

Bar-Ilan University

**The Effect of Participation in a Workshop on the Topic of a Curriculum
for Students with Severe and Profound Intellectual Disability: The Stance
of the School Staff towards Implementing the Changes, Planning and
Teamwork**

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to examine the effect of participation in a workshop on the topic of a curriculum which advances literacy education for students with severe and profound intellectual disability (ID), the stances of the school staff towards implementing the changes, cognitive changing ability, planning the studies and team work.

Aspects of the staff's willingness to cope with a change in the manners of teaching were also examined, by reviewing concerns and needs towards the change and the willingness of the staff to implement the new program. Furthermore, qualitative tools were used to examine the question on how the extent and manner of learning of the program and the primary experience in it affected the female staff of the experimental group.

The program is an expression of a recently developing trend in the field of curricula for the population with ID and emphasizes the increase in the expectation threshold of these students, by inserting a literacy aspect into the regular education programs while performing adaptation, accommodation and added changes and integrating it into all aspects of activities and treatments held in class, such as making breakfast and eating. The program is characterized by a multi-disciplinary, holistic and multi-structural planning model and refers to three aspects which are expressed by three levels of teaching planning (Ministry of Education, 2013):

Adaptive behavior skills, such as: eating, clothing, control of body waste, development of employment skills, communications skills, etc.

Universal social values, such as: autonomy which gives meaning to life and a possibility to make a difference and a choice made while activating judgement and expressing personal preferences.

Cognition, instilling of literacy knowledge, such as: examples, discourse on the importance of the field, prioritizing personal and cultural preferences, expanding knowledge or presenting written words along with instilling the terms.

The new program is based on theories regarding modification and learning abilities of students with developmental ID, according to which individuals with severe and profound developmental ID possess learning and modification abilities with the help of an appropriate environmental educational intervention, even in the presence of three formidable obstacles usually believed to prevent change: (a) age; (b) etiology; (c) severity of limitation (Feuerstein & Rand, 1977; Feuerstein, 2003; Lifshitz, Klein & Fridel, 2010). The “Compensation Age Theory” postulates that a delay in the development of intelligence and adaptive behavior in the early years of individuals with developmental ID is compensated for in later years and they continue to develop and advance in their adult years (Lifshitz-Vahav, 2011; Lifshitz-Vahav, 2015; Facon, Facon-Bollengier & Grubar, 2002; Lifshitz & Rand, 1999).

The participants in the current study included 55 multi-professional staff members who work in state schools for students with ID. The participants were divided into two study groups: 28 participants were randomly allocated to the experimental group (50.9%) and 27 participants were randomly allocated to the control group (49.1%).

The study method included 4 stages:

First stage: The staff members were given pre-test questionnaires which included the following measures: the attitudes of the staff towards the cognitive modifiability of students with severe and profound developmental ID (Nissim, 2006); the attitudes of the staff towards the need for meticulous planning of literacy studies for students with severe and profound developmental ID; the attitudes of the staff towards cooperation in a multi-

professional team (Shaked, 2006); the willingness of the staff to cope with the change by examining their level of concern and fear towards the change (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1979).

Second stage: A workshop which included 8 sessions was held. The three principles of planning teaching and writing teaching programs adapted to the school values alongside the values, theories and rationale at the basis of the program were taught.

Third stage: Implementation of the program's principles was conducted with the participation of a middle school educator, an elementary educator and a professional teacher. The implementation included six sessions of guidance over the course of three months, which included observations and development of ideas on how to implement the program in the classrooms.

Fourth stage: The staff members were administered post-test questionnaires which included the following measures: the attitudes of the staff towards the cognitive modifiability of students with severe and profound developmental ID (Nissim, 2006); the attitudes of the staff towards the need for meticulous planning of literacy studies for students with severe and profound developmental ID; the attitudes of the staff towards cooperation in a multi-professional team (Shaked, 2006); the willingness of the staff to cope with the change by examining their level of concern and fear towards the change (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1979) and the staff's perception of its tools for implementing the program (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). An interview in a focus group of the staff was held. The participants in the interview included the principal of the school, the curriculum coordinator, a professional teacher, a middle school educator and an elementary school educator. The interview was

analyzed through a qualitative method with the aim of deepening the understanding of the staff's attitudes and perceptions as well as the qualitative findings.

The hypothesis of the current study was that differences between study groups will be found in the measures of belief in the cognitive modifiability of individuals with developmental ID, meticulous planning of literacy studies for students with severe and profound developmental ID and work of a multi-professional team in special education. We further hypothesized that differences between groups will be found in the level of fears and concerns of the change as well as in the level of willingness to implement the program.

Two-way ANOVAs with repeated measures were conducted on each of the questionnaires and factors separately. Following the differences found between groups prior to the intervention in the questionnaire of attitudes towards planning studies, the measure of attitudes towards meticulous planning and attitudes towards multi-professional team work, both in the general measure of the questionnaire as well as in the construction of a mutual language measure, one-way ANOVAs were conducted for these measures **only**.

Results of the study: It was found that learning the program positively affected the attitudes of the staff towards cognitive modifiability of individuals with ID, towards meticulous planning of studies planning, towards all three planning stages (cognitive, principal and executive) and towards team work. The level of concerns and fears was not affected following the intervention. However, the staff felt it was given the tools for implementing the program.

However, the findings of the study indicate that the school staff is still in the primary stage of implementing the program and the change which the team had begun to undergo is still not a profound conceptual change. The staff is interested in continuing to learn

about the essential aspects of the program and is concerned about the manner in which the program will affect the progress of the learner in the cognitive, executive, principal and emotional level. Following the experience in implementation, it is recommended to train a staff member who will specialize in the new curriculum and will act as a “change agent”. This staff member will be the available professional address for consultation and learning the program, will assist in adapting the program to the needs of the school, guide the staff and examine the progress of the implementation of the program (Dobbs, 2004; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Gundy & Berger, 2016).