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An Eclectic Multicultural Approach Developed By The Informal Education Centers For Russian-Speaking Children In Israel

Descriptors: Russian-speaking community, multicultural education, heritage language, preservation of culture, bilingualism, educational approach, objectives, principles, literacy.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

Abstract

The present paper introduces some topical issues concerning multicultural education in Israel. It deals with the tendency of the Russian-speaking community of Israel to preserve its heritage language, maintain cultural and educational values, and combat the loss of language and culture as well as the negative self-image of immigrant children and “sabras” (children born to Russian parents in Israel). This tendency is manifested in the activities of the various informal education centers founded by the educators of the community for Russian-speaking children.

The paper presents the initial findings of the ongoing study of the objectives, principles and methods of the educational approach developed by one of the centers – the “Mosaic” youth theater. The data analysis may lead to the conclusion that this center has developed a unique eclectic approach, which comprises three interrelated domains (Language, Literature, and Culture). Since the major content-oriented objective of the approach is the preservation of heritage culture, it encompasses other human- and social-oriented goals.

The paper suggests that the unique pedagogic approaches of such informal education centers for Russian-speaking immigrant children as the “Mosaic” youth theater require in-depth scientific research. The implementation of its findings and conclusions may exert a beneficial effect on Israel’s education system.

Introduction

Any society that experiences a flux of immigration (repatriation) inevitably develops multicultural educational approaches. These approaches address the needs of the minority communities that continue to struggle with the realization that the society they live in is not monocultural, but rather an amalgamation of many cultures (Hanley, 1998).

It is a generally accepted tendency in modern multicultural democratic societies to view the diversity of languages and cultural values as an indisputable asset (McLaughlin, 1995). The concept that language and cultural differences enrich rather than diminish any society is increasingly acknowledged (Hanley, 1998). According to some survey data, bilingual citizens, children among them, have economic, social, cultural, cognitive and other advantages over monolingual citizens (Pease-Alvarez, 1993; Soto, Smrekar, Nekcovei, 1999). Thus, children who preserve their heritage language have access to a range of resources that are largely unavailable to monolingual speakers. Besides, a sizable body of literature on the cognitive functioning of bilingual children suggests that bilingualism could lead to a certain amount of cognitive growth (Diaz, 1985; Duncan & DeAvila, 1979; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; Kessler & Quinn, 1980). Finally, the ethnographic research that focuses on the everyday lives of bilingual children and their families and communities has provided descriptions of a rich learning milieu (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned advantages of bilingual speakers, bilingualism is a temporary phenomenon (Pease-Alvarez, 1993). Most immigrant children arrive in a new country as monolingual speakers of their heritage language. As they acquire the host language, they develop bilingualism. Many of these immigrant children are only minimally proficient in their parents' native language. There is copious evidence that the loss of the heritage language occurs most rapidly at the child's level (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Some formerly bilingual children shift to using the dominant language of the country (in this case, Hebrew), regardless of setting. Such a shift may be triggered by a number of factors, including a preference for Hebrew or an actual loss of heritage language (in this case, Russian) proficiency. Communication between these children and their non-Hebrew-proficient parents may be impaired, thereby jeopardizing the parents' ability to socialize and enculturate their children, causing family conflicts, and creating a social and cultural generation gap (Pease-Alvarez, 1993). The inability of both these children and "sabras" (children born to Russian-speaking families in Israel) to speak their heritage language causes many of them to lose their grasp of who their parents and grandparents were/are and

what country they lived in and came from. On the one hand, these children acculturate into “mainstream” Israeli society quickly, and on the other, they lose their traditional ethnic identity equally quickly. Having been influenced by a negative Russian self-image, many of them think that by not speaking Russian, they will cease to be “Russians” and become merely the descendants of Russian-speaking immigrants.

