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Benjamin Hozmi

Identity of Capability

The Emotional Aspects of Complex Learning Disorders

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Benjamin Hozmi
The Inclusive University and Knowledge Management
Beit Issie Shapiro
Ra'anana, Israel

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I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students

—The Talmud, Taanit ,7a

Published thanks to the generosity of Barbara Blumenthal.
This book is dedicated to the memory of Barbara's sister
Dorothy Jolson z"l who taught Barbara and all of us that
"Every person can grow if we just extend a helping hand".

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I wish to thank my dear wife and children who taught me what love is, my parents who taught me the art of living that\and laid the foundations for an identity of capability, and my students who taught me the love of learning and the power of adaptation and planted the belief within me that change and growth are possible.

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Introduction

Throughout my personal and professional life, I have encountered children, adolescents, and adults who were perceived as "different" because of their difficulties in learning, behavior, or function. These people were part of community life, but at the same time they were criticized and unofficially diagnosed as "Extremely mischievous", "A little unfortunate", "Not okay", "A bad child", or "Lazy". A large majority of these children and adults were the objects of jokes and were bullied and ostracized. The challenges that these children and adults were dealing with had common characteristics that could be identified, but no term existed for defining the difficulty they were coping with.

When I was the director of the tutorial project at Bar Ilan University, I encountered these children, who were designated as being "disadvantaged". They were referred to in other professional care facilities as "falling through the cracks". Approximately 20 years ago, people began to use the concepts of learning disabilities, adjustment, and function to characterize this population group, and during the past decade, the term was shortened to "complex learning disabilities".

The two major landmarks in my life that led me to devote thirty years to adults with complex learning disabilities were my direct encounter with them at the diagnostic center for the Ministry of Welfare which I managed and my work at the Ministry of Welfare care facilities in the 1990s. It was there that I learned about the unique social, occupational, and domestic needs of this population. I also came to recognize the lack of solutions that could enable them to fulfill themselves after they completed their schooling and to contribute and benefit in society as equals.

Many of the people whom I met had reached the age at which they would formulate their "future orientation", but they were extremely confused and had difficulty shaping a competent identity—a self-perception of a capable person. It was evident that for many of them, their life paths and experiences had created a state of "learned helplessness" accompanied by mourning for the life they wished to lead combined with a sense of doubt regarding their chances of fulfilling their dreams. It was there that the understanding emerged that these people were not necessarily destined to "fall through the cracks". We are obligated to initiate "tailor-made answers" in many areas of life for these people.

20 years ago, I joined "Beit Issie Shapiro"—an organization that is the home of vision and entrepreneurship for promoting the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities. My work in the organizations as the academic director resulted in the establishment of the "Inclusive University" and its core course "Identity of Capability–Introduction to Practical Psychology". The program focuses upon offering adults with complex learning disabilities an opportunity to

become integrated in studies and academic life in a unique, specially adapted accessible study program. The core course "Identity of Capability" is designed to enable participants in the program to experience a process of empowerment and to establish an identity of capability through learning selected issues in psychology that serve as a tool for empowerment. During the two decades that the program has been implemented and continuous dialog that has been conducted with its graduates, the three-step program for establishing an identity of capability developed, which is presented in this book. The program views increasing self-love as a condition for loving others and increasing social integration.

Attention is also devoted to the emotional repercussions of learning disabilities upon the world of those who live with them. Consequently, this book focuses more upon the emotional world of adults with complex learning disabilities and less upon the characteristics of learning disabilities and learning strategies for coping with them. The book will also describe the "three-step approach" to establishing a positive identity and the "Inclusive University Program" in the Trump Institute at Beit Issie Shapiro. This unique program was developed to meet the emotional needs of adults with complex learning disabilities. The book focuses upon understanding the importance of building an identity of capability as a means of growth, giving, and living a rich and satisfying personal and interpersonal life. The book also presents tools for facilitating and teaching that are directed toward building an identity of capability.

The book is divided into five sections:

The first section focuses upon the topic of "the emotional world of adults with complex learning disabilities". This section is an introduction to the contents of the book. It briefly presents the characteristics of complex learning disabilities. In some cases, these people are characterized by moderate–low intelligence and adjustment disorders alongside learning disabilities. This section also presents the possible repercussions of a complex learning disability upon the emotional world of those who experience it. The message between the lines is that despite the fact that a learning disability designates difficulties in the area of learning, attention must also be paid to its repercussions upon the person's emotional world, his or her identity, and quality of life.

The second section is entitled "What is an Identity of Capability?". This section focuses upon the development of an identity among adults with learning disabilities.

It explains the barriers that are liable to arise during the process of building positive self-value due to the challenges of the disability in various areas of life. This section focuses upon the main topic of this book: "An Identity of Capability". The contents propose the essential components for establishing an "identity card of capability". The section concludes with paradigms that promote an identity of capability that constitute the gateway to the process of personal growth.

The third section deals with the three-step approach to building an identity of capability and presents the contents of the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" that is the tool for applying the approach. Each of the three "steps" is directed toward building an identity of capability. The content included in each step is reviewed together with the rationale for including them as well as statements by participants in the program that relate to these topics.

The fourth section presents the working model for the group "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology". This section focuses upon the "how" and first describes the development of the Inclusive University Program, its vision, and objectives. The section continues with a description of the guiding principles for implementing the program that emphasizes the importance of making academic content cognitively accessible and the effectiveness of the power of the group in individual growth.

The fifth section focuses upon "Empowering teaching—significant learning in an inclusive climate". I chose to devote an entire chapter to this topic since its contents are based upon "my students' voices" and insights from my life's journey as a student and teacher. These voices were processed into a model for empowering and guiding teaching. I call this model the Pentagon of Empowering Teaching. This chapter describes its components.

The contents call for a reassessment of "teacher–student" relations and suggests that we view teaching as not only a means of acquiring knowledge and education, but as a tool for producing identity as well. Despite the fact that many educators view this as a part of their obligation and even a privilege, in many contexts of education and guidance scant attention is devoted to the issue of identity.

The terms "lecturer", "teacher", and "guide" are used interchangeably throughout this book. This was done intentionally because I believe that educators alternately serve as lecturers, teachers, guides, and occasionally as "parents" for their students. This book is intended for education workers, lecturers and guides, therapists, and guidance workers who provide services for children and adults with complex learning disabilities. It is also intended for parents who serve as educational leaders for their children, family members, and adults with complex learning disabilities who can broaden their understanding about barriers in their lives and possible directions of action toward change and personal growth.

The quotes in this book are presented with pseudonyms. Instances in which no specific speaker's name is mentioned indicate that I heard this statement numerous times from adults with complex learning disabilities.

Establishing an identity of capability among students in general and among adults with complex learning disabilities in particular will enable them to identify their true strongpoints, to conceptualize them, and to place them at the forefront

of their self-image. An identity of capability is not an objective. It is a means. It is a means that is directed at helping the individual moderate patterns of avoidance, to go beyond their comfort zone, and to dare to suggest themselves as a member of society who are capable of playing an active part in the social interaction of "give and take".

Daring to give is directly connected to daring to take. Persons with an identity of capability will be more likely to venture to fulfill the proverb: "Love your neighbor as yourself" which is the essence of the Torah.

Benjamin Hozmi

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The Emotional World of Adults with Complex Learning Disabilities

Complex Learning Disabilities: A Systematic Perspective

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What Are Complex Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities include a number of difficulties in the area of learning which are neurological in origin. According to the 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) the official up-to-date diagnosis is a specific learning disorder. Learning disorders are reflected in a discrepancy between a student's learning function and achievements and what is expected of other students at the same age. The most common learning disabilities include dyslexia—difficulty with reading, dysgraphia—difficulties with writing and organizing writing, and dyscalculia—difficulty with understanding mathematics and performing mathematical activities. Less common learning disabilities include difficulties with orientation in time and space and dysnomia—difficulty naming things, conceptualizing, and difficulty with recalling an output of words when speaking. People with dysnomia are often perceived as being unable to convey ideas clearly because they are overly verbose and have difficulty transmitting content in a focused manner. They are liable to include sentences in conversation such as: "I need a… what-do-you- call it…" or "Yesterday I saw what's-her-name…" Other disabilities are connected to understanding language, syntax structure, and vocabulary, difficulties with short and long-term memory, difficulties in reading and auditory comprehension, difficulty acquiring a foreign language, and difficulties in planning and organizing. Approximately one-third of children and adults with learning disabilities are also diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

ADHD is not a learning disability, but it impacts learning processes. Attention deficit disorder involves three main components:

Difficulty Maintaining Attention and Concentration (distractions, difficulty persevering at tasks, inattentiveness to details).

Hyperactive Behavior (Excessive movements of the arms and legs, difficulty conducting quiet leisure activities, and a tendency to talk excessively).

Impulsiveness (Interrupting to answer before the other person has finished asking a question, inability to wait for one's turn, difficulty waiting, a tendency to interrupt others when they are speaking, uncontrolled physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses to various stimuli that are sometimes offensive to others).

Children and adults with ADHD may not display all three of these characteristics simultaneously, and they may appear in various combinations.

Many people with ADHD are overwhelmed by a world that is inundated with sensations that cannot be regulated. This is often expressed in hypersensitivity to stimuli such as sounds, smells, tastes, textures, visual stimuli, and crowded places. Some people are also hyposensitive (lacking sensitivity) to certain stimuli, for example, some people enjoy listening to music at a deafening volume. Others may seek close physical contact and crave a strong sensation of being touched. Some, quickly become bored with constant stimuli and need a changing environment. In

addition to difficulties with sensory regulation, people often have difficulty with cognitive regulation. I have often heard people with learning disabilities complain: "My motor is on turbo," or "There's noise in my head all the time" or "I'm looking for something that will stop the washing machine that is running in my brain." Difficulties with regulating thinking and emotions are also liable to pose difficulties with regulating behavior and function.

Many adults with ADHD whom I met within the framework of the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" described difficulty falling asleep. The main rationale for this was: "When the silence of night begins, the noise in my head begins." The main stimulus at night stems from the person him/herself and their thoughts about the past, their living routine, interpersonal relations, and doubts about the future. At night these elements emerge from the hiding place of external stimuli that the person experiences throughout the day. At night they are transformed into an annoying and oppressive conceptual quicksand that is inundating and threatening. People who take Ritalin are liable to experience insomnia that is a common side effect of this type of pharmaceutical treatment. Lack of sleep has an impact on the ability to concentrate and lowers the frustration threshold—creating a destructive loop of existence that influences academic, occupational, and interpersonal achievements resulting in repercussions upon the person's self-perception as well.

Attention deficit disorder does not necessarily mean that a person lacks ability in these areas. Every person has a specific attention span, and many people with attention deficit disorder have an ability to retain attention for longer periods of time when they are pursuing something that is of interest to them and the content is presented with varying methods. Parents of children with ADHD wonder how their children are able to watch movies and television programs, surf the Internet, or play computer games for extensive periods of time. These activities have several things in common: The person chose the stimulus, they offer a certain proportion of control, and they have a rapid rate of change and stimulation. Today's plays, movies, television programs, and games (which are for the most part computerized) are fast-moving and alternate between stimuli frequently and rapidly. I have witnessed teenagers triple the speed while watching a movie on the computer because "The person on Youtube doesn't speak fast enough."

