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Searching for the tools for realization of national reading campaign

ALL OF UKRAINE READS TO KIDS



The Child is Father of the Man

(William Wordsworth, poem "My Heart Leaps Up")

As a part of social project "All of Ukraine reads to kids" the Ukrainian Research Center of Children's and Youth Literature in collaboration with other NGOs (MO "Dzyga", NGO "European home", NGO "Hillel" and others) have tested such ways of promoting reading like "Commedia delpARTa" (ImproTheatre), " Festivals' Library", "Family Reading Club", TV show "Let's read together! "(TRC "Tisa-1"), "Creative Reading", "Winter Readings - Kramators'k" (Donbas), "Around the book" (in Bookstore "E"). Youth volunteer scouts organized and conducted a poll among their peers (13-16-year-old young people) in all schools of Lviv. The survey clearly confirmed that if children read today, that is mainly due to the school curriculum, which is still mandatory. They named mostly classic world writers. Modern authors aren't very popular.

Ukraine¹, which is a big country with a multicultural world both internal and external, with the old family tradition, where the most important place is given to the child, should develop its own methods today to promote reading and books. Direct tracing programs supporting reading from any other country will be ineffective. Sharing experiences, observations, discussions and visions from the partners like “All of Poland reads to kids” or “Every Czech reads to kids” are

¹ Ukraine has an area of 603,628 km² (233,062 sq mi) making it the largest country entirely within Europe. Ukraine borders Russia to the east and northeast, Belarus to the northwest, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary to the west, Romania and Moldova to the southwest, and the Black Sea and Sea of Azov to the south and southeast, respectively. During the whole history of Ukraine these borders were smearing and stabilizing by different authorities. The people living in Ukraine today are holding in their cultural memory the permanent interferences from outsiders from all borders. In the history of Ukraine are not known the aggressive wars, initiated by Ukrainians.

During the Middle Ages, the area was a key center of East Slavic culture, with the powerful state of Kievan Rus' forming the basis of Ukrainian identity. Following its fragmentation in the 13th century, the territory was contested, ruled and divided by a variety of powers, including Lithuania, Poland, the Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungary, and Russia. A Cossack republic emerged and prospered during the 17th and 18th centuries, but Ukraine's territories remained divided until they were consolidated into a Soviet republic in the 20th century.

But even here we are following the differences in the developing of history on the territory of Ukraine. The Eastern Ukraine had been taken over by the Soviet Union in the twenties, while Galicia and Volhynia (West Ukraine) were incorporated into independent Poland. Bukovina was annexed by Romania and Carpathian Ruthenia, with mediation of the United States, was admitted to the Czechoslovak Republic as autonomy. And only in 1939, but actually in 1944 Eastern Galicia and Volhynia with their Ukrainian population became reunited with the rest of Ukraine. For the first time in history, the nation was united under the soviet regime. The Famine of Ukrainians in East by Russians and oppressions of Ukrainians by Poles in West, mixing the mentalities and borders, persecution of the Intelligence and political, physical genocide of Ukrainian families and their children for the whole century till 1991, saved Pain and Distrust in the generation memory of Ukrainians. The collapse of the Soviet Union, Independence of Ukraine provoked the hope for the future but at the same time also the economic disaster and put the Ukrainians into the survival modus in the new circumstances. Ukrainian parents went on the way for searching the existence solutions to build the new life for their children, to give them the education and to open the doors into the “better world”. The parents working hard, earning money in different ways, mostly abroad, living their children with the grandparents at home, trying to build new houses and pay for the studying, have not got still the possibility to relax and to pay really attention to providing the reading culture to their children. They cannot do it enough not because they do not love their children or do not want to stay with them, but only because of full-time working modus of the life. The Orange Revolution in 2004 gave the hope again; the Ukrainian folk felt its power... Juschenko opened the doors for developing the culture and different cultural international projects, what influenced also the feeling of identity of Ukrainians. But all economic and political plays provided by own egoistic politicians and foreign interventions caused by the people the skepticism and cynicism. The generation trauma took modernized form in the country with to 45 millions people (including Crimea), 77.8% of whom are Ukrainians by ethnicity, and with a sizable minority of Russians (17%), as well as Romanians/Moldovans, Belarusians, Crimean Tatars, and Hungarians. The mix of

