



Multicultural Educational Resource Center (MERC)

Gordon College of Education Description of Programs and Activities

The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities of Gordon College's Multicultural Educational Resource Center (MERC) located in Haifa

Objectives:

The main objective of MERC addresses the issue of training teachers from different ethnic and religious groups to educate children to live in the multicultural Israeli society. In addition, our staff develops and implements learning programs aimed at enhancing tolerance and respect among children enrolled in different educational systems. Our main activities are geared towards furthering these goals.

Background:

Gordon College is a School of Education whose mission is teacher training. It has a student population of about 1,000 and an academic staff of approximately 220 members, whose academic ranks range from full Professor to lecturers. As a teachers' college, Gordon's staff closely supervises their students who are sent to over 100 different schools in northern Israel for their student teaching experience. By being closely involved in the reality of Israeli schools, the staff is aware of the multicultural nature of the Israeli population and the need to address the issue of working and teaching in a multicultural setting. Moreover, as a School of Education, Gordon College believes that a major problem in Israeli society is the lack of understanding and tolerance towards different cultures. The lack of tolerance towards cultural differences, prejudice and negative stereotypes of different ethnic and minority groups are all issues that must be

addressed in a concrete manner. To take on this challenge of developing a dynamic program involved in dealing with the issue of Multicultural Education, in January 1997 Gordon College of Education established the first Multicultural Educational Resource Center (MERC) in Israel. It is aimed at promoting pluralistic values based on mutual respect and understanding and enhancing attitudes of tolerance and coexistence between different cultural, ethnic, religious and secular groups in Israel.

ACTIVITIES OF MERC

PROGRAMS WITHIN GORDON COLLEGE

MERC's goals are furthered through a variety of programs:

- ▶ Teaching in a Multicultural Classroom
- ▶ Ethnic and Minority Groups in Israel
- ▶ Educating to Function in a Multicultural Society

1. Specialization in teaching in a multicultural society

Gordon College offers a specialization track in teaching in a multicultural society. This study track offers a variety of courses which prepare teachers and students of education to work in multicultural classrooms.

Thousands of pre-service and in-service teachers are required to take at least one course in this specialization track. Through these courses, our students gain knowledge and acquire tools that can be applied to teaching in Israel's multicultural classroom as well as learn about Israel's ethnic and religious diversity. A partial listing of courses that have been offered in this specialization track are:

- Monotheism in Israel's Multicultural Society
- The Genetics of Ethnic Groups in Israel
- Dialogue Between Secular and Religious Israelis
- Trends in Judaism
- The Life Cycle from an Anthropological Perspective
- Educational Systems in Israel and in the World
- Sex Roles and the Status of Women in Israel
- Language, Culture and Communication
- Inter-cultural Communication

Our student evaluations of these courses have been overwhelmingly positive, subsequently many students have enrolled in several courses in the specialization track and not just the one course that they are required to take in order to graduate. To our knowledge, Gordon College is the only teacher-training college in Israel which requires all of their students to take at least one course from the program of teaching in a multicultural society. The importance of providing all of our students -Israel's future teachers- with concrete tools and knowledge to work in the multicultural realities of Israel is further reflected in our required workshop-course for all first year students, "Human Interaction". The staff at Gordon College believes that communication skills are the basis for becoming a good teacher. The goal of this workshop is to provide our student teachers with tools that enable them to listen to different opinions and to provide them with the ability to express themselves in an empathic manner. Empathy and the ability to be tolerant of differences are the foundation of multicultural education.

2. Multicultural Educational Field Trips

Another program which MERC provides for our students of Education is Multicultural Educational Field Trips to different areas of Israel. Through visiting various ethnic and religious communities and museums which specialize in multiculturalism, these trips provide our students with a first-hand understanding of the various ethnic and minority groups in Israel. Around 15 trips take place each year. The faculty and staff who are responsible for the multicultural field trips have consistently reported how these trips often were the first time our students (both pre-service and in-service teachers) had direct contact with different

communities as well as various minority groups of Israel. These experiences expose the students to the Israeli society as a whole and provide them with tools they can use as teachers, in the classroom and on school trips.

