"*CROSSING FENCES*": UNCOVERING MULTICULTURALISM OF JEWISH AND ARAB TEACHERS STUDYING TOWARDS AN M.ED. DEGREE

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Abstract:

The present research explores the multiculturalism of teachers learning towards their M.Ed. degree in an academic collage of education. The research questions deal with teachers' perception of multiculturalism, a change in their attitude towards the issue of multiculturalism from their point of view throughout their studies as well as their multiculturalism-oriented recommendations to the leaders of the M.Ed. programme. The research population comprises 27 Jewish and Arab teachers in their second year of studies. The research is conducted according to the qualitative paradigm and it constitutes a case study. The research instruments include a focus group and an open-ended questionnaire. The research findings illustrate that the teachers' perception of multiculturalism is focused on the ideological aspect, demographic differentiation and the setting up of a unique encounter. Most of the teachers emphasise the importance they attribute to multiculturalism, arguing that it is necessary to engage in it by various ways during the studies. The research recommends allocating room for the issue of multiculturalism in M.Ed. programmes. These programmes are part of the professional development of Jewish and Arab teachers for whom the classroom does not imply only academic studies but also a complicated and challenging multicultural encounter.

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Keywords: multiculturalism, particularistic multicultural education, education for pluralistic multiculturalism, case study

1. Introduction

Programmes towards a M.Ed. degree do not embody education for multiculturalism or engagement in concepts associated with it. The learners' encounter is built of a human mosaics of all sectors of the Israeli society. It sets up a natural arena for learning, as well as a spontaneous cognitive, emotional and behavioural acquaintance with the issue of multiculturalism. The natural inquisitiveness and the inter-personal relations enable learners to experience exposure to others, learning and consolidation of perceptions. In recent years, professional learner groups have been established in the college. Each group combines a cultural mixture of the multicultural Israeli society representatives: Jews and Arabs, females and males, secular and religious. This situation brought about the idea of investigating the group of teachers learning towards their M.Ed. degree, attempting to comprehend their perceptions about multiculturalism which they experience throughout their studies.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Multiculturalism

Since the 1960s, the term multiculturalism has become one of the key issues in the academic, public and political discourse. Dozens of definitions and interpretations have been accumulated during the discourse and it has been extensively but not uniformly used (Ezer, Millet & Patkin, 2006; Yonah, 2011). Analysis of the definitions illustrates their focus in fact on three aspects: demographic aspect, structural aspect and ideological aspect. The demographic aspect relates to the differentiation manifested by the heterogeneous composition of a society which encompasses different ethnic and cultural groups. The structural aspect relates to the just distribution of power between different cultural groups in society. The ideological aspect which has become the common and central aspect of the term multiculturalism, relates to the way by which a society refers to the existence of varied cultures in it and the way it is managed. On the level of the individual, this concerns the belief in the right of people to assess and develop those components of their identity which stem from their culture of origin and/or the culture of their parents. On the national level, this relates to the perception of cultural differentiation as a national resource which should be nurtured as a source of inner enrichment of the society through interrelations and current dialog between the

different cultural groups in it. The ideological aspect highlights a dialogical attitude of respect between the different groups in society, encouraging the individual in society and the group as a body to critically examine both themselves and the others vis-à-vis the critical examination of themselves (Gilad & Millet, 2015b; Mautner, Sagi & Shamir, 1998; Sever, 2001).

2.3 Education for Multiculturalism

Over the years, education for multiculturalism has become an academic discipline and many programmes, studies and publications have been written about it. Moreover, a theoretical and practical debate has been developed in western pluralistic societies concerning the implementation of two alternatives of the education for multiculturalism: the pluralistic approach and the particularistic approach in education (Gilad & Millet, 2015a; Yogev, 2001). The pluralistic approach which constitutes education for multiculturalism underscores value-oriented education for multiculturalism which is granted to the entire learner population. The advantage of this educational approach resides in the fact that it provides a response of significant characteristics to fundamental issues associated with value-oriented education in a pluralistic society. The debate in the various social groups conducted on an equalitarian background enhances learners' awareness of social pluralism as well as increases their level of inter-group tolerance. The pluralistic approach advocates multicultural education, namely a differential education to each of the social groups, emphasising the group's specific values and culture (Sagi, 2011).

In recent years, we have witnessed the consolidation of a new approach to multiculturalism which is affected by the consequences of the globalisation and technology processes. Globalisation which has been initially perceived as a process negating particularistic identities and has turned the world into one big village, entails reaction and increases the search for a more limited and intimate group identity: local, ethnic, religious and national combined with sanctification of the past (Oron, 2010). The approach which is represented by Maaluf (2010), considers globalisation as an opportunity for a new perception of identity whereby the individual can have several identities and which recommends accepting the multi-identity person at the same time (Gilad & Millet, 2016).