In light of the advantages associated with bilingualism and the recurring phenomenon of heritage language and culture loss, many educators who are members of the Russian-speaking community of Israel¹ have initiated educational projects and programs aimed at the preservation of heritage culture and language. These programs reflect the concern of this community to preserve its cultural, language and educational values. This concern can be explained by the peculiarities of the self-image of Jewish emigrants from Russia, Ukraine and other East European and Asian states – former USSR countries. Among these peculiarities is the combination of Jewish (mostly Yiddish) legacy and the heritage of the “Grand Russian Culture” created partly by the Jewish intelligentsia (educators, writers, poets, publicists, philosophers, scientists, and composers). Thus, Russian Jews tend to consider Russian a more important channel than Hebrew for conveying their cultural values. While members of the Russian-speaking community members strive to retain a multilingual identity, and while they appreciate Hebrew and the cultural values it conveys, they have a strong feeling that their own cultural-linguistic identity is of greater value to them (Epshtein, 1999). In view of this, the educators of the Russian-speaking community in Israel adhere to the school of thought concerning the language-culture-identity interplay according to which (a) the demise of languages means the demise of culture (Peacock & Day, 1999); (b) cultures are embedded in languages; and (c) language is an important part of one’s identity (Davidoff, 2001; Kheimets & Epshtein, 2000; Krasilshikov, 1999, 2000; Shamis, 1996; Weitzman, 1999; Zubarev, 1999).

Among the numerous educational projects carried out by the Russian-speaking educators for the children of their community, there are various informal education centers. We have commenced our research on these centers with the study of a well-known cultural and educational center, the “Mosaic” youth theater.

¹ The term, “a Russian-speaking community,” refers to Jewish families from Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, Uzbekistan (including the Bukhara district), Moldavia, Latvia, and other countries of the former USSR that established Russian-speaking households in Israel.

The questions under investigation are: (1) What are the principles and methods of the educational approach that has been developed by the center's teachers? (2) What are the objectives of this approach?

The data were obtained on the basis of (a) observation of classes, rehearsals and performances; (b) a survey of the letters written by the students' (grand)parents; (c) interviews with the theater educators; and (d) a review of the Israeli press.

Setting

The center constitutes a unique combination of the features of an informal education institution and an amateur theater. It was founded in 1990 on the premises of the Beit Recka cultural and educational center in Jaffa Dalet. Since then, thousands of young children and teenagers ranging from age 8 to 20 have studied there.

The theater students have classes and rehearsals twice a week, three hours each time. Every Saturday evening, they put on plays. The audience consists mostly of members of the Russian-speaking community: (grand)parents with (grand)children, young couples, etc. Sometimes organized groups of Russian-speaking schoolchildren from Bnei Brak, Petach Tikva, Yavne, and so on, also attend these performances.

The educators who work in the center – Zoya Wassermann, Vladimir Zlotni, Lyle Zisselson, and others – are experienced teachers. In addition, theater actors, producers and educators Igor Mushkatin and Lyudmila Mushkatin, who are renowned in the Russian community, also work there.

Most of the theater students are new immigrants, but many of the youngest pupils are “sabras.” Before coming to the theater, the latter could barely speak Russian. Their parents brought them to the theater in the hopes of restoring the heritage language in their children and bringing them back to their parents' cultural roots.

Unfortunately, there were and still are cases of parents bringing young addicts or members of street gangs to the theater educators. Some children, according to their parents' words, were on the verge of dropping out of school.

At present, many of the former theater students are studying in prestigious high schools, colleges and universities. None of those who attended the theater classes and rehearsals have dropped out of school. None of them is involved in any gang activity or addiction. Even if children quit their

theater studies for other – mostly financial – reasons, they are strong enough to avoid succumbing to drugs, alcohol, and other negative habits.

According to the evidence of the (grand)parents², evaluations of the theater educators, and our observation of classes, rehearsals and Saturday performances, the students at the center not only speak standard, grammatically correct Russian, but also read and write a correct literary language. The (grand)parents testify that their (grand)children's language is free of vulgarities, slang, and dialectal (non-standard) words.

