Student Exchange Programs in Times of War.
Outcomes of a Ukrainian Student Visit Program at an Austrian School and its Implications for Peace Education

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Introduction

- **Premise:** Intercultural interactions foster mutual understanding, respect, collaboration, and peace (Swain & Johnson, 1997).

- Case study: **Ukrainian students visiting an Austrian school during ongoing war**
  - Perspectives of both Ukrainian and Austrian students on the exchange experience
  - Benefits, challenges, and insights from such short-term programs
  - Findings to inform future exchange initiatives during periods of crisis

Recent Paper

Bacher, S., Bacher, M., Kraler, Ch., & Binytska, K. (2024). [A Ukrainian Student Visit at an Austrian School in Times of War: Implications for Peace Education](#). *The Modern Higher Education Review. 9*(1). 141-162. https://doi.org/10.28925/2617-5266/2024.99

Historical Context and Global Trends on Short Time Student Exchange

- **Long Tradition**
  - e.g. **"Grand Tour"** (17th century): early form of aristocratic educational travel, primarily focused on classical culture in Italy (Chaney, 1998)

- **Modern Student Mobility:**
  - e.g. **ERASMUS+** program promotes student exchange: more than **1.74 million** participants since 2014

- **Globalization and Education:**
  - **Social, economic, and technological interconnectivity** is increasing (Ritzer, 2007)
  - Greater exposure to **cultural diversity** (Perry & Southwell, 2011)
  - **Displacement due to war and natural disasters** has increased over the last 15 years

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Theoretical Background and Advantages of Short Time Student Exchanges

- **Expanded Immersion** (Swain & Johnson, 1997):
  - Originated in language learning to expose learners comprehensively
  - Focuses on content, duration, and especially the temporary change of location
  - ➤ **Exchange programs** enhance learning by **changing location** and context

- **Glocalization** (Roudomentof, 2016):
  - Explores the interaction between **global trends** and **local contexts**
  - ➤ **Exchange programs** provide **structured exposure** to both **familiar school settings** and **unfamiliar cultural elements** fostering **intercultural competence** (Deardorff, 2009) through **direct engagement** (Huggins, 2015) **> active experiences** (Dewey, 1938)

- **Additional Advantages** (Kendall & Rodger, 2015):
  - ➤ building **relationships**, both peer relationships and those between staff and students
  - ➤ positive impact on **resilience**, **self-confidence** and **wellbeing**
  - ➤ **knowledge**, **skills** and **understanding**

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Fostering Peace through Educational Exchange

Evolving Definition of Peace (Harris & Morrison, 2004):
- More than the **absence of war** > focuses on **harmony, justice, and civic engagement**
- Achieved through strength, justice, politics, sustainability, and **peace education**

Education as a Catalyst for Peace:
- Nurtures **understanding, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution** (Harris & Morrison, 2004)
- **UNESCO (1945):** Peace is **built in human minds** through education, science, and culture
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Education fosters **global understanding and cooperation**
- Peace education nurtures understanding, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution (Harris & Morrison, 2004; UNESCO, 1945; UNGA, 1948)

Peace Education and Intercultural Exchange:
- A **philosophy and practical approach** (Morrison, 2012)
- ➢ **Student exchanges promote tolerance**, reducing the risk of **conflict and war**

Fostering Peace through Educational Exchange

- **Humboldt's Ideal of *Bildung* (Humboldt, 1792; 1793; 1804)**
  - Exposure to diverse experiences prevents prejudice and promotes a cosmopolitan worldview (Bacher, 2023, 2024).
  - ➢ Cultural exchange fosters empathy, curiosity, and respect for diversity.
  - ➢ Student exchange programs are an important component of peace education

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Empirical Study

A Ukrainian Student Visit Program at an Austrian School in Times of War

Background

Educational Disruption and Migration:
- The invasion (Feb 24, 2022) forces families to seek educational continuity abroad
- Many Ukrainian students resettle in Poland (Herbst & Sitek, 2023), while those remaining face severe challenges (Chovpan, 2023)

Integration Measures:
- OECD: 68% of member countries have established temporary reception classes for Ukrainian refugee students (OECD, 2023a)
- EU supports collaboration with Ukrainian teachers (European Commission, 2022).

Case Study – Austria:
- Significant integration of Ukrainian refugee students in Viennese classrooms; highlights need for extra language support (Woltran et al., 2023)
- Example: A short-term program enabled 40 Ukrainian students from Kiev to attend two Viennese secondary schools for a week (Europabüro, 2024).