3. Dialogue Between Secular and Religious Israelis

A special program which represents a joint project between Gordon College and Sha'anani College, a religious teacher's college in Haifa, is a class which is called: Dialogue between Religious and Secular Israelis. Two faculty members, a Rabbi from Sha'anani College and an expert in the culture of dialogue and discourse from Gordon College jointly teach the course to third and fourth year students from these two colleges. The students are taught the "principles of dialogue" and apply these principles through joint projects and discussions to the religious and secular issues which are relevant to Israeli society. This course includes many activities, the most important is the planning and actualization of a communal Shabbat which the students themselves prepare and experience during the second semester. The participants of this program gain a better understanding of religious and secular issues, and moreover, learn methods to teach children to be tolerant.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

An important aspect of our program is our involvement in the wider educational community. Gordon College's aim in these programs is to further our goals of multicultural education in the community. These goals include educating towards tolerance, mutual respect and co-existence. We have several activities in this area.

1. Workshops for In-service Teachers

Gordon College and its Multicultural Educational Resource Center has been offering workshops and

conferences on various aspects of multicultural education to in-service teachers since MERC was established in 1997. Thousands of in-service educators have benefited from our programs which included national conferences on the following topics:

- Israel, A Multicultural Society
- East and West in Israeli Literature and Art
- Women in Israel from a Multicultural Perspective

In addition to these national conferences, MERC has organized numerous workshops on a variety of topics relating to multicultural education for in-service teachers in the North. Hundreds of in-service educators have participated in these programs. Recently, we provided an intensive 56 hour workshop for 42 teachers from 20 different educational institutions in the Haifa area. We are currently providing workshops for 30 Kindergarten teachers and are planning to combine a joint workshop with teachers from Haifa and Boston in the summer of 2003.

2. Educating Towards Tolerance

As a college of education, the staff at MERC believes that we have an obligation to develop and implement educational materials and programs aimed at increasing tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect among grammar school children. Programs that have been developed by our staff are being used in schools in Northern Israel. One of our programs, Footsteps in the Grass, developed by a member of our staff, Liora Yisraeli, is in use in schools from Atlit to Kiryat Shemonah. Over a few years, we have expanded the number of schools participating in this program from two schools to ten. Moreover, the number of children who are participating in these programs has grown from a few hundred to over 2,000 today. The expansion of this program is through our field workers, pedagogical staff, and programs, as well as through "word of mouth" as in the case of our newest school Sollim (near Kfar Yeshuah and a part of the Kibbutz movement).

3. Coping with Terror in the Classroom (Website Development)

The purpose of this project is to develop a web-site that will provide activities and tools on coping with terror in the classroom for Hebrew, Arabic and English speaking teachers in Israel. The idea for this project has been developed by the staff at Gordon College in response to today's realities of Israeli society in which our faculty, their student teachers and the pupils taught by them must cope.

The project began in the spring semester of 2002 as a topic within a course on teaching English as a second language (TESL). The students who participated in this course represented the multicultural character of Israeli society and included Jews, Druze, Moslem and Christian Arab Israelis. Even within each group, the students could be further divided into several sub-groups ranging from orthodox to secular, politically liberal to extreme.

For details:

- ▶ http://www.gordon.ac.il/zlinn/projects_2002/coping_2002.htm
- ▶ http://www.gordon.ac.il/zlinn/projects_2002/Helping_children_cope.htm

4. Center for Parenting in a Multicultural Society

Gordon College plans to soon open a center for parenting in a multicultural society. This center, which will be located at the Multicultural Educational Resource Center, aims to provide parents from different ethnic and minority groups with resources which will empower them vis-à-vis the educational institutional structures. Single activities and workshops will be organized focusing on a variety of issues, such as children's rights, parent's rights, community schools and methods of parental involvement, etc.

In the multicultural city of Haifa, many parents, especially new immigrants and certain minority groups, are unaware of the roles that they can and should fill in their relationship with their children's schools. We

would like this center to contribute to parental empowerment.