When people's intelligence is average or above average, they develop compensation strategies and they will not necessarily be underachievers. On the other hand, when the learning disability—with or without attention deficit disorder—is accompanied by moderate-low intelligence the person's learning experiences and existence become much more difficult. In these cases there will be significant repercussions upon areas of adaptation and function, interpersonal relations, their sense of belonging, autonomy, achievements, mental welfare and personal identity.

The concept "complex learning disability" refers to people who have a learning disability together with low-average intelligence. As a result they demonstrate difficulties in areas of adjustment and function and require moderate, but continuous support throughout their lives. This book focuses upon understanding the emotional world of adults with complex learning disabilities.

The Family and Complex Learning Disabilities

Complex learning disabilities are not usually evident during early childhood and are normally diagnosed when the child reaches kindergarten or primary school. When a child is diagnosed with delayed development the parents' anxiety and sense of uncertainty increase. Rimmerman and Portowitz (1986) described various stages experienced by parents of children who are diagnosed with developmental disabilities.

The Change Crisis At this stage parents must recognize the reality that has been forced upon them. They experience shock, denial, confusion and guilt due to the fact they have been forced to deal with an unfamiliar reality for which life has not prepared them. Parents then undergo **crisis of values** in which they experience "conflicting sets of values" regarding their child. On one hand they are expected to love their child unconditionally, while on the other hand they experience a sense of loss for the "perfect child" they had expected. This conflict often assumes the form of over-protection as opposed to a sense of ambivalence towards their child. This value crisis is liable to be expressed in what Olshansky (1962) termed "chronic sorrow" in which the parents feel sorrow for the "ideal child" as opposed to their "real child" at every step of development. For example, when the child reaches school age parents feel sorrow about their child's learning difficulties, limited achievements, and at times the need to study in a special educational framework or other non-mainstream learning tracks. When the child reaches marital age parents experience sorrow over the difficulty their child has in establishing a family. Finally, they feel sadness that their child will be unable to help them when they reach old age.

The third crisis parents undergo is the **crisis of reality** that refers to changes that are required when the family is forced to redefine the components of the parents' role. If parenting is a "profession", than parenting a child with disabilities is a "field of expertise." Parents of children with disabilities, particularly mothers, serve as their child's case manager. They are continuously in contact with numerous diagnostic and treatment factors including occupational therapists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, emotional therapists, educators and teachers for corrective learning strategies, doctors, psychologists and many other professionals. Parents must devote extensive personal, emotional and financial resources which quickly leads to a sense of pressure followed by burnout. The extensive resources of the parents that are devoted to advancing their child who is diagnosed with a disability are liable to come at the expense of the developmental needs of the child's siblings. When the crisis of reality subsides, the parents will hopefully be able to come to terms with reality and accept it. Parents who accept reality do not deny the existence of one disability or another. They view their child as a complete being, whose essence consists of both strengths and challenges. They are not ashamed of their child's disability and do not attempt to hide it and feel comfortable realizing their child's rights and seeking help. They are aware of their child's needs and feel an obligation to negotiate solutions while viewing their own needs and the needs of their other children as legitimate.

Despite this, the reality is slightly different when a son or daughter has a complex learning disability. This type of disability is invisible, and the abilities of a child with a complex learning disorder are inconsistent. High linguistic abilities often appear alongside low abilities in performance and vise-versa. This can be extremely confusing for parents and has implications upon their expectations as well. Some parents are well aware of the reality and fall within the realm of "accepting parents" while others broadcast messages to their child such as "There's nothing wrong with you. You 're just like everyone else. You'll go far." In some families a complex learning disability is a "secret" that must not be discussed—particularly when making contact with others in an attempt to pursue a romantic relationship. Hiding and secrecy transform the disability into something illegitimate, but at the same time the child knows that these "secret" illegitimate impairment and weaknesses are part of him/her.

Parents also expect adults with complex learning disabilities to assume more responsibility for their lives, while at the same time they experience a great deal of anxiety when their children attempt to become empowered, make independent decisions and manage their own affairs. The mixed messages and confusion are intensified when parents of adults with complex learning disabilities who are independent in many areas of life appoint an executor or family member to handle their child's financial affairs. I recall a case in which one of my students moved into a supportive living framework. He mentioned that he had been working at a steady job for several years and was earning a salary that was above minimum wage. His job involved physical labor and he wanted to purchase a high-quality mattress. When he approached the person responsible for his finances he was told that he was spoiled and incapable of making decisions about his expenditures and that there was nothing wrong with the mattresses that were provided by the housing framework where he lived. He was incensed and explained: "It's my money and it's my back. I know how I feel at the end of the day, but my parents signed an agreement that he would be responsible for my money. I don't understand a lot about money and I don't feel like fighting over it."

Adults with complex learning disabilities usually describe relations with their siblings as positive and they view them as a source of support and pride. In many cases when parents become elderly and can no longer fully manage their children's financial matters, the parents appoint one of the siblings to do so. However, many admit to feeling overt or hidden envy of their "successful" siblings. This feeling became more acute when the sibling with the complex learning disability was the oldest child. This was explained by Danit (pseudonym) one of my students who was 29 years old: "I see how much pleasure my sisters bring my parents and how proud my parents are of them, and I ask myself: 'What about me? Will my parents ever be proud of me? Will I ever have a normal life—a diploma, an occupation, a home, or a family?'"

Another issue that is spoken about less is the reality in which some parents who seek a diagnosis for their child's difficulties or suspect that difficulties exist, read the findings of the diagnosis and recall and understand that they experienced similar difficulties as children and that perhaps they also have a learning disability or ADHD that was never diagnosed or treated. Giving a name to the

disability and the dialogue that develops around solutions that are required is liable to arouse guilt. At times they are overcome with events and reopen wounds from childhood that their parents suppressed. Exposure to the complex reality their child is experiencing is liable to remind them of their own childhood experiences, which may create an emotional burden. Despite the fact that they identify with their child, parents sometimes feel that he or she is forcing them once again to confront things that they choose to forget. This is liable to result in ambivalence towards the child who is in a state of distress and in need of direction and support. Parents should be aware of these feelings and should seek professional help if necessary. Processing these feelings from the past will enable them to devote their resources to supporting their child who is dealing with difficulties in the present. An inclusive, warm and supportive home will constitute a "safe harbor" in the stormy sea of social and learning difficulties. The family is the place in which children can find rest, re-energize at the end of the day, and prepare for the challenges and coping that the next day will bring. Inclusion and opportunities for success inside within the family can balance the experiences of rejection and lack of success on the outside.

In summary, parenting girls and boys with complex learning disabilities is "a journey between light and shadow." It involves many moments of pleasure and satisfaction coupled with times of anxiety and uncertainty. It is important for parents of children with complex learning disabilities speak openly with their children about their disability and explain its meaning. They must have expectations of their child that are compatible with his or her abilities and help them view support and adaptation as legitimate help. Children must be given tasks at home that will enable them to feel that they are capable of giving to their family and to others. They must strengthen their child's natural abilities and enable them to utilize them for fulfillment. Parents serve as a role model for their children. The more parents show that they accept their children unconditionally, the easier it will be for their children to accept themselves in a similar way.

The Emotional World of Adults with Complex Learning Disabilities

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What Does It Feel Like to Have a Complex Learning Disability?

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The educational system devotes significant attention to understanding learning disabilities and adapting learning strategies for coping with learning challenges. However, less attention is devoted to the emotional repercussions that complex learning disabilities have on students. A learning disability and attention deficit disorder are invisible. They are therefore not diagnosed at an early age and intervention does not begin until the child reaches school age or later. The environment has normative expectations of children or adults with complex learning disabilities, and when they have difficulty fulfilling them they are often rejected and criticized instead of being included and supported. Despite the fact that, in many cases, persons with complex learning disabilities have low-average intelligence, many have abilities within the normal range or higher in numerous areas alongside extremely low function in others. Because of these discrepancies between various learning abilities and life skills, many are forced to wander between educational frameworks until a suitable framework is found—if one exists—that is suitable to their unique abilities. Moving from one educational framework to another makes it difficult to establish a sense of belonging, and disrupts learning continuity and stability. The constant change is liable to lower learning achievements and increase stress. The pileup of stressors in the lives of people with complex learning disabilities is detrimental to their mental welfare, their feelings of self-value and their identity.

The difficulties do not end when the child graduates from high school. They continue when the person reaches adulthood and impact many areas of life such as abilities to organize and plan, social participation, community life, education, and employment. Other difficulties that accompany learning disabilities such as developmental coordination disorder (DCD), attention deficit disorder (ADHD), or anxiety influence the person's daily function and self-management (Sharfi and Rosenblum, 2014).

My students gave me the impression that their existential experience is one of "living almost like everyone else". Their plight is similar to that of the legendary fox who is tempted by a juicy bunch of grapes hanging in the vineyard—(an analogy to life in the mainstream) who futilely attempts to grasp it. The fox is nearly touching it, yet he is unable to reach it and taste it.

Failures in the life of a person with learning, adjustment, and functional disabilities are liable to lead to a sense of "learned helplessness" resulting from repeated attempts that end in loss of control. The person eventually succumbs to defeat, even if he or she is currently capable of coping with similar attempts. This reminds me of a story written by the Argentinian writer Jorje Bucay (2013) in which he observed a circus elephant tied to a small stake in the ground.

Bucay was puzzled as to why the huge and powerful elephant never attempted to uproot the small wooden stake, free itself, and escape. Years later the answer was finally revealed to him: The circus elephant never attempted to escape because he had been attached to the stake since it was very small. Regardless of how hard the baby elephant tried, it was unable to free itself. The day finally came when the elephant stopped trying to escape and resigned himself to his fate. Even

after he was fully grown, he continued to perceive the stake as being too strong for him and to see himself as small and weak.

Bucay's story demonstrates how learned helplessness and "External locus of control" develop—a sense that "I am not the master of my life or my choices. I am being lead and steered along every step of the way (Rotter 1975). In such situations there is no linear connection between investing effort in various areas of life and the likelihood of succeeding. This is liable to increase helplessness, anxiety, and avoidance. Many people, like the elephant in the story, try to break free from the helplessness they experienced during childhood, but representation of the vulnerable, weak and confused child continues to control their adult entity as well. One of my students, a 30-year-old man participated in the course Identity of Capability after completing an academic degree. During the meetings he explained how mistrustful he was of people because: "They are cruel." His justification behind this claim was that when he was a child he had been ridiculed, scorned, and even bullied at school. Members of his group in the program felt confused and wondered whether if he was referring to them as well. I asked him whether or not he also felt rejected in this group and he answered that he did not. His colleagues noted how much they admired him and considered him to be a role model because he had challenged himself with academic studies and even succeeded in completing a degree. They added that he was a sensitive, caring person and that they perceived him as a mature person and a leader. I reflected to him that he was chained to the image of a helpless child who was forced to study in a framework with classmates that he had not been able to choose. Today at age 30 he possesses additional strengths, maturity, and other skills that the helpless child and adolescent did not possess. He conducts his own life and can choose who he wishes to make contact with. He is also admired by his friends, but doesn't realize it. "You have to let go of the helpless child. I suggested: "You are no longer him. He is part of an earlier period in your life. Since then you have continued on your life's journey and that child is not more than a memory of the place where you began to grow." He listened intently, and the next day he called to tell me: "I want to let go of the helpless child."

