trauma always has a destructive impact on self-confidence. Therefore traumatised young people are

more accustomed to negative experiences than to positive ones. It is important for teachers not to lose courage and to build into their curriculum projects and experiences which offer the students good feelings and success.



In a Erasmus+-project, 'from zero to a hamburger' students sowed tomato seeds, took care for them, repotted them and could harvest tomatoes after 6 months to produce ketchup. They could improve effectiveness, patience and care. (Source M. Herzog)

Self-esteem is lived very intensively in action; sewing, planting, cooking, baking, in subjects like handy-craft lessons, music, choir, gymnastics.

The school of Șura Mică, the Romanian partner school, is especially challenged by the fact that a third part of the students are Roma with a poor socio-economical background. The school especially focus on creating an interactive and collaborative learning environment through extra-activities like the project called 'Miss Toamna' in which all students are encouraged to express themselves through music, dancing, singing, artistic creations and cooking.



Students from Șura Mică (Source Corina Masaru)

Additionally weekly activities in which students take dancing lessons improve their feeling of effectiveness and the positivity of cooperation.

Congratulations! You have produced an excellent piece of work this week/have made a consistent effort (Please delete as appropriate)

Please take this invitation slip to visit the Headteacher in her office, situated on the 1st floor.

Well done!

Student Name: Staff Name:

Lesson: Period: 1 2 3 4 5 6

This green slip directly leads the awarded students to the Head's office (Source Natalie Slade)

Students with good results may need some positive experiences too. At Marriotts School when students complete a high standard of work over a sustained period of time, they are awarded with a green slip. The policy is that the Head teacher will interrupt any meeting that is taking place to speak to the student, as the students are the most important part of the school. Students then re-

ceive a letter of commendation home and they are put on the spreadsheet and may be invited to the tea party that is held once a term on a Friday.

5.3.7. Take over responsibility for themselves

The students should be empowered to take responsibility for their actions, within a framework they can cope with. A student who is bullying another one is regularly asked before entering the classroom: 'How are you?' — 'Not so good'— 'Do you think you are able to manage to stick to the rules in the classroom?' If his answer is positive, he is welcome and he can join in. If he refuses because he feels inadequate and is trying to reduce his stress by bullying, he has to sit at a table outside the classroom to do his work. It is important to stress that he is welcome if he sticks to the rules.

5.3.8. Helplessness versus autonomy

A situation which is so overwhelming that the psyche cannot cope is always linked to helplessness and powerlessness. Therefore it is important that the traumatised person regains a position where he does not feel helpless. He should be involved in the decision-making process, and have a sense of autonomy. Very often children and young people know about solutions. As a teacher we have to discover these: 'What could help you, so that you can concentrate better?' Especially helpful are the questions ending with 'because of'. 'You cannot concentrate because of ...?'²²

²² Vgl. Ebel, A. (2006): Heilsamer Umgang mit traumatisierten Pflegekindern im Alltag, Skript zum Workshop, "Das Konzept des guten Grundes". FORUM: Internetzeitschrift des Landesverbandes für Kinder in Adoptiv- und Pflegefamilien S-H e.V. (KiAP) und der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sozialberatung und Psychotherapie (AGSP)

5.3.9. Adoption of appropriate roles

Children and young people from a socially vulnerable environment are often accustomed to taking roles they cannot cope with. They may, for example, assume the adult role of a parent. The same process can take place later on at school or in an organisation. Largely unnoticed, the student assumes an adult role and starts to dictate what is to be done and which rules apply. This is particularly evident in aggressive students over whom there are concerns.

The student cannot cope with this role, and his aggressive behaviour escalates. It is important that this process is recognised and that all involved assume their appropriate positions within the system. A clarification of the hierarchy is needed through words and actions, for example when a head is talking to students at the entrance of a school, it is recommended that he or she stands on the staircase and the students downstairs than the other way round.

5.3.10. Changing positions to lose tunnel vision

Taking a walk with traumatised people who feel oppressed by a situation is an effective strategy. It may not be possible for teachers to go for a walk with the student, but it may be realistic for a social worker or a therapist to do so. Walking means changing physical proximity. It helps to widen the view and to find new strategies. There is no need to talk much, but the student may raise the topics on his mind. There are similar positive aspects to train or car travel.

The question: 'I am wondering how else you could behave in this situation?' helps to extend the range of possible responses.

5.3.11. Building on skills

Teachers and social workers have to focus on the strengths of our students. Their skills and talents should be our central focus, and continually developed. Afterwards very often there is also progress in the softer skills.