Programs for and about Jews from Ethiopian Background

In furthering one of our main goals to train teachers from various ethnic and religious groups to educate children to live in the multicultural Israeli society, Gordon College has invested much effort to try and attract students from Ethiopian background to become students of education in our college. We have developed a program (at the request of FIDEL) for educational mediators from the Ethiopian community. We plan as soon as the final sources for funding are secured, to begin this program. We strongly believe that until there are certified teachers who come from the Ethiopian community, their absorption and integration into the Israeli society will be incomplete.

We are also planning to publish materials that we have been researching about the structure of the Ethiopian community and leadership. We see this material as contributing to the knowledge of educators in Israel about Ethiopian Jews. We plan to distribute this material to teachers' colleges throughout Israel.

Workshops for Special Education in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine:

A special community project which reflects another aspect of our multicultural educational approach as well as the willingness of our staff to go to other cultures and countries in order to try and help improve the quality of Jewish life, is reflected in our volunteer project in the Ukraine. We are participating in a new program which is connected to a UJA Boston Project in which we send qualified staff to give workshops and consultations to the special needs initiative center in Beit Hannah, Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine. Gordon College's staff is volunteering their professional time for these efforts and has made several visits since 2002.

Publications

Our staff is involved in the development of learning materials and programs which are aimed at furthering pluralistic values and goals as well as educating towards tolerance and co-existence. Many of the materials that are listed below are currently being used by pupils in elementary schools. In addition, teachers and students of education have studied from the materials below in our courses as well as in our numerous workshops for in-service teachers.

Below are the books that have been written by our staff. In order to reflect the evolution of our publications, our books below are presented according to date of publication rather than by author. All books are written in Hebrew unless otherwise stated.

- 2002 Israeli, L. *The Same Old Thing in a Different Form: Proverbs and their parallels in the Israel's multicultural landscape*. Ach Publishers and Gordon College of Education, Kiryat Bialik and Haifa.
- 2002 Coping with Terror in the Classroom. Website in process of development.
http://www.gordon.ac.il/zlinn/projects_2002/coping_2002.htm and
http://www.gordon.ac.il/zlinn/projects_2002/Helping_children_cope.htm
- 2001 Israeli, L. *Multicultural Odyssey*. Mofet Institute, Tel Aviv.
- 2000 Israeli, L. *Israel, a Multicultural Society: Treasure Chest. Activities for Students in Kindergarten and Primary School, Education for Tolerance and Human Respect*. Ach Publishers and Gordon College of Education, Kiryat Bialik and Haifa. (In ARABIC, Translator Prof. Naim Ariedeh)
- 1999 Oshrat, Z. and R. Richter (editors). *Israel, a Multicultural Society: Activities for Students in Elementary Schools. Education for Tolerance and Human Respect*. Ach Publishers and Gordon College of Education, Kiryat Bialik and Haifa.
- 1999 Israeli, L. *Footsteps in the Grass: Education Towards Tolerance in a Heterogeneous and*

- 1999 *Multicultural Society, Riechgold Publishers, Tel Aviv.*
Israeli, L. Israel, a Multicultural Society: Treasure Chest. Activities for Students in Kindergarten and Primary School, Education for Tolerance and Human Respect. Ach Publishers and Gordon College of Education, Kiryat Bialik and Haifa.
- 1998 Hiezner, Z., L. Segal, R. Sofer, and others. *Israel, a Multicultural Society. Education for Tolerance and Human Respect.* Ach Publishers and Gordon College of Education, Kiryat Bialik and Haifa.

Support from Outside Granting Institutions

MERC has been mainly supported by the Gordon College of Education. In addition there have been several grant foundations which have funded our programs. Their support has been vital to expand MERC's program activities to reach the community at large. The foundations which are supporting us or have supported us in the past are:

- The UJA- Federation of New York
- Ministry of Education, Israel
- The Abraham Fund
- Haifa-Boston Connection (UJA Boston)
- Keren Sacta-Rashi Foundation

Summary

The purpose of this report was to present the various activities and programs which are a part of the Multicultural Educational Resource Center at Gordon College in Haifa. It is important to emphasize that this center is an integral part of Gordon College itself. It is Gordon College's intrinsic character and multicultural structure which has been the foundation for the creation and development of MERC. Gordon

College, almost from its inception has practiced multicultural education. MERC is, therefore, a natural development at an institution which has lived multicultural educational values and principles for years.

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