Methodology

Exchange Details:
- **Dates:** April 22–26, 2024
- **Participants:** 20 Ukrainian students (ages 13–16) from Kyiv
- **Host School:** Vienna secondary school (900 students, 80+ teachers)

Survey & Sample:
- Conducted **three weeks post-exchange**
- **Participants:** 70 students (19 Ukrainian, 51 Austrian)
- **Languages:** Separate surveys in **Ukrainian (for Ukrainians)** and **German (for Austrians)**

Data Analysis:
- Method: **Qualitative content analysis** (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022); Software: **MAXQDA**
- **Triangulated coding** with three coders to derive categories **inductively**

Questions for Ukrainian Students

- **Open Questions:**

(1) What did you find interesting, fascinating, or surprising about your time at an Austrian school? Please concentrate on three aspects and write a paragraph (4-8 lines) to each of these points. Did you join activities with the Austrian students? If yes, which ones, and how did you experience them?

(2) How did you interact with the Austrian students? What did you talk about? How did you communicate?

(3) How would you rate this experience for the Austrian students? In what way could the Austrian students profit from your visit at their school?

- **Closed-end questions:**

(4) Would you recommend this form of exchange? (yes-no question) and

(5) Did you like your stay with the Austrian students? (Likert scale ranging from 1-10).

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Questions for Austrian Students

- **Open Questions:**

(1) What did you find interesting, fascinating, or surprising about the week with the Ukrainian students? Please concentrate on three aspects and write a paragraph (4-8 lines) to each of these points. Were there any joint activities? If yes, which ones, and how did you experience them?

(2) How did you interact with the Ukrainian students? What did you talk about? How did you communicate?

(3) How would you rate this experience for the guests? In what way could the Ukrainian students profit from their visit?

- **Closed-end questions:**

(4) Would you recommend this form of exchange? (yes-no question) and

(5) Did you like the weeks with the Ukrainian students? (Likert scale ranging from 1-10).

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Results

- **Impact on Ukrainian Students:**
  - **Positive experiences** despite wartime challenges.
  - Appreciated **modern teaching methods, spacious classrooms, and extracurricular activities**.
  - **Enhanced cultural understanding, language skills, and friendships** with Austrian peers.

"The school itself was fascinating. The school seems to be small, smaller than ours, but there is really a lot of space. There was enough space for large and interesting classes, a nice dining room and a large gym. Also, the choir and the school performances were really exciting" (Text 16).

"Visits help them to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, learn new language aspects and see the world through the lens of another nationality. In addition, communicating with other people can arouse interest in global issues, develop intercultural skills and support a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding" (Text 15).

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Results

- **Impact on Austrian Students:**
  - **Mixed reactions**: Some found it enriching, others faced **language barriers and organizational challenges**.
  - Raised **awareness of global issues and cultural diversity**.

"I found it interesting that I was able to get to know a new culture and learn how they arrived here. What surprised me was that the two Ukrainian students came in traditional clothing and showed us what they wear in their country. But what I found most fascinating was definitely the language, because there really is a big difference compared to the German language, and Ukrainian sounds really cool" (Text 8).

"I don't know exactly what the goal of this week was, so it's hard to give a recommendation. I also don't know how much of this trip was planned by our school, but I found it very interesting that they took a bus for 2 days to get here, spent 5 days in Vienna, and then took another 2 days to drive back home" (Text 5).

Results

- **Cultural Immersion and Interaction:**
  - Enhanced **intercultural competencies** for Ukrainian students.
  - **Strengthened connections** with Austrian peers.

- **Challenges Identified:**
  - **Language barriers** posed initial difficulties.
  - Importance of **structured planning** and **language support**.
  - **Duration** of the program

- **Ideas for Future Programs:**
  - **Inclusive activities** foster **mutual understanding**.
  - Well-organized exchanges contribute to **peace education** and a **more peaceful coexistence**.

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Conclusions

- **Lessons and Future Considerations:**
  - **Clearer objectives and structured activities** for improved engagement.
  - **Enhanced language support and curriculum integration** to deepen learning.
  - **Longer exchange duration and better planning** for greater impact.

- **Broader Contribution to Peace Education:**
  - Strengthening **mutual understanding, empathy, and tolerance**.
  - Supporting **peaceful coexistence through cultural exchange**.

Outlook

🔍 **Advancing Research Methodologies:**
- **Mixed-methods approach** integrating **qualitative and quantitative** data
- Capturing **both specific experiences and broader trends**

👥 **Expanding Stakeholder Perspectives:**
- Involving **teachers, principals, organizers** to assess program impact

💻 **Exploring Virtual Exchange Alternatives:**
- Assessing **digital platforms** as tools for cross-cultural learning
- Ensuring **continuity of peace education** during crises

🌍 **Third Mission:**
- Promoting **global exchange initiatives**

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Thank you for your attention!

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