According to Yonah (2011), the multicultural position is defined as open, flexible and having a dynamic dimension resulting from changes transpiring in society. He distinguishes between multiculturalism in common public spaces and multiculturalism in separate, uncommon public spaces. The Israeli society is being challenged by the question of how to maintain multiculturalism in a common public space. It is essential

to discuss the differences between the common spaces in the context of identities and practices and allocate resources in a differential way without branding and hierarchy.

Analysing a discourse of a conflict group, Steinberg (2010) found seven discourse types: ethnocentric discourse, attack, window opening, acknowledgement of differentiation, intellectual discussion, inclusion of the differentiation and a dialogical moment defined as participation in the experience of the 'other' without losing the 'self'. The discourse types manifest the continuum of multiculturalism existence in the Israeli common public space.

2.4 Education for Multiculturalism in Colleges of Education

The world has been undergoing an entirety of changes and processes of the information revolution, technological development as well as global, social, political and religious transformations. Hence, the education system is required to apply a renewed and creative thinking regarding the place and function of multiculturalism in the education system and in teachers' education and professional development (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Dvir & Cohen, 2016a; Smith & Bahr, 2014). The reality in both Jewish and Arab Academic Colleges of Education in Israel illustrates that there is no common basis of knowledge for integrating multiculturalism in teachers' education and development processes. Each college copes with the issue according to its resources and understanding: from organising single courses and up to encounters of co-existence, setting up particularistic separate pathways and on the other hand culturally mixed pathway.

Boiymel, Zeevi and Tutri (2009) conducted a study in a college of education in which they explored what do Jewish and Arab students mutually learn from each other. The research findings indicated three general circles in which the participants were positioned. The first circle presented the tension between the state and its Arab citizens, the second was a circle of the daily relationships between the Arab citizens of the state and its Jewish citizens and the third was the circle of relationships between Arabs and Jews in higher education institutions, characterised as a means of social mobility. The encounter of the third circle was perceived as an environment whereby the Arab students considered their status was equal to that of the Jewish students.

The study conducted by Reichel and Mor (2007) examined the narrative of four 'other' students in an academy of education. The study investigated multiculturalism in teachers education from the viewpoint of the students themselves. Moreover, it examined features of teachers' education in a Jewish secular college whose learner population came from various cultures. The students reflected positive echoes from activities which took into consideration their other culture and recommended activities

which would contribute to multicultural education programmes. In fact, the changes proposed by the students brought about the establishment of a multicultural teacher education college. One of the research recommendation *"called for reshaping the studies in the college and defining its mission in parallel to theories dealing with the topic of multiculturalism"* (Reichel & Mor, 2007, p. 99).

The study conducted by Ezer, Millet and Patkin (2006) explored multiculturalism in the curricula of two colleges of education. They found that the topic of education for multiculturalism was on the 'agenda' of both colleges and that the awareness of it was increasingly growing in the curricula. This involved the following aspects: a. direction of transformation towards civic education for all and a mutual pluralistic education by adding unique courses for all the students as well as unique particularistic syllabi; b. thinking about cross-curricular super-concepts is lacking and there is no focus on terms such as differentiation and social justice in the studies of the disciplines of education and pedagogy.

Another research engaged in exposing the perception of multiculturalism of teacher-educators who studied in a school of teacher-educators' professional development. The research indicated the learners' conflicts and dilemmas combined with acknowledgement of the other and a wish to build a liberal multicultural society (Millet, Golan & Dikman, 2012). In their study of multicultural perceptions of teacher-educators, Dvir and Cohen (2016b) maintained that the personal biography was an essential factor in shaping the perceptions and that it was necessary to refer to multiculturalism in colleges as part of the learners' personal and professional development.

To sum up, review of the literature indicates studies which deal with multicultural education in colleges of education and with the need to conduct a thorough discussion on the topic in order to generate a change in the existing situation.

3. Research Questions

1. What is the teachers' perception of multiculturalism and has their point of view changed during their studies in a college of education?
2. What do teachers recommend to leaders of M.Ed. programmes in colleges of education with regard to the issue of multiculturalism?