Complex learning disabilities can be said to have repercussions upon all the needs of existential growth described by Abraham Maslow (1943) in his theory of human needs. Maslow's theory focused upon physiological needs, the need for safety, the need for love and belonging, the need for respect and esteem, and the need for self-actualization.

Physiological Needs Children and adults with complex learning disabilities sometimes experience difficulties in sensory regulation, which has impact upon their entire essence of existence. This is characterized by oversensitivity to certain stimuli alongside a lack of sensitivity to others. An unregulated sensual world is liable to increase feelings of disquiet followed by frustration that is also expressed in unregulated behavior characteristics. Some people perceive moderately low sounds and rustling as deafening, or a light touch as painful or annoying. On the other hand, people with a complex learning disorder who lack sensitivity to touch will search for opportunities for contact by constantly attempting to initiate wres-

tling or any other possible opportunity for physical contact. People who have hyposensitivity to sounds will listen to music at a deafening volume—resulting in criticism and sometimes rejection by others around them.

An unbalanced sensual world also exacerbates problems with concentration. Persons with complex learning and ADHD are also liable to experience insomnia, which hinders their ability to function properly while they are awake. Lack of sleep also has direct influence upon the ability to retain concentration during waking hours.

The Need for Safety A complex learning disability has implications upon all three components of the need for safety. **Personal safety**: people frequently undergo ostracism, bullying, and even abuse during primary school, and these experiences often continue when the person reaches adulthood. Sometimes efforts to avoid these situations at work or during other social contacts lead to various levels of social anxiety and fear of once again experiencing a reality of rejection, scorn and humiliation. **Financial Security** Many people with disabilities work at part-time jobs with low salaries. They often have difficulty with arithmetic and managing money, and sense that their financial future is uncertain. Those who have financial resources are extremely fearful that they will not know how to manage their money properly, or that they will be taken advantage of. **self-confidence**—Children and adults with learning disabilities often have a low level of self-confidence due to unsuccessful experiences, being compared to their successful siblings and friends who dwarf their own successes. In addition, they feel incapable of fulfilling environmental expectations.

The Need for Love and Belonging Many children and adults with complex learning disabilities experience love and belonging in their lives, and have loving, supportive families. However, during childhood many begin their schooling in regular educational frameworks. From there they begin a journey until they find the "right school." This has repercussions upon their sense of belonging and acceptance by the educational institution and by their peers. I have often heard adults with complex learning disabilities talk about wandering endlessly from one educational framework to another using passive language such as: "They diagnosed me and decided to move me." "They demoted me down one grade." "They moved me to a smaller class." "They sent me back." "They expelled me." "They said I wasn't suitable." Even when these moves were made when the child was in high school they were not allowed to take part in the decision-making process. Those who continued studying in mainstream schools noted that their classmates turned their backs on them after graduation. One of my students came to class dejected. When I asked him what was wrong he explained. "I thought I had friends, but I understand now that I don't. My friends from high school and I have been going out for years on Saturday nights, but last month we stopped. I thought it was because some of them have girlfriends, but then I heard that they were still getting together. I didn't understand why they hadn't called me. I asked myself what

changed and then I understood: I had been the group's driver for years because my father had a car from his place of work. He didn't receive a car at his new job. I understood that they hadn't been friends me or my friends?. They were friends with my father's car. It just broke me up."

The Need for Respect and Esteem This component of Maslow's pyramid of needs is a higher level need that is not attained by everyone, but it is nevertheless fundamental and important for building an identity of capability, as will be described in the coming chapters. Respect and esteem constitute the approval of an individual's existence and society's need for their personal resources. The construction of a positive self-image is based upon positive feedback from the environment together with self-control and self-esteem regarding events and successes that the individual experience in life. I have met many adults who have earned certificates of excellence in their places of work or appreciation for their essential contribution to the organization they serve. At the same time, many feel that the salary they receive does not reflect their contribution to their place of work. Some of them undergo humiliation, but lack the tools to fight back. Amir)(pseudonym) who attended the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" looked for a steady job for many years. He finally found a job stocking shelves in a health shop that paid a low, but reasonable salary. For some time he showed his pride of belonging to his work place by coming to class in his uniform. One day he came to class wearing a casual outfit. He asked to speak with me alone and told me what was on his mind: "I decided to quit my job. I've been humiliated for half a year. There's someone at work who thinks he's my boss, but he's not. He calls me 'dyslectic', 'stupid', 'autist', 'mentally ill', and 'slow as a turtle' and I've had it. No money in the world is worth the humiliation I suffer every day." When I asked him how he responded and if he had complained, he answered: "What good will that do? It will only make things worse!" I explained to him that even if he decided to quit, he should do it with his head held high. I asked him to teach the "boss" a lesson in empathy—a concept he had learned in the course—by telling him: "You know, you've been calling me all kinds of names and diagnoses for a half a year. I'm studying a university curse about all those things and I'm amazed that you're able to read me so precisely—without studying a single course. I have only one question for you: If you had a son like me—would you want him to have a 'boss' like you?" Amir cringed and said he couldn't do it. I urged him and he confronted him. During the next lesson he summarized what had happened in two words: "It worked." This incident testifies to the sense of inferiority that some adults with complex learning disabilities feel and how much they fear to fight for an equal place in society, respect, and a fair wage like any other worker. Because of their invisible disability and the large gaps that exist between the various abilities, instead of alongside appreciation, they are exposed to criticism or ambivalence from their families as well. The lack of esteem and the inconsistency in the manner in which the environment relates to them create confusion that has implications on their emotional world and upon their identity.

The Need for Self-actualization Every person has various personal resources in addition to cognitive ability. The idea of a single type of cognitive intelligence has faded with the establishment of Gardner's multiple intelligence theory (Gardner 1993). According to Gardner's approach, people possess a variety of abilities in eight areas: Linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, logical/mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, naturalistic intelligence (that is expressed in an understanding and connection with nature), bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence (that takes the form of self-awareness), and interpersonal intelligence. Nevertheless, during childhood extensive importance is attributed to academic achievements, success in examinations, and the ability to memorize and assimilate what is learned in class.

Some students are directed towards actualization in other channels such a sports teams or clubs and occasionally in educational frameworks that are compatible to the type of intelligence at which they excel. Inability to meet the standards of the mainstream educational system in one way or another results in criticism that becomes the basis for sensing loss and significant anxiety about the future. The father of a fourth-grader complained to me about his daughter who had a learning disability. She devoted her time to playing soccer and didn't study. He decided to impose an educational punishment and told her that from now on he would forbid her to play soccer until she improved her grades in school. He was surprised when I told him that it seemed to me that his daughter was extremely talented in sports and that this was the main channel through which she experienced success and fulfillment. It was strange to him to hear terms such as "talents, success, and fulfillment" regarding his daughter. I assumed that her attraction to soccer enabled her to experience success and fulfillment in one area, and that experience was important for raising her self-esteem. Forbidding her to play soccer would sever the most significant—and perhaps the only—channel for fulfillment that she had. I suggested to her father that he should praise her abilities in soccer and encourage her, but limit the time she would spend playing. He could use encouraging words such as: "You're extremely talented in sports and I'm proud of you, but soccer mustn't be at the expense of your schoolwork. Go and play soccer, and at a designated time we'll begin your homework." In this way it would be easier for him to persuade her to complete her assignments. During a discussion I had with a 32-year-old woman she told me in a broken voice: "I don't expect anything anymore. My emotional counselor told me: "You know what your problem is? You have high expectations. If you had no expectations you wouldn't be disappointed. So I stopped having expectations." On the other hand, another student in the course "Identity of Capability" participated in a summary panel discussion at a seminar that we organized about "Emotional Aspects of Learning Disabilities." She explained: "You're applauding when you hear my personal story because you're amazed. Stop being amazed and start expecting." Today she is married, raising children, and working at a well-paid and satisfying job.

Reality becomes significantly more complicated when a complex learning disability is accompanied by attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity and impul-

siveness. The need for constant stimulation makes it difficult for the person to adhere to the main channel of self-actualization. This is liable to lead to an "existential vacuum" and a sense of missing opportunities and boredom. These instances emphasize the complexity of self-actualization in the lives of children and adults with complex learning disabilities. Every child and adult with complex learning disabilities has abilities in different areas. Consequently, guidance, mentoring, mediation, consultation, and direction are invaluably important as a means to self-actualization. Fortunately, when people receive support from the environment they experience greater self-actualization and satisfaction in a variety of areas such as employment, leisure activities, intimate relationships, and, in certain cases—parenting.

From Adolescence to Adulthood—A Never Ending Story

Many adults with complex learning disabilities exhibit a level of maturity that is not suitable to their chronological age. I recall when one of my students who resided in a hostel for adults with complex learning disabilities greeted me when she arrived for a lesson in the course "Identity of Capability". She was wearing a yellow T-shirt with a smiley cartoon and a pouch around her waist. She smiled more brightly than usual and declared: "Today you have to congratulate me." When I asked her if she and her boyfriend had decided to get married, she replied: "It's my birthday." I assumed that she was celebrating a decade birthday and asked: "Is it your 30th?" "No," she answered. Guess !again." "31st?" I asked carefully. "No," she answered reprimanding me slightly. "I'm 40!".

I asked myself why it had not occurred to me that she was 40 years old, and I understood that her general mannerisms and appearance did not fit my stereotype of a 40-year-old woman. My encounters with thousands of other adults with complex learning disabilities have helped me understand that their mannerisms, the issues that occupy them, their limited experience of freedom, and, frequently, their partially-formed identities are in many senses similar to those of adolescents. I called this phenomenon "continuous adolescence" (Hozmi 2009) because these people embark on a continuous journey while striving to form their identity, find their destiny, and assume full responsibility for conducting their own lives. According to Sheinfeld (1984) adults are expected to form a clear-cut identity, earn their freedom, and be capable that freedom, to find themselves a profession, and to build a family framework for themselves after "leaving the nest" of their parents' home. A person who attains these things is considered an adult in all respects. The processes of adolescence and the transformation to adulthood among adults with complex learning disabilities are longer than among the general population, and are sometimes eternal.

Forming an Identity Many have difficulty identifying their capabilities and fulfilling them because the cloud of their disability obscures those points of light and prevents them from penetrating and illuminating their lives.

Striving to Gain Freedom Many still experience feelings of ambivalence that are characteristic of adolescence even after they reach adulthood. On one hand they are in need of containing support-system, but at the same time they perceive them as factors that limit and hinder them. The environment also broadcasts conflicting expectations—a demand that the person be independent together with anxiety, criticism, and sometimes limitations when they demand to assume more responsibility for their lives.

Choosing a Life Destiny and Occupation This objective is derived from self-awareness—recognizing my abilities and difficulties. Professional and personal destiny need to be compatible with capability. Consequently, I view the existence of a clear identity of capability as the essential infrastructure and condition for the personal and occupational destiny in the lives of people in general, and in the lives of adults with complex learning disabilities in particular.