In the letters of gratitude written by some (grand)parents to the theater educators, it was stated that the studies at the center prevented their families from immigrating to Canada and the USA. As a survey of these letters shows, the children found something in the center that they could not find anywhere else, and this helped their parents solve many of the family problems. The (grand)parents claim that their (grand)children's participation in the theater classes, rehearsals and performances was a kind of escape from an overly pragmatic reality. The letters show that the (grand)parents enjoy watching their (grand)children's performances. As a result, both the children and their relatives can fill the cultural vacuum that exists in their current life in Israel.

Principles and methods of the approach

One possible explanation of the students' educational and cultural achievements may lie in the methods, principles and objectives of the approach that has been developed in the educational center under analysis.

In order to characterize the objectives of the educational approach of the "Mosaic" youth theater, we singled out its fifteen main principles based on the data analysis.

I. Bilingual literacy supplements and enriches the mastery of two languages.

The theater educators believe that bilingualism is an asset and should be fostered. They also claim that learning Russian makes it easier to acquire Hebrew and that as the students' competence in Russian increases, they naturally apply their literacy skills to Hebrew. The students are continually encouraged to expand their literacy skills in Hebrew since some of the

² In the Russian-speaking community, grandparents play a traditionally important role in the upbringing of grandchildren. This is often because immigrant parents are extremely busy and have little time to spend on raising their children.

theater performances are in both Russian and Hebrew. Thus, the students experience not only the practice of deep literary analysis in Russian, but also master Hebrew reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. The parents claim that their children's grades in Hebrew have improved since they started attending the theater lessons.

II. Language acquisition and the study of literature are inseparable.

During the lessons and rehearsals, the students are exposed both to the acquisition of the Russian language, which is achieved through teacher-student and student-student communication, and the study of Russian literature. The latter is accomplished by means of improving students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and abilities. Underlying this tenet is the conviction that although not all of the students, especially the young ones who were born in Israel, are fluent in Russian, they can nevertheless become highly literate.

Both the literacy skills of the students and their study of Russian literature are facilitated by their deep involvement in literacy development activities. The theater teachers' instruction takes place in a long, unbroken block, allowing time for the kind of reflection, discussion and deep thinking that foster good reading and writing skills. The teachers, for example, combine direct instruction in rhetoric, pronunciation, grammar and stylistics with the whole-language approach in the context of a drama-based curriculum. Their goal is not only to make the students fully literate and able to read, but also able to write and think at a high level of sophistication, which is the hallmark of mature literacy.

The **reading** program includes learning several layers of text comprehension. When reading authentic dramatic works, the students perform literary analysis – exploring plot, character, and theme – rather than simply read for comprehension of facts. The students assume the roles of characters and enact scenes in the framework of a dramatic reading. Such an approach engages the students' aural as well as visual comprehension skills, giving them additional opportunities to develop oral language skills.

The students are encouraged to read extensively. This reading includes the literary masterpieces of world and Russian classic and modern writers such as William Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*; *Richard III*), Tennessee Williams (*Trampled Petunia*), William Saroyan (*America, America; Hey, Somebody!*), Oscar Wilde (*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*), Alla Sokolova (*Where Are We From?*), Zhan Anyi (*Antigona*), Eugene Schwartz (*Snow Queen; Ordinary Miracle*), Anton Chekhov (*Offer*), Sh. Dilleny (*Taste of Honey*), A. Vampilov. (*Elder Son*), and so on. They are trained to analyze

them profoundly, thus gaining a personal understanding of the important themes touched upon in classic and modern literature.

During the lessons, the students are given the requisite time and direct instruction to become **competent writers**. They are required to write original stories, reviews, and summaries, to have their work edited by peers and teachers, and to revise and polish their writing. They also write dialogs and scenes that are subjected to a multi-step process of writing, editing, and rewriting. In addition, the teachers serve as speakers of perfect literary Russian who correct dialectal misusage in **speaking** Russian.