4. Methodology

The present research was conducted according to the qualitative-interpretive approach of the case study type used in the research of teaching and learning (Smolicz & Secombe, 1990; Yin, 1993; Donmoyer, 1997). One of the important advantages of a case study resides in its ability to offer insights about occurrences in the actual contexts and sites in which they transpire (Miles, 1987). A case study is inductive, presenting the data from the situation regardless of the assumptions. It manifests great sensitivity, diagnoses and expresses situations from different points of view of the participants (Stenhouse, 1985). The content of a case study is mostly descriptive and concrete and tends to develop by the reader's interpretations. It is unique, cannot be recreated and is not representative and hence does not enable generalisation in the usual sense. The case study allows readers to get an impression and attain new insights of unknown relations and variables in the investigated occurrence (Strauss, 1987).

4.1 Research population

The research population consisted of Jewish and Arab teachers learning in the second year of the M.Ed. studies. This was based on the assumption that 2nd-year teachers had already studied together for two years and, based on their personal experience were able to relate to the perception of multiculturalism of themselves as it was being shaped. The participants were 27 teachers: 19 females and 8 males, 21 Jews and 6 Arabs.

4.2 Research instruments

The present research made use of two research instruments: a focus group and an open-ended questionnaire. The participants in the focus group were four teachers, two Jews and two Arabs who related to the perception of multiculturalism. The open-ended questionnaire was based on an open-ended questionnaire (Millet, Golan & Dikman, 2012) which was validated by a group of peer-researcher experts and was administered to the participants at the end of the academic year. The questionnaire included background items, items about perceptions, thoughts and emotions, dilemmas as well as examples and recommendations for the programme leaders.

4.3 Data analysis

The answers to the open-ended research questions were content analysed on two levels: a normative content analysis designed to identify prominent trends and a qualitative-interpretive content analysis in order to display essence, nature and perceptions and

comprehend various insights. The researchers triangulated the analysis in two stages in order to enhance the categories (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016).

5. Findings

The research findings illustrate that most of the teachers clearly perceived multiculturalism from the ideological aspect integrated with the demographic aspect. The first research question engaged in the characteristics of the multiculturalism perception and the way it was manifested in the M.Ed. studies in the college of education. According to the analysis of the findings, 23 teachers responded that the issue of multiculturalism was manifested in the studies. The teachers emphasised the cultural mosaics and the human, diversified and heterogeneous fabric. Most of the answers (85%) focused on the demographic differentiation and the establishment of a unique encounter. For example: "*The differences and the cultural differentiation were given a stage*". Or as one of the female-teachers defined: "*A new common group culture has been created, being multicultural by nature*". Another male-teacher underscored the demographic aspect and the ideological aspect: "*The multiculturalism was manifested by the multiculturalism of the learners who came from different sectors. The relationships of everyone with everyone are good and all the teachers are willing to learn and develop regardless of the cultural affiliation but according to the personal competences*".

As for the changed perception of multiculturalism, the findings indicated two main groups: a. teachers who came to the college with a perception of multiculturalism and therefore it had not changed as a result of the studies; b. teachers who changed their perception of multiculturalism. The first group comprised eleven teachers who attested to an open and accepting perception. In the teachers' words: "*My perception did not change, it stayed positive as before*". Another female-teacher pointed out: "*My perception did not change, only expanded. I became more inquisitive and unafraid to ask in order to increase the understanding of the culture of others*". One female-head teacher specified: "*My perception did not change since I came with a relatively consolidated perception. Yet it is clear to me that the encounter in the college offered me room for deepening my perceptions. It affected my behaviour as a learner and as a teacher and a school position holder*".

The second group consisted of 16 teachers who answered that their perception had changed. Seven of them responded that their perception had changed only partly. The teachers spoke about special encounters which constituted learning and renewal and generated changes of perceptions about multiculturalism. For example, a Jewish female voice which explained the change in her perception of multiculturalism: "*My perception has in fact changed due to the academic multicultural encounter in the group. I have*

learnt to appreciate, like, include. The encounter which to some extent 'broke' my prejudices and conventions about the Arab society". A Muslim female voice: "*As a Muslim Arab I studied in Jewish schools. The innovation in the college was the connection to the religious Jewish culture, particularly the male religious Jews surprised me. My myth was shattered, I see myself getting connected to the Jewish culture, finding common things and a common language. I felt I was capable of crossing fences*".

The content analysis of the second research question which dealt with recommendations to the M.Ed. programme leaders yielded two salient groups. Twenty-four out of the 27 respondents (88%) underscored the importance of multiculturalism and recommended integrating it formally and informally while the remaining three teachers objected to the integration.