Choosing a Partner and Building a Partnership The percentage of adults with complex learning disabilities who marry is significantly lower than among the general population. Some feel guilty that they are single and some are envious of their siblings who have established families. This is particularly evident if the person with a complex learning disability is the oldest sibling. Those who are in a relationship have difficulty experiencing total intimacy because figures who accompany them such as parents and counselors in assisted living setups intervene in these contacts. For example, a 34-year-old man told me that he had decided to move out of his assisted living setup because he had met someone "amazing", but the management of the hostel wouldn't allow him to going out with her. "They told me that first I had to bring her to the hostel so they could see who she was. If I didn't bring her they wouldn't allow me to see her. It's my life and I want to be in contact with her. I don't understand why they have to intervene." Those who choose to marry also require more support from their parents, and their intervention often creates the impression that the marriage is not a relationship between two adults but is instead a marriage between two families. Since their children have difficulty planning, organizing, making decisions, and managing money, financial contacts are conducted between the two sets of parents. They purchase their children's apartment, they make the decisions about creating the financial infrastructures for their married children, and sometimes establish the priorities for the couple's purchases. Even the decision regarding parenthood among adults with complex learning disabilities are not in their hands, but is determined by many authorities, who demonstrate doubt regarding their capability to parent.

Despite the fact that many adults with complex learning disabilities talk about a sense of living a full life, many reported a sense of "loss" in several areas during open-hearted conversations with me. Olshansky (1962) coined the expression "chronic sorrow" to describe the emotional response of a continuous sense of grief among parents of children with disabilities. Olshansky observed that parents of children with disabilities or complex chronic illnesses experience a different type of loss. regarding the "ideal child" they expected. He termed this as "chronic sorrow" rather than "mourning" because the child is alive, but parents feel sor-

row about the fact that at every stage of the child's development their child did not fulfill or actualize the expected developmental milestone. For example, when a mainstream child attends a regular school, parents feel sorrow that their child must study in a special educational framework. Most adolescents begin military service or college after they complete high school, but the future of an adolescent with disabilities often remains unclear. An additional source of sorrow for parents stems from their anxiety that when they reach old age their child will still be in need of intensive support, but they will no longer have the ability to guide their child or provide the help he or she will require.

Very little has been written in professional literature about the "chronic sorrow" of persons with disabilities in regard to themselves. Many adults with complex learning disabilities live in the heart of society, and social comparison is unavoidable. This is liable to arouse significant frustration and anxiety because in many walks of life their lives are "almost like" the lives of others in regard to personal capabilities and achievements. This existential reality leads to feelings of deficiency, stress, avoidance, anger, bitterness, and guilt. In many cases these people feel continuous sorrow for the "ideal self" that they could have fulfilled at various stages of their lives. Nalavany et al. (2011) found that adults with learning disabilities reported fear of exposure, a sense of not belonging, social wandering, fear of failure, feelings of inferiority, sadness, anxiety, and pain.

Dissatisfaction with the "self" and the sense that the true self fails to meet the expectations of the environment can result in the development of a "borrowed identity". During the 1960s Winnicott (1960) referred to this as the "false self". The "false self" is a phenomenon in which a person hides what he or she identifies as his or her disadvantages and weaknesses by creating a façade in an effort to satisfy others, be accepted, and ascend the social ladder. A reality in which the "true self" is illegitimate and the person constantly feels that it must be hidden, poses significant difficulties to their emotional existence and personal welfare. Since complex learning disabilities are invisible, many adults tend to adopt a "borrowed identity" in order to appear equal to the mainstream. This phenomenon is intensified when the close environment is unable to include and accept the disability. In these cases the disability is a secret and the person invests intense efforts to hide it. The price of this is intense anxiety that the secret will be revealed, and the person becomes occupied and troubled with satisfying others rather than with self-fulfillment. The person will establish and attempt to fulfill objectives that are incompatible with their ability and will consequently experience failure. In certain cases support and guidance can help attain these objectives, but people with complex learning disabilities and a "false self" will have difficulty admitting to others that they are in need of support and guidance. I often hear adults with complex learning disabilities express intense anxiety and confusion regarding whether or not they should tell others about their disability during their first date when attempting to begin a relationship or a job interview. If so, how much, in what way, and when should they talk about it? Adopting a "borrowed identity" hinders the process of actualization among persons with complex learning disabilities as well as their sense of freedom, and joie de vivre, establishment of positive self-value, and a solid, genuine identity. A borrowed identity is liable to increase a person's sense of loneliness and arouse intense anxiety.

Loneliness and Complex Learning Disabilities

Many adults with coplex learning disabilities report experiencing loneliness in various social situations when they were students in elementary school, high school, national service, military service, at work, and sometimes at home as well.

Loneliness is a subjective feeling in which an individual senses that he or she is not a part of social circles, does not belong, and is misunderstood. This feeling hinders the individual's life and arouses feelings of sadness, anxiety, and depression. These feelings often develop following lengthy periods of criticism and rejection, and are extremely common among adults with complex learnnig disabiities.

Tiwari (2013) differentiates between three types of lonlniess:

Situational Loneliness Loneliness resulting from certain situations and various situation such as moving to a new home or a foreign country, hospitalization, rehabilitation following an accident, quarrells or tense interpersonal relations, or existential emptiness that can result in helplessness or other life situations.

Developmental Loneliness This type of loneliness results from a sense that the individual is delayed in their development as compared to others of their age or culture. IN these situations the individual senses that everyone around them is living their lives and having a good time, while their life is continuing in solitude in a different channel.

Internal Loneliness This type of loneliness describes a subjective experience that is not grounded in reality. Many adults with learning disabilities are surrounded by friends and spend time with them, but nevertheless feel lonely. People who experience internal loneliness sometimes feel lonely even among their families or within frameworks that offer them services because they feel they cannot share their thoughts, feelings, or experiences with others lest they receive a response of criticism, scorn, or rejection.

Many adults whom I encountered within the framework of the introductory meeting of the "Art of Living" course before they joined the program reported a sense of loneliness and detachment and reported that many people who had been their friends in high school were not really their friends. Frequent moves from one work framework to another ended with their return to "their parents' business". Dan (pseudonym), a 24-year-old, descrived this vividly during our introductory meeting. "Most of the time I'm at home. I have a few friends, but now I'm not working. I try, but it never works out. I try and pass the time a bit with my computer and mobile phone. It makes me sad that people place me in a certain category and tell me that I'm different. I attended a regular school but I wanted to move to a special education framework to get a push forward. Now people tell me that if I attended a school for special education I'm not one of them. I'm afraid that people will slam the door in my face all my life and tell me: 'We don't accept everyone here, especially not those from special education.'"

Lack of social belonging and the sense that "Everything is difficult for me" significantly hinders the lives of adults with complex learning disabilities and is liable to arouse unclarity and anxiety about the future. In many cases involvement in a social club or living in a group framework alleviates loneliness and offers a sense of sharing a common fate with others. It increases enjoyment and existential significance and—as a result—contributes to personal welfare. For this reason opportunities should be created for students with complex learning disabilities who are integrated within the mainstream educational system to meet with peers of the same age, abilities, and coping characteristics. This intensifies their experience of belonging and unity and alleviates their feelings of loneliness. Children and adults need to be surrounded by people who can offer them unconditional love and acceptance who they can trust, to whom they can reveal their inner feelings and who will respond with empathy and hope that it is possible to change reality. These people will provide them with a "safe harbor" where they can find a resting place, support, understanding, and shelter from the stormy seas of life.

Anxiety and Complex Learning Disabilities The lives of children and adults with complex learning disabilities are filled with stressors. For many the past echoes with unpleasant memories, the present presents constant challenges, and the future is unclear. These circumstances can lead to the development of "learned helplessness", an "external focus of control", and "self-stigma"—all of which arouse intense anxiety.

Anxiety is a feeling in which a person fears a reality that is often undefined and in most cases unreal.

A fetus in its mother's womb is unfamiliar with the concept of need or regulation. The womb is a protected, ideal, and regulated environment in which the fetus has no need to alert others of its needs. Being born constitutes banishment from this Garden of Eden. The concept of "need" is born the moment the infant leaves its mother's womb and becomes a distinguished being, Freud described the moment of birth as a trauma—a severe and significant disruption of balance and referred to it as the "primal anxiety." For the first time the infant feels helpless in the wake of its needs and the new internal and external stimuli that it experiences. Anxiety during life is characterized by similar emotional experiences together with catastrophic thoughts. The person feels that something undefined and terrible is about to happen and that he or she is insignificant and unable to cope with the expected, but unknown threat. Fear, on the other hand, is an anxiety response to a concrete or defined stimulus. An anxiety disorder is a continuous phenomenon in which a person is overwhelmed by threatening, disorganized thoughts, a sense of disquiet, and terror. This is expressed in numerous physical phenomenon such as shortness of breath, weakness, muscle tension, perspiration, and accelerated heartrate. The experience is so threatening that people developed fear of panic attacks.

Persons with complex learning disabilities experience difficulties connected with learning that continue to affect their daily lives even after they have completed school. Difficulties in organization and decision making and difficulties in

emotional and other areas transform many daily activities into continuous challenges. Some have guardians or other figures of authority who manage their financial matters or even make decisions regarding their body when they receive medical treatment, and other issues. Previous negative experience and failures often lead to avoidance and anxiety. In addition, the incomprehensible world together with the expectations for carrying on a normative life and fear of failure, criticism, and rejection constitute sources of anxiety in their lives. Cooray and Bakala (2005) note that anxiety disturbances appear more frequently among people with learning disabilities that are accompanied by lower intelligence in comparison with the general population. In many conversations that I held with adults with complex learning disabilities they explained the stressors that they experience in life. I identified six main themes in their statements that are presented in the following table:

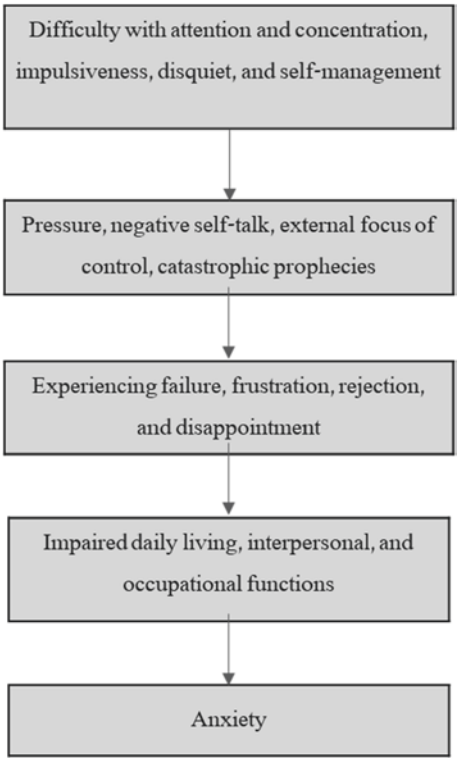
Source of anxiety among adults with complex learning disabilities