necessary for Ukraine. “All of Ukraine reads to kids” is looking for all possible tools to make it possible to develop the reading culture in the whole Ukraine. Especially today it is very necessary, because of very difficult political, economic, psychological and emotional situation, caused by outsider occupants. While parents are downloaded by the all of negative information, coming from the Media and the realities of all-day-real-life-survival, children are also suffering. I suppose, today, all the psychotherapists from over the world would not be able to help all these people. But maybe only a good book, a good story read to Ukrainian kids before they go to sleep could help to save the healthy nervous system and mental health psycho-state of the young generation of Ukrainians and make them feel still happy.

To make you understand why direct tracing programs supporting reading from any other country will be ineffective and why I am asking you, dear colleges, to help us in finding the most suitable tools for real providing the national reading campaign in Ukraine, sharing experiences, observations, discussions and visions from the partners like “All of Poland reads to kids” or “Every Czech reads to kids”, including the Ukraine into the project “All of Europe reads to kids”, I invite you now in my starting review.

mentalities, the distrust between the entities and disappointment in the reality was used by Russian government to fully destabilize the country and the nervous system of such different people, living on the territory of Ukraine. **Maidan** was like the scream of the whole big Ukrainian folk that was united independent of the language or mentality, past or future... United Ukrainian nation - nation united in Ukraine - nation united by hope and hopelessness at once. The war, caused again from outside (insatiable Russia), new invasions, new loss of young men, orphans, strangers, death, fear and untruth, - that what are feeling the Ukrainian children growing up today in Ukraine.

Ukraine is known for its calm open-minded character of the citizens, fruitful soil, hard-working people, pretty women and smart children with open heard. Only values like freedom, children, family and friends move the Ukrainian nation forwards in spite of all difficulties carrying through the centuries.

Methods for learning reading like the methods of introduction the cultural processes in every different country represent the tradition, the cultural heritage and memory, mentality of the society and reflect the political intentions and economic situation of the land. How do children read? What do children read? What makes children into readers? The role that adults play in acts of reading in every country is also different. What is the way of transferring the information? What does the hierarchy of knowledge and authorities look like? Morag Styles and Even Arizpe in the introduction to “Acts of Reading – from Nursery Libraries to Digital Screens” emphasize that “given that answers will change along historical, cultural and technological developments” (p.3). All this items determine and limit the spheres where we are going to accept our ability to read.

Since the beginning of 2015 the young volunteers organized by Myroslav Vovk have made the poll in all schools in Lviv among the teenagers (13-17 years old young men). My idea was to see and to show to the public the real situation with the read books in the main cultural capital of Ukraine. We know, that there is a big distrust of any kinds of official pools, provided usually by schools, teachers or other governmental or social organizations. Ukrainians have no idols (like the stars or other authorities), they can trust only the family and to be motivated by the friends.

So, the teenager Myroslav Vovk proposed me to organize the scouts to make the poll for the teenagers. Teenagers were asking teenagers. Friends were asking the friends. As the result we got very confusing picture. The teenagers named 165 Ukrainian books and 427 foreign books from the world. The questioner entry was completed by over 2000 teenagers. Two volunteers were responsible for libraries. Two volunteers were talking with the teachers. One teacher told us a very good phrase: “Today children have all possibilities to read new good books, published in

Ukraine. But for realizing the reading process maybe we should forbid them to read. Then maybe they start to read the books to disobey us”.