The recommendations encompassed a wide range of options for engaging in the issue from the informal to the formal level. **On the informal level**, the teachers proposed allocating time within the framework of the studies, mainly at the initial stage, for informal encounters (e.g. longer breaks). These will serve as an arena for personal meetings and mutual acquaintance between the teachers as well as for elimination of barriers. "*I would suggest expanding the space allocated to this topic. Dedicate one of the opening encounters for a more personal acquaintance among the learners"; "giving room for informal encounters as part of longer breaks will facilitate establishment of relationships, conversation and acquaintance of others and thus will remove the barriers*". Moreover, the teachers suggested forming mixed debate groups in which "*everyone will present their experience and so we will be able to see the similar and the different and in particular the link between the cultures*". At this level, one of the female-teacher wrote: "*Allow things to surface, conduct a dialogue, not to be afraid of confrontation, trust*".

On the formal level, the teachers indicated introduction of multiculturalism as part of the curriculum, i.e. dedicating part of the learning hours to engagement in the issue combined with structured activities and determination of an ethical code for the behaviour of the group. "*Conducting full class discourse which will serve as grounds for initiatives by and collaboration between teachers from the different sectors and exposure to the various cultures"; "inviting guest lecturers from the different sectors"; organizing a seminar on the issue of multiculturalism and presenting studies which describe what is being done in the different sectors and within the framework of studies during the two years*".

One of the female-teachers presented the relation between the formal engagement in multiculturalism and the engagement in this topic with the pupils: "*Displaying the concept of multiculturalism with its range of problems and dilemmas is very fundamental. The more aware of it we are and the more we engage in it, the greater the chance we will deal with it also in the course of our teaching*". It is worthwhile mentioning the

teachers' argument: "*It is essential not to evade nor to 'sweep under the rug' the emerging questions*". Teachers from the Arab sector emphasised allocation of a bigger space for narratives of the Arab teachers, to their thoughts and experiences, giving an opportunity to submit works in Arabic. For example: "*I believe that the main thing is allowing learners to submit assignments in Arabic as well as reading literature in Arabic*"; "*Translation of materials into Arabic and English so that everyone can understand them*".

The prominent assertions illustrated the advantages of the multicultural encounters which consisted of: personal acquaintance among the learners, mutual feedback, accepting the different other, conducting a respecting dialogue, establishing initiatives and collaboration, forging relationships and joining of hearts, developing awareness of multiculturalism and inculcating a foundation for coping with it. Nevertheless, some teachers cautioned that "*… there is no need for putting this issue at the centre, creating some artificial and coerced commitment and introducing multiculturalism into each and every matter*".

The opposing teachers maintained that we should not formally deal with multiculturalism, presenting varied reasons: "*… relate naturally, like human beings*"; "*it is impossible to deal thoroughly with topics which are 'charged' from various social perspectives as part of the M.Ed. programme*"; '*… it does not clear the air…*"; "*there are conflicts whose solution is difficult and hence it is better not to engage in them*". One of the female-teachers claimed: "*We should manage the degree studies according to the contents and professional programmes and every person should be integrated according to his or her understanding of the topic. It is not necessary to awaken the issue of multiculturalism. It transpires and is organised by itself without leading to a problem*". Moreover, one of the female teachers stipulated that "*there is no mandate for that. If I had known that this was the reason for our gathering, I would have re-considered joining from the beginning*".

6. Discussion and Summary

The present research engaged in uncovering the perceptions of multiculturalism of Arab and Jewish teachers learning towards a M.Ed. degree in a college of education. The findings manifested the perception of multiculturalism, the nature of change in the perception following the joint learning from the viewpoint of the teachers themselves. Moreover, the teachers related to the issue of multiculturalism and its place in a formal and informal way during the studies.

The teachers' perceptions referred to education for multiculturalism in the pluralistic sense (Ezer, Millet & Patkin, 2006; Sever, 2001). The ideological was demonstrated as a value-oriented approach in a diversified society. The teachers

perceived their study group as having the potential for a model of groups whose atmosphere facilitates openness, mutual respect and acceptance of the social and cultural differentiation. Moreover, an atmosphere "*for forming a group whose culture is multicultural in the spirit of the college*".

The demographic aspect was manifested by the fact that the ethnic and cultural differentiation between the teachers constituted a source of expanding the knowledge about the other, an encounter with various worldviews, creating a foundation for valuable discourse and discussion. The dilemma of segregation versus integration was prominent, the orientation being towards integration, inclusion rather than segregation. The teachers maintained that in the inclusive group, individuals can be acknowledged and express their voice in the discourse about professional development as part of a multicultural, equalitarian and pragmatic group. They increased their sensitivity to the Arab minority by lectures, workshops, invitation of Arab lecturers and consideration for the dates of holidays and festivities. The dilemma of differentiation (Boyd, 1996) is demonstrated here. It expresses the tension between the wish to be different and maintain self-determination, either social or national, and the need to live together and draw closer to each other. An appropriate management of this tension can ensure autonomy of the individual on the one hand. On the other, it can develop a sense of solidarity with the wider society for the greater good (Yonah & Shenhav, 2005). According to Maaluf (2010), this is an opportunity for a new perception of identity as a total of identities belonging to the human community. Yet, we must avoid developing deadly identities of belonging which will undermine the trend of the global village.