III. Authenticity assists in the acquisition and learning of language and culture.

Based on this tenet, the theater educators make broad use of realia, i.e. genuine objects brought by Russian-speaking immigrants to Israel, and other cultural referents (authentic newspapers, books, records, posters, cassettes, clothes and household appliances) in order to impart knowledge, social skills, and emotionally colored attitudes.

IV. The acquisition and learning of language, literature and culture are continual developmental processes.

The teachers consider lessons and rehearsals more important than performances. According to their claim, lessons rather than performances show the results of the educational influence.

As the theater educators believe, culture, i.e. the conscious and unconscious ways of life, including attitudes, values and behavior, can be acquired and identity formation promoted through continual student-teacher communication when performing a variety of reading, writing and speaking activities.

V. Every child has his/her own learning style.

During one lesson, Lyudmila Mushkatin, one of the theater educators, said: "Every child is a star. We love the divine spark in each of you." Like other teachers at the "Mosaic" youth theater, she is convinced that the same goal – preservation and maintenance of the heritage language and culture – can be achieved by every child, but each one has his/her own way to accomplish this goal. Consequently, the educators believe that teaching methods should be adapted to every individual theater student. Our observation of lessons and rehearsals revealed a wide variety of channels

and techniques that cater to the students' different learning styles. These include reading dramatic works, writing dialogs, singing, dancing, drawing (in younger students' classes), and even some aerobic exercises and physical training (such as fencing during rehearsals of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*). In addition, the students are taught the skills of stage enunciation and plastic movements.

Here is another manifestation of this tenet. At the end of the academic year, the students are asked to complete a questionnaire containing questions that are rather difficult but nevertheless important for the teachers, such as "What has changed in me?", "What caused this change?", "What does the 'Mosaic' give me?", "What do I like about classes (rehearsals)?", etc. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the questionnaire responses enable the teachers to adapt the curriculum to the students' mental and spiritual growth and to their needs and learning styles.

VI. Allowing equal opportunities is important in children's education.

There is no division between major and minor role actors in the theater performances. Every play has two or three so as to give each child an opportunity to perform. There are no leading actors or extras. A child can "star" in one performance and play the role of a passer-by in another.

VII. The teachers' high expectations lead to excellent results.

This tenet is based on the theater educators' belief that children, irrespective of family and previous learning background, learn best when challenged by high standards. In the teachers' opinion, this can spur the students on to get as much as they possibly can out of their theater schooling. At the lessons and rehearsals, for instance, I witnessed an attempt to confront 13-year-old students with such complex philosophic issues as human truths, real and seeming values, and loneliness and the attempts to overcome it. Furthermore, the center's educators spark discussions on universal questions concerning the meaning of life. Sometimes these discussions occur after listening to songs or reading poems or prose pieces. The following are only three examples of thought-provoking statements from Russian pop songs I heard in class:

"Everything passes. All dies, but love."

"Try not to lose yourself if you want other people not to lose you."

"Nothing on the Earth passes without leaving a trace."

Related to this principle is a tendency observed in the lessons to make greater educational efforts and expect higher achievements of younger students. Based on her rich educational experience, Lyudmila Mushkatin is

of the opinion that the earlier the children begin the study of heritage language and culture, the more effective this study is.

The theater educators expect the students – even the youngest ones – to display powers of imagination in order to identify with the characters of the plays. They want the young actors not just to act but rather to live the lives of their heroes. No wonder every performance is a celebration for them. The title of one of the plays – *Ordinary Miracle* – is noteworthy.

VIII. Heritage language and culture are embedded in the formation of a positive self-image.

According to the theater educators' views, children benefit by gaining stronger identities, knowledge and appreciation of their heritage language and culture. Therefore, they strive to validate and affirm their students' cultural identity and instill in them respect for their heritage and pride in belonging to the Russian community. "You may stay as you are. Do not be ashamed of your language or of being 'Russians,' and people will accept you as you are" are exhortations that are frequently heard in class.