Source of anxiety	Examples of original quotations
Anxiety from the repercussions of learning disabilities	. "I'm not good at math and I'm worried about what will happen with my money. I don't trust myself with money. That's the reason I entered the hostel. Sometimes I exaggerate and sometimes they exaggerate." "People tell me to sign here and sign there. Who has the patience to read? Even when I read I don't understand." "I don't know how to get where I want. I don't have any orientation"
Anxiety from loss or lack of inclusion and belonging	"I worry all the time about how people will accept me in society and on the street. Society sees difference but not abilities." "All my life I've never known where I belong. It's hard for me to be with regular people and it's hard for me to be with people with special needs." "When I was a boy in school the other students abused me. Today I want friends very much but I don't believe any more. I want contact with people but I'm afraid when others approach me. I want to talk about it but I'm afraid that if I share things with someone they will tell everyone"

Source of anxiety	Examples of original quotations
Unclear perception of functional ability	"I feel like people are watching me all the time and examining me. I have to prove myself all the time." "I have to be thankful that someone is employing me despite the fact that things are bad for me and I'm not treated nicely. They tell me: 'be grateful that we give you work.' That's true, but it's difficult for me." "When I go to the doctor I don't know who's against who. The doctor makes me nervous and doesn't explain things to me. I want him to explain things to me and not ask 'where's your mother? Where's your counselor?'"
Anxiety about Loss of Sources of Support	"We're afraid that the staff will change. Every year the counselors change. By the time we get used to them, they leave us. We don't know who will come and what will be." "What will happen when my mother will no longer be with us? I am not sure that my brother will be able to care for me. He will be busy with his own children, grandchildren and health issues"
Difficulty making Decisions, Dependence	"People make decisions about me. They've taken away my freedom. The court appointed a guardian to make decisions for me." "People don't trust me. They even limit my phone calls. I can't make phone calls whenever I want to whoever I want"
Apprehension and Helplessness About the Future	"I am constantly afraid that I'll lose my job." "We are the first ones to get fired because we are special." "I'm afraid they'll make me leave the hostel if I don't behave well. It's hard to manage without the hostel." "I want a girlfriend but I'm afraid that no one will like me. So does that mean I have to be alone?" "Parents raise children who will help them when they get old. We don't have any children. Who will help us?"

These statements express realistic anxiety and reflect various dimensions of what the speakers experienced as uncertainty and helplessness regarding their present and future. Lengthy dialogues with adults with complex learning disabilities reveal that the high frequency of anxiety and its causes can be explained in the following manner.

- **The Connection Between Complex Learning Disabilities and Anxiety**



This diagram illustrates the connection between life circumstances and the development of emotional difficulties for which anxiety is the focal point. Anxiety can be general or in certain cases it will be projected towards a particular object or phenomenon, which is liable to lead to the development of phobias. Anxiety is sometimes expressed in obsessive disturbances that are characterized by invasive thoughts and rituals that serve the function of "regaining" some sense of control. Sometimes the focal point of anxiety is social and is expressed in total or partial avoidance of family or social cycles.

Occasionally the anxiety will undergo a process of conversion resulting in the development of physical symptoms upon which the person can focus to distract them from the unfocused existential threat that overwhelms them.

Rigidity and Anxiety

The cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms that are described in diagnostic books and professional literature relate to acute symptoms that occur during a panic attack. However, many adults with complex learning disabilities experience continuous uncertainty that arouses anxiety which is not necessarily expressed in a panic attack. It is a vague reality that may arouse existential frus-

tration and intense anxiety about losing their dream of a full life. In most cases they sense that their life path is not follow the mainstream, while at the same time they do not know where their life path will lead them. In many cases fear creates cognitive inflexibility. People who are afraid of what the future will bring entrench themselves in what currently exists and tend to adopt the attitude of "The best is the enemy of the good." Inflexible leaders and managers fear loss of control. A connection between inflexibility and anxiety is often evident among elderly people who avoid adventure and adhere to a familiar routine. Clinging to what exists and what is familiar provides a sense of security and establishes a feeling of control.

Adults with complex learning disabilities frequently display rigidity by entrenching themselves and avoiding or refusing suggestions to pursue paths for growth in life. Their behavior is sometimes similar to a hedgehog's reaction to threats. It curls up itself and displays its prickly quills to anyone who threatens to approach their personal space. Adopting a rigid daily routine creates a sense of stability and control. Difficulties in decision-making and lack of ability to weigh alternatives while considering solutions for daily challenges increases a sense of frustration and helplessness that leads to inflexibility. Instead of understanding their inner world and the connection between anxiety and inflexibility, people around them mistakenly perceive them as being stubborn or ungrateful.

It is important to build a sense of trust among children and adults with complex learning disabilities by developing an empathetic approach to the existential reality they experience. It is also essential to attribute legitimacy to failure, positively reinforce their courage to venture beyond their comfort zone and, most importantly, emphasize that their support factors will always be there for them and will not be judgmental. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach said: "All a child needs [in this world] is one adult who believes in him." I have thought a lot about this idea. I visualize an analogy of saplings that are planted next to a wooden stake that will support them until they reach maturity and are sufficiently strong and stable. At that point the wooden stake is liable to get in the way and hinder their future growth.

Social Anxiety and Complex Learning Disabilities

Social anxiety is characterized by increased illogical fear of performing certain activities in social contexts. It may cause unpleasant and even intolerable thoughts, feelings, and physical symptoms. The individual continuously fears that his or her behavior or thoughts will result in rejection, shame, or humiliation. Social anxiety can take the form of **generalized social phobia** in which the person fears criticism in most social situations and consequently avoids them. People may also display **non-generalized social phobia** in which they only fear specific social encounters such as introducing themselves or conversing in a language other than their mother tongue.

The possible causes of social anxiety are:

Genetic/inborn tendency towards "delayed temperament". Toddlers with delayed temperament avoid contact with other people or refus to play with new

toys, Factors in the Brain—Studies have shown that certain areas of the brain are more active among persons with social anxiety than in the general population, Difficulties with self-acceptance, Negative body image, A critical environment during childhood and adolescence or Exposure to a traumatic social incident. Social comparison is also liable to arouse negative internal dialogue and the establishment of a self-stigma resulting in avoidance and social anxiety.

I have often heard my students report that they experienced ostracism, rejection, humiliation, and neglect by their classmates. Criticism by family members, teachers, and members of the community did not contribute to the establishment of a positive self and aroused embarrassment, detachment, and the understanding that "I'm not like everyone else" and therefore don't deserve to be a part of "everyone." Yair (pseudonym) described this feeling in a truthful and moving monologue: "When I was a child I had trouble making friends and I was more violent. I felt that everyone was against me. I would spend time by myself. It was harder for me to connect with other people. I felt that no one enjoyed my company and thought that I was ugly. I took everything that people did in jest seriously. It got to the point where I became violent and eventually I stayed at home. I didn't want to see people. Today I'm better at connecting with people because of all the support that I received and because I decided to do something about it, but I'm still working at improving it every day."

Lack of intervention with regard to the problem and its sources is liable to significantly impair the person's quality of life. It may lead to seclusion, alienation, severing ties with friends and family members, detachment, and loneliness. People in such situations are at risk to becoming addicted to alcohol or other psychoactive substances. As a result they will have fewer opportunities for acquiring an education and employment. In extreme cases it can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.

The most common and effective methods for treating social anxiety are group therapy for coping with social anxiety and coaching for social skills, cognitive behavioral treatment, decreasing self-focus, gradual exposure to social situations, counseling parents and other supportive figures in social mediation. Pharmaceutical treatment for anxiety or depression can also be administered if necessary. Connection to a group of peers who are also coping with complex learning disabilities significantly decreases the person's perception of being different, increases self-value, and may help decreasing social anxiety.

Many people describe their lives as a journey in an alienating world while searching for a group to belong to. They note that transfer to a learning framework for adults with complex learning disabilities, moving to a supportive housing setup, and enrolling in the Inclusive University exposed them to people who experienced a past or are currently experiencing an existential reality that is similar to their own. The sense of "togetherness" normalizes their coping and they are more prepared to expose their inner world and create close social ties. Sarah (pseudonym) described this in her own words: "My mother was a teacher. She constantly demanded that I will be like everyone else and excel in school. She blamed me for my difficulties. I also felt estranged in the rural community in which I lived. My peers and adults ostracized me. I didn't feel I belonged and

I didn't want to live. When I moved to a supportive housing setup I met people who wanted me and wanted to be with me. They believed in me. I cried for two years—not about the move to the living setup, but for the years that I had wasted when they deprived me of my happiness. I cried because I hadn't known that things could have been different. Today I'm happy." During her acceptance interview for the Inclusive University Tal (pseudonym) explained: "I went to a regular school, but it was difficult for me. They didn't accept me and they ostracized me. The only reason I stayed was because I wanted to matriculate. It was then that the social worker approached me and asked if I wanted to join a social club for students with learning disabilities that met outside school once a week. At first I was afraid, but then I realized that I was surrounded with people who were like me. They understood me even if I only hinted at things. I would look forward to those meetings because I could be myself and feel that it was okay." These statements support the idea that children with complex learning disabilities who are integrated within the regular educational system need encounters with groups of peers who are experiencing a reality that is similar to theirs. Such encounters will enable them to establish a sense of belonging and to moderate their sense of being different and exceptional. The power of the group will be discussed in a later chapter of this book.

Identity of Capability

Identity and Complex Learning Disabilities

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Identity is the manner in which individuals perceive their past, their body, capabilities, ambitions, characteristics, values, priorities, and their sense of inclusion within social structures. Identity is the conscious and consistent pattern in which the individual merges these components into a whole. With the formation of identity people can envision these characteristics and assess whether or not they have abilities in each component and assess themselves as competent or incompetent beings.

Identity is the basic key to existence, performance, and integration within social being. In traditional society many components in a person's identity such as their sexual, cultural, religious, and occupational identity are dictated by their tribe or community. Birindelli (2014) noted that in modern and post-modern society the personal narrative that is formed by an individual is extremely important as a basis for their identity. A person's story, which is based on their subjective biography, helps them to conduct their intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogue as "social actors" with themselves and with others. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) noted that identity is not an individual's visible characteristic or characteristics. Identity is the manner in which individuals reflect their life's story to themselves, understand it as a continuous biography and ` it to others.

Many adults with complex learning disabilities experience their life story in an extremely complex light. During childhood some were perceived as being different (due to factors that were often invisible) and were referred to professionals for assessment and diagnosis—a process that usually ended with a diagnosis and a diagnostic report.

Many of these people continue to identify themselves with their diagnosis when they reach adulthood, and despite their objection, it becomes a major and central component of their personal identity. In many cases the diagnosis is vague, and they do not understand it. They are not familiar with the contents of the diagnosis and rapidly reach a state of anxiety and shame.

Many of the students I have met are uncertain about what group they belong to. They describe a feeling of "falling between the cracks". They are "a tail to lions" among mainstream children and adults and "a head to foxes" among persons with lower intelligence. When I meet with these adults I often reflect the existential reality they have experienced—and are frequently still experiencing—as being similar to the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" that is attributed to the English poet Robert Southie. Goldilocks loses her way in the forest and finds shelter in the house of the three bears when night falls. She cannot find a comfortable chair. The large chair is too large for her and the small chair breaks under her weight. The conclusion that can be drawn from the story is that a tailor-made "chair of support" has to be built for each adult with complex learning disabilities that fits their abilities and challenges. This will enable them to feel they belong, and that they are capable and deserve to participate in social life—to contribute and to benefit. The issue of identity among people with learning disabilities is extremely complex, and the process of its formation is extremely long. I have decided to present this complexity using Erikson's theory of development which deeply impressed me when I was a student.