The top 10 read books of Ukrainian literature were by classics like Taras Schevtschenko, Ivan Franko, Mykola Hoholj, Ivan Kotljarevsjkyj, Pantelejmon Kulish, Lina Kostenko, Vsevolod Nestajko. The top 10 world books named were by very different in literary directions like Joanne Rowling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Suzanne Collins, Daniel Defoe, Christopher Paolini, William Shakespeare, E. L. James, J. R. R. Tolkien. The list of Ukrainian literature showed us the curriculum duty but the list of world literature showed mainly the initiation of inner development of the Ukrainian young reader. All public activities, carried out for the last 10 years trying to provide the reading promotion projects and motivate children to read good new books using all the modern methods (like reading by the stars, meeting with authors in the schools and libraries) failed if we see the results of the poll in Lviv – the cultural literary capital of Ukraine today. It means that the main word in the literacy education today still has the school that is abandoned immediately with the governmental Ministry of Education. The Libraries are subordinate to the Ministry of Culture. But the libraries get accordingly the “school curriculum readers”. By annual “Book Forum” in Lviv the parents mostly buy books needed for school or new children’s books for small children (fairy-tales, picture books, verses). The school program is so difficult and overloaded by books in all fields and by difficult texts that the parents do not want to buy more to read (children need to have the free time, make music, sport) or even they usually do not have enough money for additional costs.

Due to the educational school system of Ukraine, the pupils have to write the mandatory summaries of the curricular texts, studied in school. If we take their notebooks and investigate them, how do you think we can estimate that

summaries? We can see that the task of the teachers in the literacy education is not to proclaim literary values and beauty of the texts or reading itself, but actually only to make children acquainted with the official political rhetoric (in the Soviet times it was the communist ideology, now it looks like the national not very hopeful). The main functions of such learning are the training of the brain and controlling it. In the countries like Ukraine, where the rate of inflation reaches more than 110 percent and the inner politic is dependent on or even corrupted by the authorities, such teaching and learning is the only possible way to hold all these people in the “frame”. Reading the Ukrainian classics, even if their works are on the highest level of literacy, gives the new generation the overview about the traumatized cultural memory of the nation: Ukrainians are poor, are suffering, are fighting against the occupants but are happy if they have their freedom, their family, their garden even if they have no money or shoes or dresses...and cannot travel and see the world free. The authorized system is not interested in the creativity and internationality of the Ukrainian children. Because than it means the diversion for that system.

But the diversion exploded. The *Maidan* showed to the world the finally healthy reaction of the young Ukrainians to resist such constrains of their personal freedom in the new multicultural digital world. Now they defy attempts to impose conformity and limit their freedom to reach out and read as and what they please. Therefore we got in our poll list texts for “pleasure reading” among the teenagers such as the erotic romance novel “Fifty Shades of Gray” by British author E. L. James or bestseller novel “The Da Vinci Code” by American author Dan Brown.

So, studying the Ukrainian reader today and searching for the appropriate tools for providing the national reading campaign and provoking reforms in literary

education in Ukraine we are bound to include the culture of both: readers and the texts. Jane Johnson make patterns of “text-based and life-referenced conversation”:

- When children have mastered the alphabet they should read for pleasure
- Understanding is better than rote learning
- Parents have an obligation to prepare their children for their future live as adults
- Children can begin to read early once they have learned to talk
- Children should be read to. This is important for their view of the task of learning and performance when they read out loud or on their own.

(in: Margaret Meet Spencer “Old and New Protocols of Reading”, p. 9).

To develop such a “text-based and life-referenced conversation” among the modern generations of young volunteers involved into the national social project “All of Ukraine reads to kids” we are providing since the beginning of the year, the weekly Reading and Discussing “Around the book” of the texts the children like. Following the repertoire of discussed texts, there are no texts given in the official curriculum but also there are not many texts that could be recommended by intellectuals for “educational” purposes or were top represented by different of numerous public introductions. For example the Ukrainian teenage girls (13-17 years) think that the Barbara Kosmovska or Christine Nöstlinger are too simple and would be suitable for

younger readers (?!). They prefer to discuss the Erich Maria Remarque, Daniel Keys, Michail Bulgakov and others. Interesting?

I see it as a very interesting case for investigating the development of the new young generation, future parents of Ukrainian world, trying to find their own idiosyncratic ways into reading. Talking to and working for the teenagers today I see the only real way to provide the nationally acceptable campaign for the future of Ukraine.



THANK YOU

Looking for the collaboration,

Your Uliana Baran

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