In order to increase the children's self-esteem and self-respect, the teachers frequently present examples of successful political and public leaders, doctors, journalists, and actors among Russian immigrants who preserved the Russian language and heritage culture throughout their lives in Israel. They constantly emphasize the positive social contributions of Russian-speaking Israeli citizens, a fact that is of paramount importance in the formation of a positive self-image.

IX. A positive atmosphere enhances the educational impact.

Positive feedback is mandatory in the theater lessons and rehearsals. The educators exert an emotional influence on the students and nurture an atmosphere of love, caring, respect, readiness to help, imagination and creativity in class. Creativity, in the perception of the theater educators, is a sign of a mature personality. Consequently, any initiative on the part of the students when analyzing Russian and other literary classics is welcomed and lauded.

X. Curiosity arouses motivation in education and self-education.

In the opinion of the teachers, some students, especially young ones, have adopted the negative attitude of "If I don't know something, it's not worth knowing." The teachers attempt to create strong motivational triggers for education and self-education by stimulating the children's curiosity.

XI. Attention to students' social and emotional needs promotes educational achievements.

Adherence to this approach explains the intensive intra- and extra-curriculum communication between the children and their educators. This is of cardinal importance, since many children are deprived of their parents' attention, support and educational encouragement during their first years in Israel. The adult immigrants have to work and/or study all day in order to make ends meet. Moreover, a certain percentage of Russian-speaking children are on their own in Israel, having left their parents in Russia, Ukraine, etc. The culture shock most of the immigrant children experience exacerbates the situation. The common reactions of children forced to learn a new culture and language include irritability, confusion, hostility, alienation, and panic. According to the research data, the percentage of personal marginalization of Israeli children is higher among immigrants (Sever & Epshtein, 1999).

Russian-speaking educators in general and the theater teachers in particular have great potential to help the students overcome culture shock since they have a more accurate understanding of the children's aspirations, expectations, problems, and abilities to address difficulties in their social milieu. The motto of the theater teachers is: "We do not teach 'difficult' children. We teach the children for whom life is difficult." The teachers adopt a proactive stance toward the students' social and emotional needs by touching on topics such as child abuse and peer violence, and emphasize the importance of such attributes as self-esteem and personal aspirations.

The theater educators pay no less attention to the development of social skills. During the lessons, they explicitly teach such skills as integrity, initiative, flexibility, perseverance, and organization. In parallel, they emphasize the importance of a sense of humor, problem-solving skills, responsibility, patience, friendship, an ability to understand a partner, and common sense. Any manifestation of the "I'm OK, Jack" attitude in the children's behavior serves as grounds for initiating a teacher-student discussion in class. In addition, the teachers encourage the students to demonstrate the life skills that are traditionally respected in Israel's Russian community – to be cooperative, caring, involved, and to take an active stand in life.

The "Mosaic" educators strive to create a proper combination of self-respect and independence on the one hand, and tolerance, discipline and respect for other people on the other. Thus, they consider behavioral concepts such as "I am the center of everything" to be erroneous. They direct their educational efforts toward eradicating egocentrism and

indifference, and developing positive social attitudes instead. At the same time, the students are allowed to make choices, given control over their school environment, and encouraged to take the initiative. They can dictate the curriculum to some extent, come up with questions, and develop their own hypotheses. In this kind of learning environment, they develop confidence in their own intellectual and social abilities. Their motivation to grow spiritually and mentally is also enhanced when they are guided into becoming competent and independent learners.

XII. Stimulation of social interaction encourages learning.

Our observations show that the youth theater students are often guided toward self-motivated, collaborative learning. As scientific data testify, during the student-student interaction, a higher order cognitive and linguistic discourse is observed (Garcia, 1991).

At the same time, the teachers seek to cultivate enthusiasm for learning and the capacity for lifelong independent learning in their students. Here, the students' ability to work with others and use their own initiative is fostered through collaborative methods of instruction. The teachers regularly arrange the students in pairs or small groups in order to work on an activity cooperatively. The cooperative work groups are carefully constructed. In many cases, each student in the group is assigned a role, such as a chairperson, secretary, artist, and timekeeper. The roles may rotate the next time the group convenes.