Erikson (1950) proposed a psycho-social theory of development in the 1950s that describes eight stages of development. Unlike Freudian theory that centers on internal mental processes that revolve around impulses and suppressing them,

Erikson felt that people exist within social contacts that involve reciprocal nurturing. Consequently the "self" and its formation must be dealt with from a social-dynamic standpoint. Freud described five stages of development that reach a climax at the end of adolescence, while Erikson views life as a continuous and formative journey from the first breath a person takes to their last. The core of this journey is the formation of an identity. At each stage of life people experience a developmental conflict that they must resolve in order to move on to the next stage. Failure to meet the challenge is liable to result in developmental deficiency that will hinder continued growth and impair the individual's quality of life and mental well-being.

Erikson views the formation of an identity as an essential step for continuation of the journey and for building a full, fruitful, and satisfying life. When I first encountered this theory I was deeply impressed with it because it reflects a complex life journey that involves developmental challenges, and a person who is able to meet these challenges is most likely to sense fulfillment and satisfaction when they reach old age. The question of how a person attains the complete "self" continued to occupy me and led me to the understanding that people must live their lives according to the idea that "Every deed begins with a thought". This implies that a person should define existential goals for the future and adopt a strategy of thinking in which every action they perform in the present must be directed towards attaining the goals they establish for the future. I understood that the essential condition for this was the formation of an identity. For this reason I studied and analyzed Erikson's theory intensely. I found that from a different "graphic viewpoint" the theory offers many insights regarding both the general population and the population with complex learning disabilities, which I will describe in this chapter.

The desired developmental achievements are marked in green, while the impaired achievements are marked in red. Arrows appear in the diagram between each stage and the next to illustrate a journey of correct development as opposed to a journey of deficient development.

Trust	vs.	Mistrust
↓		↓
Autonomy	vs.	Shame and Doubt
↓		↓
Initiative	vs.	Guilt
↓		↓
Industry	vs.	Inferiority
↓		↓
Identity	vs.	Confusion
↓		↓
Intimacy	vs.	Isolation
↓		↓
Generativity	vs.	Stagnation
↓		↓
Ego Integrity	vs.	Despair

Birth is similar to being banished from the Garden of Eden. The infant is unwillingly thrust from a regulated balanced environment into the outside world—an environment filled with unfamiliar stimuli that arouse unfamiliar senses. Severing of the umbilical cord creates the new and unfamiliar concept of need. This is where a person's existential life's journey begins.

Trust Versus Mistrust The first stage of Erikson's theory of development begins at birth, and the infant's first challenge as a social being is to sense trust, which is the basic condition for social participation. The infant must convey its needs to others in the environment whose role is to respond. If the infant's needs are met it builds trust in the environment, but the power to convey its needs is equally important.

The knowledge that someone will respond to its cries because they view the infant as being important implants the basis for a sense of self-value. On the other hand, failure to provide the infant's needs is liable to lead to mistrust of the environment.

Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt Children who are equipped with trust in the environment are ready to move on to the second stage of development. Toddlers aged one to three face the conflict between autonomy versus shame and doubt. During this stage motor and language skills become more refined, and the formation of the "self" begins. The child needs and wants to be offered choices to learn and to experience the world. Autonomy serves as the basis for a sense of capability and approval of the child's abilities. Conversely, if the environment suppresses the child's desire to "do it by myself" it will create shame and doubt in the child's mind regarding his or her capability. Needless to say, the environment is often over-protective and dictates limitations upon children with disabilities. They are liable to feel shame and doubt about their capabilities because they are not provided with opportunities to try, to succeed or fail, to refine their abilities, and to grow from their mistakes.

Initiative Versus Guilt This stage takes place during preschool age (three to six) when children attend nursery school and kindergarten. Children of this age have numerous social encounters with other children. If they are equipped with a sense of freedom, know that they have experience, trust in the environment and self-trust, they will exhibit initiative behavior. If children have developed mistrust, shame, and doubt during the two previous stages it will be difficult for them to initiate and explore, and therefore they are likely to develop a sense of guilt.

Industry Versus Inferiority Elementary school aged children from six to twelve must acquire learning skills, meet learning expectations, and demonstrate productivity. Failure to develop these abilities will result in a sense of inferiority when they compare themselves socially to their peers. During this stage many children with complex learning disabilities are in the midst of searching for the right educational framework. They are liable to wander from one educational framework to another because they have difficulty meeting the expectations of mainstream

schools. These forced transitions from one educational framework to another have significant repercussions upon their self-perception and personal identity later in life.

Identity Versus Role Confusion This stage occurs during adolescents at ages twelve to eighteen. This age constitutes a major, important crossroads in the process of development. According to Erikson, at this stage adolescents are expected to integrate their "self". They must form a clear, consistent picture of their essence and abilities which must feet fit social expectations. Failure to do so will result in uncertainty and confusion regarding their role and destiny in the world. According to Erikson's approach, identity is the main resource for continued fulfillment during the coming stages of development. It is the condition for building intimacy for a fruitful working life that will conclude with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. For many adults with complex learning disabilities the process of forming an identity extends beyond the age of adolescence. Many continue to deal with the questions of "Who am I?" and "What will become of me?" throughout the later decades of their lives.

Intimacy Versus Isolation This stage takes place during early adulthood at ages eighteen to thirty-five. With the establishment of a basic identity, a person is ready for sharing life with a partner—while still remaining aware of his or her distinguished needs. A sense of intimacy will enable a person to share their inner world with others without fear of being engulfed or criticized for doing so. On the contrary—they will sense trust, mutuality, and building together. Freud claimed that the essence of happiness is "to love and work." Erikson emphasizes that identity is important and essential for an intimate life and for the transition to the next stage—a life of industry and generativity. Without intimacy a person is liable to experience loneliness. Loneliness does not necessarily imply being alone. People can live with a partner and still have difficulty building intimacy, and will consequently experience loneliness despite the fact that they live with a partner. Many adults with complex learning disabilities exhibit expressions of uncrystalized identity and ambivalence because they have kept their disability a "secret". During lessons about building relationships with a partner and making acquaintances to find a partner I am often asked questions such as "Do I have to tell others about my disability?" "When should I talk about it?" "How should I talk about it?" and statements such as: "If I tell her she definitely won't want to go out with me," or "I live in a hostel but I want someone normal who doesn't live in a hostel, who doesn't have a disability. I deserve better than that."

Generativity Versus Stagnation This stage takes place at middle age from thirty-five to fifty. At this stage people are expected to procreate and provide for their children's education and needs. They are expected to attain fulfillment in their working life, to contribute, and to build a financial infrastructure for themselves and for their progeny. Self-awareness and a positive Identity are prerequisites for finding a professional destiny and developing a career. Failure to meet the expectations of this stage of development is liable to arouse a sense of stagnation. This

does not imply that a person experiencing stagnation cannot earn a living. Many adults with complex learning disabilities are productive and have jobs, but sense that they are "treading in place" and not fulfilling themselves in their work. One of the main difficulties is that many people attempt to establish occupational objectives that are incompatible with their abilities, and when they cannot attain these objectives they tend to avoid additional attempts to pursue other, more appropriate occupational paths.

Ego Integrity Versus Despair This stage takes place in late adulthood when people are over fifty years old. At this stage people begin to form the personal narrative of their life and to summarize it in terms of success or failure. A clear identity and fulfillment in the areas of intimacy and work result in a sense of satisfaction and a "self" that senses having led a full, fulfilling life. On the other hand, difficulties in forming an identity that previously aroused shame and guilt are liable to lead to isolation and stagnation, followed by frustration, lack of fulfillment, and despair.

Despite the fact that these developmental conflicts are presented in a dichotomous light, I view them as a continuity. People who did not develop trust do not necessarily mistrust others. Some people trust others only partially. Others are caught at a midpoint between autonomy versus shame and guilt, in which they feel autonomous in some areas, but feel incompetent, shy, and doubtful in others. Many are productive in some areas of learning in which they are talented, but have difficulty and feel inferior in other areas and so on and so forth.

Although it may seem that normal development early in life will ensure that a person will continue along a proper path of development, while detained development during the early stages is liable to result in impaired development throughout a person's lifespan, this is not necessarily so. Many people experience traumas in their lives that cause them to deviate from a normal path of development to a path of detained development. For example, an 18-year-old who has experienced a successful life in all terms of the word and senses that he has a clear, positive identity could undergo a traumatic event such as a head or spinal injury. Such a trauma requires a lengthy rehabilitation followed by a continuous journey of constructing a new identity. The journey entails a process that begins with rebuilding trust in himself and his environment, developing personal and functional autonomy, and exhibiting initiative and productivity. These new experiences are important for rehabilitation of the self that would also be injured in such an accident. It is a process that requires investing extensive energy and mental and physical strength. On the other hand, people who began their lives with developmental deficiencies can undergo corrective experiences and continue their lives along a successful and normal path of development. We witness this in the "Inclusive University" program. We see people who have experienced rejection and formed an identity of deficiency followed by avoidance, detachment, and isolation who undergo a corrective experience when they join a social club, move to community housing, or participate in the "Art of Living" course that focuses on strengths and abilities. Environments such as these can serve as corrective, empowering experiences that help establish a positive self.

In answer to the question of how identity is formed, studying the diagram of Erikson's eight stages of development reveals that identity is derived from trust in the environment and in one-self, experiences, the freedom to fail and succeed, initiative, and productivity. Adolescence is a time when a person opens their "diary" from the day they first pursued their own path. Adolescents assess experiences and events and mark them in terms of success or failure. If the scheme that emerges is positive they will construct a positive identity. If not, they will develop a sense of inferiority and emotional and mental distress.

When reviewing Erikson's model of development while relating to the developmental—social-emotional world of persons with complex learning disabilities, we understand that rebuilding or rehabilitating their identity requires a developmental retrospective by the persons themselves or by those helping them. They must determine at what stage the journey of development was disrupted. Did it occur at an early stage, requiring the person to rebuild trust with the environment and with themselves? Did the person experience shame and doubt and need greater opportunities and autonomy? Did the delay occur at the third stage of development at kindergarten age, causing the person to exhibit lack of motivation? If so, they need to be encouraged to take initiative. Was the person denied productivity and opportunities for success in school? If so, they must be provided with academic challenges that are compatible with their ability that will constitute a corrective experience.

Eliminating deficiencies from early stages of development can provide a corrective experience and establish a competent identity—an essential condition for fulfillment and a life of a "whole self." People with a clear and positive identity will know how to market themselves to potential partners or employers. The issue of identity is an integral part of working with many adults with complex learning disabilities. Many of them experienced paths of development that forced them to be mistrustful, to forfeit autonomy, to become burdened with a sense of guilt over their modest achievements and hence, to feel inferior. Their dreams are normative, but their "personal resources" make it difficult for them to experience fulfillment. Large gaps between the individual's ideal identity of "who I would like to be" and the real one of "who I really am" are liable to result in stagnation and arouse anxiety both in the present and the future. This perception and these insights from Erikson's theory of development enabled me to reach the understanding that when working with adults with complex learning disabilities the real challenge is to provide them with a corrective experience that is directed towards reinstating their trust in themselves and in their environment. They can then experience a formative process with the main objective of forming and establishing an identity of capability.

