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## **HOW TO TRAIN A TEACHER FOR INCLUSION?**

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The Teacher that paves the way for equality in society, how is he trained for such a noble mission? Let us describe the reality of inclusion in education. To understand how it is regularly done, we shall use a metaphor of teaching swimming. Imagine a teacher that never went into the water, that asks young kids to jump into the water and instructs them how to swim... That, more or less describes the situation we are putting teachers and children in when we put them in an inclusive class. In this context, we wish to share our insights and Academic experience. We started our journey in 2005 in transforming teacher training; we found out that the change we introduced is a paradigm shift that we named: “from learning about to learning with and from people with disabilities.” What are the changes that both sides must do in order to create real inclusion? In this article will give us indication for the above question and much more, it is based on experience from over 20 courses and 12 years of bring together two groups: Students studying education and social activists with disabilities. The last part of the course focused on taking initial steps, in groups, towards developing new initiatives. One’s of this initiative was from Einav Mogdassi a Kindergarten assistant with disabilities that had a dream: “To train assistants like her, to become part of the staff of the kindergartens “ ... so that the children will not be afraid of a people with disabilities when they grow up”. The dream became a reality, today 5 kindergarten assistants, are employed by the Jerusalem municipality and another 16 will start to work in May, 2019.

*Keywords:* inclusion, persons with disabilities, kindergarten.

**We** are training Teachers over half a century. Until 2007 we believed the term Inclusion in education to be the right way to accept the other, to give the marginalized a fair opportunity to be part society.

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One day we looked in the mirror and asked ourselves how can we train students to become teachers, who shall guide and direct young kids to the ideal of inclusion?

Let us describe the reality of inclusion: the teacher is supposed to pave the way for equality in society, a great thought and Ideal but can it be done in practice?

To understand how it is regularly done, we shall use a metaphor of teaching swimming. Imagine a teacher that never went into water, asking young kids to jump into the water and instructing them to swim... That is, more or less, the situation — we are putting teachers and children in an inclusive class. Why do we do that? While most teachers, when in training, do not practice inclusion with people with disabilities, we use an academic and theoretic way of teaching about such inclusion in practice.

It seemed to us unjust and unfair to ask our student to follow a noble ideal without giving them a proper experience. As teacher trainers, we knew there must be a way to practice what we preach.

Firstly, as higher education lecturer, it is important that we practice our own preaching. Secondly, our students should also experience inclusion. Thus in 2007, we teamed up with a leader and teacher with disabilities to design the first inclusive social-change academic course.

Following a year of deliberating, planning and rethinking, we decided to create a course that would bring together two groups that might meet one another [1], but would almost definitely never work together: students studying special education and social activists with disabilities

The Principles that behind the design of the course are:

- creating extended frameworks in which students and people with disabilities could learn and work together;
- creating a group space based on “I-Thou” relation [2];
- orientation toward social change through joint social entrepreneurship;
- creating a supportive network of organizations in the community prepared to support enterprises initiated in the course.

The change experienced by all of us reached way above our wildest dreams.

On the personal level each of us was forced to check his or her believe system, action and the gap between accepting the other and reality.

For better understanding of this change, let us share words from our students, words written during the course as part self-development requirements:

*The partnership with people who live with disability changed many of my previously held attitudes. Now I understand that in order to promote things in this area I must learn, as I have already begun, how to dance a tango, lead by those who live with the disability, dancing together with me opposing the people in positions of influence. That seems to me to be the most perfect and successful dance.*

Two years into the process, we sat down to write an article for a conference on renewing education. While going over our students reflective journals, assessing the social innovation that mature into action, we understood that we created a paradigm shift. We called this shift: from learning about... to learning with... and learning from... The shift is described in our article [3].

*The present paper presents a new mode of professional training in the area of disabilities, one which supplements the traditional mode of “learning about” people with disabilities, with the intentional creation of spaces in which students are able to “learn from” successful social entrepreneurs with disabilities, and to “learn with” and “operate with” disabled activists in the community.*

What began as a pioneer course turned into academic courses embedded in a B.A. track, and many of our students said it should be mandatory. The course continues to operate and be duplicated, but the impact and spheres of influence and change reached way beyond our own four walls and 2 hours of weekly meetings. Following are some of the effects:

- within a decade, an inaccessible campus became 90 % accessible, including 50-year old building, auditorium stage, garden and others;

- people with disabilities found a way to join academic life. Today some of them completed their diplomas in their areas of interest;
- people with disabilities became an integral part of campus life including two lecturers;
- we expanded accessibility from the physical to social life, academics and bureaucracy;
- last but not least, dozens of social innovations were developed and some of them affect national policy and beyond.

The last part of the course focused on taking initial steps, in groups, towards developing new initiatives [4]. It was primarily the disabled activists — in our opinion the real experts on their respective disabilities based on their 24/7 experience — who identified the areas in which initiatives were needed.

One's of this initiative was from Einav Mogadassi, a Kindergarten teacher assistant with disabilities who had a dream: to train teacher assistants like her to become part of the staff of kindergartens “so that the children will not be afraid of a different person when they grow up” [5].

The dream turned into reality: 5 kindergarten assistants are employed by the *Jerusalem municipality*. *16 Were trained and will start to work in May, 2019*. To change the mindset of the adults in charge is much harder than for kids to accept a teacher with disability. The way ahead is long and we need many partners with the right mindset to pave the road ahead in order to start inclusion within the staff. Once we get teachers with disability integrated into the teacher training staff all the way up to early childhood education, we can start to practice our own preaching and the children can be part of real inclusive education system.

## References

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