As a result of the consistent use of cooperative groups, the students become skilled cooperative learners. They are taught to listen without interrupting interlocutors. They know what is expected of them and are able to move into groups and work without direction from the teacher for long periods of time. Moreover, cooperative arrangements give the teacher more time to work with the students individually and in small groups. Since the students are able to work on their own, the teacher can pay attention to the particular needs of individual students.

Our findings show that student-student interaction is not limited to theater lessons and rehearsals. Outside the theater, the students socialize and meet for rehearsals and discussions.

XIII. Ongoing contact between the theater staff and parents and grandparents is important.

The "Mosaic" educators are aware that their students' parents trust them and believe that studying at the center can shield their children from the

negative street impact on the one hand and improve their achievements at school on the other. According to some parents, their children's attendance at the center is vastly preferable to roaming the streets, watching TV, or playing endless computer games.

In order to keep abreast of the parents' and grandparents' expectations, remarks, opinions and problems, the teachers constantly remain in touch with them. Lyudmila Mushkatin thinks that keeping in touch with the students' grandparents is even more effective than with the parents.

XIV. Prevention of violence should be a component of culture education.

The theater educators have noted that there are many more displays of aggressiveness and violence among young "sabras" than among Russian-speaking immigrant teenagers who have stronger heritage culture values. This fact accounts for the specific educational approach the teachers have developed with the youngest (eight-year-old) children in class and rehearsals. In one such class, we observed how a teacher initiated a discussion on the topic "The human face is sacred." In another class, a teacher mentioned that to curse and use foul language is inadmissible no matter what the circumstances are. In general, the center educators believe that the very informal, family-like atmosphere that prevails in classrooms and rehearsals reduces the number of opportunities for manifestations of violence among their students.

XV. Culture can prevent crime.

The teachers at the center believe that heritage language and culture preservation (revitalization) help prevent the children from engaging in criminal activities, developing alcohol and drug addiction and dropping out of school, as well as mitigate other risk factors.

Analysis and discussion

Several attempts have been made to develop a typology of multicultural approaches implemented in modern societies (Banks, 1994; Burnett, 1994; Schwartz, 1998; Sleeter & Grant, 1993). Sleeter (1996), for example, delineates five approaches to multicultural education: (a) the *Teaching the Culturally Different* approach; (b) programs emphasizing *Human Relations*; (c) *Single Group Studies* curricula; (d) the *Multicultural* approach; and (e) the *Social Reconstructionist* approach.

For the purposes of the present study, we will adhere to the more widely expected typology suggested by Burnett (1994). This typology comprises three constituents:

- 1) Content-oriented programs that aim to include content about different cultural groups in the curriculum and develop educational

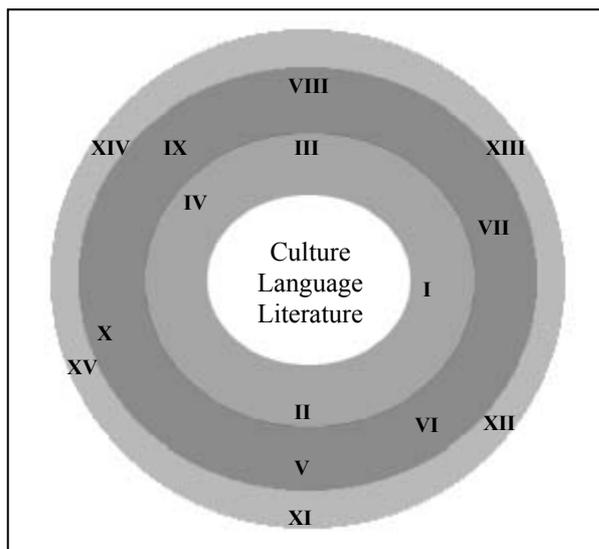
materials in order to increase students' knowledge about their cultural background;

- 2) Student-oriented programs whose intention is to increase the academic achievement of minority groups even though they do not involve extensive changes in curriculum content;
- 3) Socially-oriented programs that seek to reform both schooling and the cultural and political contexts of schooling, aiming neither simply to enhance academic achievement nor to increase the body of multicultural knowledge, but to have the much broader impact of increasing cultural and racial tolerance and reducing national bias.