4

Identity of Capability

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People with complex learning disabilities or any other disability are liable to focus on their impairment and therefore they are unable to recognize their abilities and achievements. The Bible states that people are commanded to feel "capable" of fulfilling themselves and of leading others despite their disabilities and difficulties. The Book of Exodus relates an incident in which G-d commands Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses conducts a dialogue with Him in which he claims that Pharaoh and the Israelites will be reluctant to accept him as a messenger. He receives matter-of-fact answers and signs from G-d with great patience. When he asks to be relieved of the job because of his stutter, G-d answers him angrily, saying: "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I?" In this passage G-d in essence tells Moses: You are not relieved of your mission because of your disability, but at the same time I am not ignoring it and I know of your need for support. I am therefore appointing your brother to be the communications mediator for you: "He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were G-d to him." (Exodus 4:16) Some people see themselves as being incapable because of their disability. The message G-d gave Moses regarding this is that you, Moses, choose to focus on your disability, while I focus on your leadership and your other excellent traits. The appointment of Aaron is important, legitimate, and essential for Moses to perform his mission. This is a complementary relationship and not a relationship of give and take. Aaron is the spokesman, and at the same time he is connected to Moses' strengths, his power, and leadership. This Biblical story is a lesson in the strengths approach and the need for people to devote their attention to what they have—rather than what they lack and to use what they have to fulfill and lead. This is the essence of what I wish to assimilate: an "identity of capability".

No person is devoid of disabilities. We are either born with one or need to cope with one when we grow old. The frailty of old age cannot diminish the glow of a person's life achievements, and by the same token no inborn disability can prevent a person from ***weaving*** dreams (that are compatible to their ability) and believing in his or her ability to fulfill them.

After defining identity in the previous chapter we can further clarify that an identity of capability is a positive identity of a person who is aware of his or her ability to exhibit self- management, make decisions, and perform tasks and social roles while at the same time perceiving themselves as worthy of others giving to them and doing for them.

I have identified ten main components that constitute the foundation of an identity of capability: Awareness of Limitations and Acceptance of Reality, focusing on strengths, a positive self-image, differentiation, autonomy, responsibility, a goal-oriented approach and pro-activity, assertive behavior, experiencing social integration, and an optimistic approach.

1. **Awareness of Limitations and Acceptance of Reality**
   We cannot choose our genetic makeup, level of intelligence, height, facial features, or impairments that are forced upon us. Despite the fact that this reality is predetermined, many people who are beginning the process of forming

their identity feel uncomfortable with their disabilities, attempt to hide them, or even apologize or please others in order to be socially integrated. It is difficult for people to conduct their lives if they choose to hide an inseparable part of their existential being, fear to deal with it, or share the fact that it exists. Interestingly, many adults with complex learning disabilities do not know the source of their disability or even its known symptoms. I often ask adults with learning disabilities who are candidates for the course "Identity of Capability" if they had ever been diagnosed. Many answer "Yes,", but when I ask for details about the results, many reply: "I don't know." "I don't remember." Or "Ask my mother, she has the information. She knows. She's the one who dealt with it." When I asked one of the candidates for the course if he was interested in learning what was written in the diagnosis report, he answered: "If you went to the doctor because you weren't feeling well and the doctor sent you for tests and the report came back written in a language that you didn't understand, would you want to know what was written? It's like putting salt on your wounds." People with an identity of capability look their disability straight in the eye with confidence, understand its causes, and do not feel responsible for its existence. They know how to talk about it to people who are unfamiliar with it according to their level of interest, desire, and need. They also learn to look at unique strong points that they ***can*** identify as byproducts of living with their disability and do not view it as a barrier to fulfillment. Gerber (2010) emphasized how important it is for adults with learning disabilities to redefine the way they relate to their disability and to view it as a factor that will encourage growth, fulfillment, and development of abilities that they would not possess under other circumstances. During one of my visits to a rehabilitation center for traffic accident victims in central Israel I was impressed by a hand-lettered poster hanging in the entrance to one of the rooms. It read: "Yes, we have scars. The purpose of scars is not to dictate how far we will go, but to remind us where we began to grow." This ***exemplifies*** the spirit of a person with an identity of capability.

2. **Focusing on Strengths**
   People with an identity of capability are aware of their difficulties, disabilities, and limitations, and view them as a given fact, but they prefer to focus on their unique personal resources and the values that motivate them in their lives. They know that when one function is impaired, another unique ability emerges. They recognize this uniqueness and are experts on all components of their lives. They view support as a legitimate component in their lives that enables their natural talents to be realized. They view their abilities—not the support they received—as the source of their success, much as a person who has trouble reading and wears glasses does not attribute their glasses as being the source of their ability to read. Focusing on strengths implies recognizing a person's natural assets that he or she can use to negotiate with others, build partnerships, to give and contribute and, at times, to need and to receive help. During interviews with adults with complex learning disabilities I ask each candidate to introduce themselves. I frequently receive automatic re-

sponses such as: "I have ADHD," or "I'm high-functioning ASD," or "I have CP". These are expressions of self-stigma that testify to the significant degree of importance the professional authorities attribute to a diagnosis and how much power the diagnosis exerts. Its impact often reaches the point at which it becomes the first word on a person's calling card. A person with an identity of capability views their strengths and personal resources as the basis for their essence and existence.

3. **A Positive Self-Image**
   It is not sufficient merely to be aware of a disability or to recognize strong points. It is also important for people to establish the basis for a positive self-image that will serve as "protective armor" against external and internal forces that attempt to undermine their abilities and achievements, humiliate them, or underrate their value. Rogers (1951) views self-image as an integration of a person's characteristics, abilities, property, social connections, and the manner in which they perceive their body, their family, and morality. Self-image results from the interaction between individuals and their environment of family and society. A positive self-image is the integration of many components including successes during personal history, acceptance of the disability (not surrendering to it as a predetermined fate). In addition, it involves awareness of ability and a positive body image that entails viewing one's body as complete even if others perceive it as incomplete. It also includes other components such as the image of one's family, moral-values, and economic image. People with an unformed or negative self-image are vulnerable to self-criticism or criticism from others. Their self-image becomes fragile and unstable. Such people attribute great importance to criticism and view it as the final proof that they are incapable and of little value as others perceive them and as they perceive themselves. Positive reinforcement or compliments may raise their spirits, but only temporarily. Consequently, some people require constant external assurance of their value to nurture their existence. They crave frequent attention, reinforcement, praise, and endless reflection of their abilities and strengths. When these verifications are absent they feel extremely tense, frustrated, and helpless, and may sometimes exhibit aggression towards others or themselves. People with an identity of capability have assimilated and affixed a positive internal representation of the self. They perceive their identity as a collection of abilities and successes. They are aware of their weak points and accept them as legitimate. They form a positive personal narrative based on all these things. Without a positive self-image navigating through interpersonal space will be fraught with anxiety, and the individual will be unable to promote personal goals that are truly important. He or she will tend to proceed according to others' expectations and not according to their own wishes. During a discussion I held with a 30-year-old man with a complex learning disability it was apparent that he was not sure of himself and had not yet formed a clear identity. He declared that he wanted to study medicine, despite the fact that he could not possibly fulfill the acceptance requirements. When he was confronted this gap he answered: "I'll complete my

matriculation examinations." As the conversation continued and trust began to develop between us, he added: "My parents are doctors and I wanted to be a doctor, too. That way I will have something in common with them and make them proud. It's difficult because I don't know English and my memory isn't great…". A person with an identity of capability will realize that there are challenges that he or she is capable of accomplishing and others that are not compatible with his or her abilities. Despite this, they will not give up these areas of interest and attempt to fulfill them according to their level of ability. A positive, realistic self-awareness and self-image are important for building an identity of capability and for charting a personal vision that is attainable.

4. **Differentiation**
   Differentiation is a person's ability to see himself or herself as a separate whole person who is distinguished from their family of origin with their own personality, capabilities, and independent desires. This process begins with separation of the infant from the symbiotic connection to its mother that is characteristic of infancy and continues until the separation that occurs as the child approaches age three. According to Freud this is the age when the ego develops. Margaret Mahler (1994) referred to this process as "separation individuation". Bowen, who coined the term differentiation and emphasized its importance claimed that people who have not undergone a process of differentiation tend to develop dependence and often experience separation anxiety (Bowen, 1978). An individual must perceive him or herself as a differentiated and complete entity in order to establish an identity of capability. Adults require detachment from their family of origin and a subjective experience of leading a separate life. According to Bowen, a person who is distinguished will have a clear identity, know how to indicate his or her own objectives, and will be less occupied with trying to please others. They will be willing to endure the effort and suffering that are required to fulfill personal goals, know how to endure frustration and calm themselves in stressful situations. They will know how to be aware of the values that guide their lives and to adhere to their opinion. People with an identity of capability are differentiated. They are connected to their inner voice, and will connect with others as a "***complete entity***." Many adults with complex learning disabilities lack a sense of separation and differentiation. Many still do not view themselves as separate entities. They are largely dependent on external figures of support such as parents and counselors, and consequently exhibit a great deal of anxiety about losing these sources of support who, in extreme cases, serve as an umbilical cord for their personality. Despite the complexity of developing a sense of differentiation, it is important for those who guide these people to enable a gradual process that is directed towards decreasing dependence and overprotection and acquiring skills that may serve as the basis for differentiation.

5. **Autonomy**
   The word "autonomy is a combination of two Greek words: **"auto"**- meaning "self" and "**nomos**" meaning government or rule. Together these two words

imply "self-government". During the process of socialization parents equip their offspring with knowledge, skills, and values so that they will eventually be able to leave the nest and begin an independent life for themselves. This is expressed in the law by which parents' natural guardianship of their children ends at age 18. Portman, a Swiss zoologist (Portman & Ritserma, 1977) claimed that people are born twice: once when their bodies finish developing and they leave their mother's womb, and again when they leave the "family next". Portman views the family as a "social womb" into which the infant is born. The family social womb is meant to prepare a person to be differentiated and independent and aware of his or her rights and obligations. For many adults with learning disabilities being dispatched from the family nest constitutes a move from one "social womb" to an alternative "social womb" such as a supportive living setup that continues the process of socialization for them and with them. While most people perceive the advantage in belonging to a sheltered housing set up, they also feel ambivalent despite the support that it provides, their wishes are not always compatible with the regulations, and they are not always free to do as they please. People with an identity of capability sense emancipation from their family of origin and conduct their lives independently. To attain autonomy people must prove to society that they are aware of their actions, know how to distinguish between good and evil, be able to regulate their impulses, feelings, and behavior and be skilled in making simple and complex decisions. The law dictates that if a person lacks these and other skills their freedom ***must*** be limited in order to protect them and the environment. Despite their need for increased support, adults with complex learning disabilities experience only limited autonomy. The move from their family home to a living framework is presented to many of them as being "a move towards independence", but many report that despite their satisfaction with the extensive content that these frameworks provide, their autonomy is limited. In order to establish an identity of capability among adults with complex learning disabilities it is necessary to increase autonomy in their lives—particularly in areas in which they are capable and talented. They must be counseled and guided in areas in which they are not yet skilled and supported in areas they feel they need support. For example, a guardian can be appointed to help adults who have difficulty making decisions about their finances. Exclusion of "the protégé"—according in legal terms—from financial knowledge will perpetuate total dependence upon a guardian. Educating people in this area will clearly enrich their understanding and enable them to participate in decision-making regarding their finances and perhaps eliminate the need for a guardian in the future.

