

Zines as Education: Amplifying the Voices of Ukrainian Children

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ABSTRACT

This collaborative project between the Cherkasy Regional University Library, and the San Jose State University School of Information (iSchool) aimed to amplify the wartime experiences of Ukrainian children. This initiative involved the digitization of 450 artworks and collecting 70 poems created by these children, culminating in the bilingual zine, “Mom, I See War,” which features ten poems and fifteen artworks centered on themes of hope, resistance, and Ukrainian solidarity. Zines serve as critical and empowering tools for marginalized voices, offering a platform for independent expression and social change (Scheper, 2023). Zines, defined by the Library of Congress as self-published and low-cost media, provide a safe space for children in this case to share their war experiences through poetry and artwork. Existing research highlights that this function positions zines as influential instruments for education and social change by challenging dominant narratives, strengthening critical thinking, and asserting agency. The creation of “Mom, I See War” was directly inspired by the artwork and poetry emerging from art therapy programs for Ukrainian children in the Cherkasy region during 2022 and 2024. These creative expressions offered a US audience powerful narratives of hope amidst the devastation of war. The curation process involved a deliberate selection of ten poems from seventy submissions. This selection aimed to carefully construct a narrative arc that progressed from depictions of devastation to expressions of resilience. Subsequently, each poem was paired with corresponding artwork to highlight thematic connections, foster a sense of community, validate individual experiences, and showcase artistic practice as a form of resistance through the incorporation of national symbols. “Mom, I See War” holds value as a curated collection of cultural records, a testament to wartime experiences, and an educational resource for amplifying

marginalized voices. As a product of curation, it demonstrates information professionals acting as cultural stewards and activists, actively preserving and making accessible the cultural expressions of a marginalized community. As a record of wartime experiences, it documents the realities of Ukrainian life and the impact of conflict on children. Furthermore, as an educational tool, the zine provides a powerful means for historically marginalized voices, specifically children, to be heard (Desyllas & Sinclair, 2014). The process of creating and disseminating “Mom, I See War” offers a replicable model for information professionals to engage in cultural stewardship, ethical curation, and the amplification of marginalized narratives through accessible digital media. By digitizing and curating the children’s works, the project team ensured the preservation of these vital cultural artifacts and facilitated their reach to a global audience, fostering understanding and empathy (Mageary, 2020). This model utilizes accessible digital tools like Canva, FlipBooks, LinkTree, and QR codes. It enhances skills in multilingual publishing, ethical curation, and accessibility-centered design, which is crucial for representing diverse voices and establishing zines as effective educational tools. These tools empower marginalized youth to transform private experiences into public narratives, develop multiliteracy skills, and foster critical thinking and social change across diverse communities facing systemic injustice.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Children’s services; Social justice; Digital humanities; Community engagement.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Ukrainian children; Wartime experiences; Zines; Marginalized voices; Digital preservation.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.alise.2025.2013>

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