This also applies to specialists dealing with traumatised people. When they bring up subjects they are enthusiastic about, this is very positive. Passion for music or sport, creativity, love of nature, fascination for foreign countries and many other topics can be integrated into the curriculum. When students feel their teachers' enthusiasm, their own interest can be awakened.^{23 24}

5.3.12. Preoccupation with the past

The fact that there is the possibility of passing on traumatic experiences from the 'first generation' to subsequent generations, shows the importance of paying close attention to our ancestors. It is important to deal with the child's own past and the past of the family with photos and narrations. The conversation that can arise among

²³ Schmidt, G. (2005): Einführung in die hypnosystemische Therapie und Beratung. Heidelberg: Carl-Auer

²⁴ Schmidt, G. (2006): Liebesaffären zwischen Problem und Lösung. Hypnosystemisches Arbeiten in schwierigen Kontexten. Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme

generations has extremely positive effects, it strengthens bonding and relationships.²⁵

Those projections are especially practicable for older students. Even without psychological expertise, red threats might come to the fore, similarity and differences become visible.

In the 1940s photos of one family were taken in the garden in front of their house. Another family has mainly photos of excursions in their album. In this case the hypothesis is possible that the first family is doing fine at home, the other one might have their safe place on common journeys.

When two human beings from such different backgrounds get married, conflicts may occur. This happened with in the case of this couple. The wife felt very comfortable at home, her husband loved travelling. Only after 60 years of a shared life they understood this setting due to a biography-project. They could put it into words and it had an effect of reconciliation. It could be interesting where the offspring has their safe places.

²⁵ Krüger, W. (2015): Die Geheimnisse der Grosseltern, unsere Wurzeln kennen, um fliegen zu lernen. Norderstedt: BoD



Photos of childhood situations can give hints as to what the 'safe place' consisted of. (Source M. Herzog)

Everybody was astonished by the anxiousness of Alice, an 80 years old lady, in another biography project. She talked about situations which were very frightening for her but not at all for the listener. When they had a look at the old photos, Alice stated that there is no photo of her great aunt Verena. Verena lived together with her mother in Alice's family after the sudden death of her father. Some days before her 20th birthday, Verena passed

away. Her death was caused by pneumonia. Only a few days later, Alice was born.

There is no photo of Verena but even though her life was so short, she influenced Alice's life very much. There was a big fear in Alice's family that the newborn baby could die too. The fear of an early death was a constant companion throughout Alice's life. She suffered a lot and was very often ill. But when she got older than 75 she got more and more courageous, got more self-confidence and gained vitality. Obviously the prediction of an early death had not been true.

This kind of time-witness-project aims to reveal connecting elements between different generations based on evidence. In some cases it might be possible to reconcile a person with ancestors and family or to acquire additional knowledge of coping methods in difficult situations. That is why resource oriented questions are important:

- What helped you to cope with this difficult situation?
- Who helped you to cope?
- How did you manage not to lose hope?
- What strengths did you get out of these difficulties?
- How would you summarise your life in one sentence?

The answers given can be very precious for grandchildren, sons and daughters but also for many other people.²⁶

²⁶ The preoccupation with the past was an important part of our Erasmus+-project. Especially in our time witness project we focused

6. Assumed trauma, what shall we do?

6.1. First steps

It is possible that as a professional you have the feeling that the stabilisation at school might have provided a certain amount of relief while there is still not enough help for the child or the young person. It is possible that the suspicion remains, that the traumatic events persist. In such a case it makes sense to talk about this suspicion to other colleagues who know the young person and to inform the head of your school. It is important that a concerted action is taken and experts are involved.

If nobody else is alerted it might not become transparent whether the child is ok. Heavy assaults can remain unnoticed. Trust in your feelings but do not act precipitately and contact professionals.

7. Conclusion

Traumatised children and students need to be treated by a specialist who is aware of the special care they require. In some European countries there are more to do specialists than in others, and there is wider appreciation of this issue. This has with history, varying socio-economic environments and different cultural norms. Today's pluralistic society throws up its own challenges, with the traditional values of immigrant groups causing subsequent generational conflict.

on those resource oriented questions. More information about the time witness project can be found on www.yestermorrow.eu.

As teachers and social workers, if we follow the relief method described in point 6, we can help children to cope better in the educational environment. Many successful teachers implement these strategies subconsciously, and learn through experience that these methods have a very positive impact on students.

The awareness of the risk of becoming affected by the problems of traumatised students or parents via their interferences may help professionals to retain their psychological health, and to continue teaching.

We therefore hope that this brochure will aid professionals in understanding and coping with trauma.

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