Regarding the changes in the perception of multiculturalism, about 60% of the teachers attested that their perception had changed whereas 40% indicated that their perception had not changed during the studies. The group whose perception of multiculturalism did not change argued that they came to the studies with such a perception. Their perception embodied a humanistic approach to any person, mutual respect, acceptance, behaviour based on social justice and values of equality as shown in the study of Gilad and Millet (2015a). Conversely, the other group members pointed out that their perception had changed throughout the studies from both the cognitive and emotional aspects. Similarly, the study of Millet, Golan and Dikman (2012) and that of Dvir and Cohen (2016b) explored the perception of multiculturalism among teacher-educators. Their findings showed that perceptions of multiculturalism change following academic studies of Jews and Arabs together. In the State of Israel, there are conditions for the formation of a multicultural awareness. This stems from the fact that the society is characterised by different cultural groups with cultural systems which feed on

numerous years of historical heritage and are shaped by a treasure of myths, ethoi and practices (Steinberg, 2010; Yonah, 2011).

As for recommendations, the teachers suggested relating to the issue of multiculturalism within the framework of studies towards the M.Ed. degree. On the informal level, there should be a deeper acquaintances among the learners from the perspective of their culture and on the formal level the proposals consisted of organising learning sessions on the subject, seminars and expanded multicultural discourse. Due to the Israeli complex reality, designers and leaders of the M.Ed. programmes obviously must cope with several essential questions of engagement in multiculturalism. One of the fundamental questions is whether a college should adopt a multiculturalism-oriented policy.

Existing models can lead to contents and behaviours, creating a new model. This new model encompasses new approaches and theories which demonstrate the place of multiculturalism as part of teachers' professional development processes. For example, the approach conceived by Maaluf (2010) which negates the identity of belonging, wishing to see individuals with several identities and recommends accepting such people at the same time. Hoffman (1996) also presented a theory which supports the theory of Banks (1995), additing the reflexive dimension that highlights the observation of the 'self' in the context of teachers' culture and other cultures. These theories can constitute a layer of the new spirit of multiculturalism existing in spaces which are not separate (Yonah, 2011).

Additional researchers (Kummel, 2013; Smith & Bahr, 2014; Wurzle, 1987) underscore that education for multiculturalism is a continuous and long-term process. It integrates reflection, learning of a cultural self-awareness, accepting the conflict as existing and as a basis for education, the wish to learn about the culture of others. Based on interaction processes and improvement of communication channels with people from other cultures, the teachers address lecturers in academic institutions with a request to open the topic, reduce students' fear and create educational models. In these new models, the process of acquaintance, acceptance and sharing resources with others facilitates formation of several identities of different groups some of which can be common (Kummel, 2013; Yonah, 2011).

To sum up, based on the findings and insights, the research recommendations are: conduct in every class a discussion about the way for creating a situation whereby the multicultural human composition and "*the multicultural culture created in the spirit of the college*" (to use the teachers' words) will be optimally used, both formally and informally, in order to design education for multiculturalism. The teachers are a leading

population with an extensive potential for waving the banner of a constant multicultural dialogue which could affect educational processes (Dvir & Cohen, 2016a). At the same time, we should build a setup of support, consultancy and mentoring for lecturers and programme leaders. This setup will demonstrate how to behave in the context of multiculturalism (Kummel, 2013). That is, how to turn the various charges into an open discussion, accepting a dialogue which includes the 'other' even without a consent or having differences of opinion among the involved parties (Smith & Bahr, 2014).

The importance of the present research resides in the fact that it makes us aware of scenarios of education for multiculturalism which foster acknowledgement and acceptance of others, caring and discourse which enrich teachers' personality, reinforce democratic values and develop professional ways of conduct. Moreover, the present research illustrates the way of "crossing fences" in worldviews as expressed by one of the teachers. By discussing the research findings, the M.Ed. programme leaders might relate to the issue of multiculturalism in the existing frameworks and to its place in the complex process of professional development of teachers who are a mirror of the Israeli society and at the same time a leading power in education.

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