

## **Special education teacher training in the context of inclusive settings**

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This lecture will present our teachers training program in special education, in an era of inclusion. The special education program trains teachers for work in various special education frameworks - segregated environments and inclusive environments. During the second year of studies, the focus is on training for inclusive teaching.

When I say inclusion I mean that it is an educational model in which pupils with special needs study in regular schools. In this way, schools are able to accept all pupils in their area and meet their varied needs.

In Israel, most of the children with special needs who study in regular classes have learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders. A few children with other special needs also study in regular classes. There are youngsters with seeing and hearing disabilities, who are integrated into regular classes, and they receive help from a specialist teacher in these areas. In Israel, there is a growing trend to integrate youngsters with autism, with PDD and even those with Downs syndrome into regular schools.

Inclusive teaching requires cooperation between regular teachers and special education teachers. This cooperation needs to be in teaching, planning and assessment.

As a college that trains teachers, we had to rebuild the teacher training curriculum so that it will meet the changing needs of, special education and the regular teachers.

Stayton and McCollun (2002) identified three models that exist in programs that train for inclusiveness: the Infusion model, the Collaborative Training model and the Unification model.

In the Infusion model students take 1 or 2 courses that cover inclusion education. In the Collaborative Training model, many more courses deal with teaching inclusive classes, and regular teaching students and special education students do all, or part of, their practicum experiences together. In the Unification model, all students study the same curriculum which trains them for teaching regular education with a focus on pupils with special needs.

For many years, the teacher training program at Beit Berl College was based on the Infusion model. But during the past three years, we have been moving to a program based on the Collaborative Training model.

Changes, that have taken place in our program, are presented next to its benefits and the challenges we face.

Over the past few years there have been changes in teacher training in Israel in general, and specifically at Beit Berl. The new approach is termed Professional Development School (PDS). This new framework for the practicum is creating a partnership between Beit Berl, as a teachers training college, and the schools. Schools are chosen to take an active role in teaching and training students. Students come as a group to the school with their pedagogical supervisor. The partnership increases the responsibility and commitment toward improving teaching standards and improving the quality of teacher training.

Not much research has been published about special education as part of the PDS framework. Voltz (2001) stressed the importance of special education teachers taking part in the practicum for training general education teachers. We have found that this new training model allows us to share our approach to special education on another level as well.. We have been able to use it to apply collaborative practices with the general education training program at our college.

We have created frameworks of cooperation with general schools, We choose schools where students who are not in the special education program do their practicum. Teacher training in the same framework has led to many opportunities for cooperation between groups of students, pedagogical supervisors and intra-school teams.

This framework of collaboration exists in both junior high schools and in elementary schools.

The framework of collaboration in junior high schools consists of groups of students, who have chosen to specialize in teaching junior high school aged, youngsters with learning disabilities - as well as students in our other programs at Beit Berl, who have chosen to teach this post-elementary age group. Students from both groups teach in the same junior high school and meet together with teachers from the school.

This cooperation has led, for exesmples, to the establishment of a pupil support center for youngsters with learning disabilities in one of the schools. Staff from the special education department advised the school on how to set up the center and special education students counsel pupils who turn to the support center.

In elementary schools there is another example of this type of cooperation. Second year student from the special education program meet regularly with student from the English program and with those from the general elementary education teaching program.

Next part will describe in more detail the process we've been through in the special education department over the past 3 years. During this period we've carried out applied collaborative training together with teacher training in the general education program.

**The first step, in preparation for the new school year, we had to:**

- Coordinate expectations between pedagogical supervisors of the 2 programs at Beit Berl.
- Coordinate expectations with staff in the schools

**During the first year our efforts focused on:**

- Joint work between pedagogical supervisors from the various teacher training programs – joint guidance before lessons, coordination of joint observation sessions and joint feedback after the lessons. The guidance before lessons was mostly online – students arrived in class after having been coached by two pedagogic supervisors and two mentoring teachers from the school. The pedagogic supervisors had to decide together on the criteria for assessing the students.
- Establishing joint learning groups within the PDS framework which are made up of experienced and beginner teachers, teachers with different roles in the school, staff from Beit Berl and our students. In their meetings, the various teams learn about the approaches, values and concepts of other members of the team. At the meetings participants discussed topics such as counseling, how to select math books and administrative issues.

At the end of the first year we applied -

- Joint assessment of the collaboration process.

**During the second year** of our collaborative program, the following aspects were added to the model:

- Co-teaching. Our students taught together with general education students. They prepared joint lessons – the general education students were responsible for the content of the lessons and the special education students were responsible for teaching methods and adapting the lessons to children with special needs.
- Joint studies of the course which go along with the practical training. Parts of the course were taught together. In other parts, each student group studied with the supervisor from the relevant program. Students received joint assignments, in which it was necessary to assess situations from the viewpoint of general education on the one hand and special education on the other.

**During the third year** of the program, after we had already gotten to know the school team, we were asked to add another learning group.

- General education teachers and special education students studied together, focusing on how to adapt lessons for children with special needs at the stages of planning, implementation and assessing achievements.

The guidance was given by the special education supervisor, from Beit Berl, **together** with special education teachers, from the school.

We believe these collaborations are very important. They enable students:

- to form their own professional identities within the reality of inclusion.
- to developing inter-personal communication

Students in the special education program are able to become familiar with the concepts of general education and its curriculum. They learn how to work in cooperation with the staff, who teaches in regular classes.

Students in the other programs also benefit from this interaction. They learn about children with special needs – different types of disabilities, learning disabilities, the potential learning abilities of pupils with special needs, teaching methods and inclusive models.

On the other hand, it's a very challenging process.

Challenges that arose during the changes:

- Differences in goals, content and focus between the various education programs. It was necessary to become familiar with previous training programs, and adapt new ones to the inclusion model.
- Differences in how people perceived their roles. General education teachers lack the knowledge to teach pupils with special needs in inclusive classrooms, and sometimes their attitude towards inclusion prevents successful inclusive teaching.
- Communication problems. At the beginning there were a lot of problems that needed urgent treatment.
- Lack of time – participants in the PDS practicum have many more assignments.
- The small number of special education teachers. In Israel, not many special education teachers are integrated in general education schools. So we can't send a large group of students to the same school.
- Budget costs

This year, as we begin the 4th year of collaboration, we are still faced with some of these challenges. We will have to ask ourselves:

Does the effort and investment in collaboration, really contribute to efficient teacher training in the era of inclusion?

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