The analysis of the above-mentioned methods and principles of the "Mosaic" educational approach suggests that it may present a kind of a content-oriented program that concomitantly accomplishes some of the goals of the student- and socially-oriented programs. The following chart reflects the interplay of the objectives and principles of this approach.

Chart I depicts the three main objectives, i.e. culture, language and literature, whose preservation is the goal of the educational approach under analysis. The first group of principles shows the **content-oriented** character of the educational approach that is being implemented in this informal education center for Russian-speaking Israeli children. Such principles as I (*Bilingual literacy supplements and enriches the mastery of two languages*) and II (*Language acquisition and the study of literature are inseparable*) focus on the promotion of the study of heritage literature through exposure to the Russian language. Principle III (*Authenticity assists in the acquisition and learning of language and culture*) shows the exposure to heritage culture to be a means of learning language and literature.

Chart I
Objectives and Principles of the Educational Approach of the Mosaic Youth Theater



- objectives;
- content-oriented principles;
- student-oriented principles;
- socially-oriented principles;

Principle IV (*The acquisition and learning of language, literature and culture are continual developmental processes*) underlines the indissoluble character of language, literature and culture preservation and development.

The next group of principles, although linked to the content-oriented objectives, aims at achieving **human (student)-oriented** goals of multicultural education. This group of principles addresses the students' academic and emotional needs since they relate to the promotion of academic achievements and the enrichment of educational experience. These are principles V (*Every child has his/her own learning style*), VI (*Allowing equal opportunities is important in children's education*), VII (*The teachers' high expectations lead to excellent results*), VIII (*Heritage language and culture are embedded in the formation of a positive self-image*), IX (*A positive atmosphere enhances the educational impact*) and X (*Curiosity arouses motivation in education and self-education*).

The last group of **socially-oriented** principles emphasizes the importance of encouraging all kinds of contacts among students, teachers and parents.

These principles encompass “human relations” in all their forms, and incorporate some characteristics of the other two groups.

We refer to principle XI (*Attention to the students’ social and emotional needs promotes educational achievements*), XII (*Stimulation of social interaction encourages learning*), XIII (*Ongoing contact between the theater staff and parents and grandparents is important*), XIV (*Prevention of violence should be a component of culture education*), as well as XV (*Culture can prevent crime*).

Judging by the data analysis in the present study, we may assume that the educational approach of the “Mosaic” youth theater presents a qualitatively new program that was not included in Burnett’s typology. In our opinion, it may be called **an eclectic multicultural approach** since it combines the attributes of content-, human (student)- and socially-oriented programs.

Conclusions and implementations

In modern Israeli democratic society, the activities of the informal education centers for Russian-speaking immigrant children demonstrate the desire of the Russian community in the country to preserve and renew its heritage language and culture values.

The findings of the ongoing study of one of these centers, the “Mosaic” youth theater, manifest the objectives and principles of an eclectic multicultural approach. This approach means a unique integration of content-, human- and social-oriented curricula focusing consciously and specifically on the preservation of Russian language and literature, and the revitalization of Russian Jewish culture.

The unique approaches, methodological foundations and educational achievements of the informal education centers for minority community children, such as those of the “Mosaic” youth theater, require in-depth scientific research and reflection. This could imply a major rethinking of the very core values upon which the educational approaches of Israel are built. It could engender new questions to ask and directions to follow.

The “Mosaic” youth theater, similar to other centers that have been created to meet the educational and cultural goals of the Russian-speaking community in Israel, is only at the stage of developing and crystallizing its educational methods and approaches. But it seems to be clear that it holds a place for a multitude of voices in a multicultural society and a place for many dreams.

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