6. **Responsibility**
   People who have an identity of capability feel that they lead their lives and not being led. They decide on their fate, make the choices in their lives, and are responsible for the results—for better or worse. The psychologist Julilan Rotter (Rotter, 1954) coined the term "locus of control" to define the individual's subjective experience regarding the source of power and control in his or

her life. People with an "internal locus of control" relate success to their own desire, investment, and efforts, while those with an "external locus of control" attribute their success to external factors such as chance or fate. People with an identity of capability attribute their success to themselves. They do not fear failure because they believe that changing their methods or choices will result in success the next time. They sense that they control their thoughts, emotions, and behavior and are not controlled by them. Developing a sense of responsibility and an internal locus of control depend largely on experiencing autonomy. Growth environments that enable people to try and to experience both success and failure and to grow and learn from one's mistakes will serve as the basis for an identity that is characterized by an internal locus of control and the ability to assume personal responsibility when a person reaches adulthood. The problem is that many children and adults with complex learning disabilities do not attribute success to their efforts. In spite of the fact that some have plenty of motivation to invest effort and succeed, success does not meet their expectations and is not reasonably proportionate to the efforts they invest. Possible reason for this can be lack of environmental adaptations or lack of skills in many areas, Other possible reasons for this are lack of learning or organization strategies, a low sense of self-value, and negative internal dialogue that leads to anxiety and low achievements. Renewed experiences, enriching knowledge, and acquiring skills can enhance people's feelings and ***awareness*** that they are capable of assuming significant responsibility for their lives and, consequently, establishing an identity of capability.

7. **A Goal-Focused Proactive Approach**
People are motivated by goals they establish in their lives. Victor Frankel claimed that people experience existential anxiety from the knowledge that life is finite, and this knowledge urges them to establish goals in their lives and to fulfill them. I have thought extensively about this philosophy and feel strongly connected to it. Our lives are filled with contrasts that complement each other and create experiences of existential renewal. An example of this is that the darkness of night teaches us to appreciate the light of day, while the light of day teaches us to appreciate the interlude that darkness brings. Our daily work routine intensifies the importance of resting from our work on weekends and holidays, and longer intervals of vacations intensify the expectation of return to the pleasure of our daily routine. If our days were not numbered, what impulse would we have to seek fulfillment? Knowledge of our mortality motivates us to add meaning to our lives and to strive to fulfill them before "the curtain falls". King Solomon advised: "Ponder the ways of your feet and let all your paths be established." This proverb implies that people who seek fulfillment must chart a map for their lives, establish goals along the way, and define a process for attaining them. If a person does this, their path will lead to attaining what they want. People who do not establish goals in their lives are similar to nomads lost in the desert—wandering about without an objective or destination and letting the roads lead them. On the other hand, travelers equipped with a map and compass will reach their destination even if the

surroundings are unmarked and repetitive. People with an identity of capability know where they are going. They are motivated by establishing a personal vision, goals and fulfilling objectives. They feel capable of charting a map for themselves and using it to motivate themselves and to follow it on their path to fulfillment. For them, every ending is a new beginning. They are in a state of continuous action that increases their chances for success. This creates a positive cycle in which the identity of capability spurs a person on to succeed, while success strengthens and establishes a person's self-esteem and the idea that "I am capable." People with complex learning disabilities often establish realistic existential goals, but many have difficulty fulfilling them. Others are significantly challenged by executive functions. These are areas that enable a person to proceed according to their objectives and to initiate, plan, absorb, process, draw conclusions, regulate, adapt, and change (Aron et al., 2003). In addition, they are often required to receive approval for the goals they have established for themselves from people who support and guide them. Sometimes their "supportive" environment is less supportive for fear that if they try, they will fail. There is a proverb that states: If you don't try, you won't fail. If you don't fail you won't learn. If we conducted our lives according to fear of failure, we would fade away in our comfort zone. Sadly, I have witnessed many adults with complex learning disabilities who chose to forego fulfillment in their lives and—in actuality—to forfeit themselves. They retreat to their room, or, at best, to their home. They are convinced that by doing this they are protecting themselves and others around them from failures they will experience if they leave their forced confinement. Instead of deterring them from trying and declaring that the goals they have set for themselves are not attainable, it is important to offer tools and skills to adults with complex learning disabilities and with disabilities in executive functions. I remember that one of my students came to class extremely agitated because he had had an argument with his mother. He was envious of his brothers who have families, and told his mother that one day he also wanted to marry and have children. His mother's alarmed and resolute answer was: "Absolutely not. You're not capable of assuming responsibility for yourself. How do you expect to assume responsibility for raising children? I have enough coping with you. I don't need to shoulder any more responsibility." It seemed to me that if the conversation had focused on the significance of establishing a family and the demands that it entails, and they had divided this "huge project" into smaller units that could be fulfilled—the conversation would have been empowering. It would have planted hope in my student's heart and motivated him to take action. We continued discussing this idea that day in class. The students were asked what is important in order to establish a family. Many answered that the most important thing was to refine skills of communication and interpersonal skills, to have a stable job, and to have an economic foundation to provide infrastructures for creating a home for a partner and family. The student who had brought up the issue talked about the insight that he had gained from the meeting: "Now I understand. I'm not working, and even when someone gives

me a job I don't stick to it. I think that if I get a job and show some responsibility maybe my mother's attitude will change."

8. **Assertive Behavior**
   Communication is the key tool with which people connect with others and inform others of their feelings, desires, and needs, as well as learning about those of others. Skills in transmitting messages clearly and absorbing messages from others are essential for creating a web of connections of give and take and for creating a network of belonging. Some people demonstrate a pattern of aggressive communication that is guided by the philosophy of "Life is a war" in which others are perceived as opponents who must be defeated. Others adopt passive patterns of communication. Their guiding philosophy is: "I've got something to lose and therefore I shouldn't get involved." Others convey only implicit messages without assuming full responsibility for the messages they transmit or don't transmit. Their perception of life as far as they are concerned is: "I mustn't get involved, but I also mustn't stay away." Their patterns of communication are primarily based on "acting out." Assertive patterns of communication are common among people whose existential philosophy is that of "live and let live." People who are assertive are sure of themselves and integrated in their identity and are therefore comfortable saying what they want because their intentions are sincere. They desire others to benefit, but at the same time they want to benefit themselves. People who exhibit assertive behavior and communication are less anxious, they have more extensive interactions, and they fulfill more goals and objectives in their lives. Assertiveness is an important component of an identity of capability. People with complex learning disabilities have a lower self-image as compared with people without diagnosed disabilities. Due to numerous reasons that were described in the previous chapters, they are dependent upon many factors in their lives who guide, advise, support, and at times limit them. Their anxiety about losing their support system causes many of them to be occupied with pleasing others instead of assertively standing up for what is important to them. When their learning disability is accompanied by an additional disability such as a disability in communication, the situation becomes even more complex. They fear that their mouth is liable to betray them and that they might inadvertently say something that is inappropriate. A positive, stable self-image is an important factor for developing assertiveness. It is an essential skill for learning for all people—particularly for people with learning disabilities. My students who developed this skill and practiced it reported a sense of freedom and a decreased level of anxiety. They learned that they could be resolute (firm in their opinions and loyal to their values) without being aggressive, humiliating, offending, or disregarding others. They came to understand that during any dialogue aimed at reaching a consensus it is also important to see and understand the way the other person is thinking. People with an identity of capability know how to use this tool wisely to take credit for success, to give themselves legitimacy for mistakes, to exact their rights, share opinions and feelings, offer help, and to widen their circle of colleagues and friends.

9. **Experiencing Social Integration**
Experiencing social integration is the individual's self-perception of being a person equipped with interpersonal skills needed to exist within social space as an equal by right and not out of mercy. The experience of social integration is important in building an identity of capability. Self-value is also built on the basis of the environment's endorsement of the individual's abilities and capabilities as well as the social status they gained as a result. Despite the fact that there are people who have little need for social interaction and have few social contacts, an identity of capability will develop when the extent of social contacts is the person's choice and not a product of lack of social skills or rejection. Traumatic social incidents, experiences of exclusion, rejection, or abolishment on the part of the environment are liable to lead to feelings of helplessness in mild cases. More ***severe*** cases can result in mental injury and mental illnesses such as general anxiety, social anxiety, depression and personality disorders, at times somatic expressions as well.

Shakespeare's social model regarding disabilities distinguishes between **impairment** (a term that refers to a limitation of the body that pertains to the individual) and **disability** which is a reality that results from social constructionism, discrimination and exclusion (Shakespeare, 2016). The social constructionism catalogues groups in society and divides them into more equal and less equal. In many cases, those with disabilities have difficulty eliminating social barriers and fighting for the right to be essential, equal, contributing members of the societies in which they live. Surrendering to social barriers and assimilating social labels that are directed towards people with disabilities intensify self-stigma and establishes a sense of incapability. Gerber and Reiff (1991) claimed that many adults with social learning disabilities who had difficulty becoming socially integrated during school age and were also victims of abuse continue to assimilate a label of "I'm stupid" even at a later age. This label arouses negative feelings such as anger, frustration, and helplessness. A 28-year-old student described this in an honest and painful way: "I'm afraid to talk with people because I'll mess things up. I've learned to develop my senses and look at people and I check their reactions all the time to examine if they scorn me and whether they notice who I really am, without my mask. I check all the time. That's why even though I want friends, I prefer to be alone."

Many theorists such as Laing (1960) and Maslow (1970) saw a connection between negative interpersonal interactions or ungratifying ones and the development of mental illness. Maslow (1970) described this explicitly: "*Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or unnecessarily hurt or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognize that every person who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force, even though a small one*."

People with an identity of capability feel accepted and wanted. They are valuable and assume various essential roles in their families and in society and enjoy extensive formal and informal systems of support. Social skills, a satis-

fying social life, awareness of social obligations and rights and fulfilling them, and the experience of inclusion are important and essential components in building an identity of capability.

10. **An Optimistic Approach**
An optimistic approach to life is a basic condition for establishing an identity of capability. Even when the self is positive and a person establishes goals for himself or herself in life, there is no guarantee that the road will be strewn with roses. The road is liable to be long and filled with obstacles, but despite this people who are determined don't surrender when things get difficult. They fall and get up again and again. Despite the suffering that fulfillment sometimes involves, they attribute significance to it and transform it into hope.

As Frankel stated in an interview: "Let me present you with a somewhat strange definition of despair as I am used to proclaim. It is that despair can be explained in terms of a mathematical equation. D = S-M. Despair is Suffering without Meaning…. As long as an individual cannot see any meaning in in his or her suffering, he or she will certainly be prone to despair. But the moment they can see a meaning in their suffering, they can mold it into an achievement, into a predicament, into an accomplishment in a human level. They can turn their tragedies into a personal triumph." Frankl teaches us that if suffering without meaning equals despair, suffering + meaning equals hope. Hope is the power that motivates people in their lives. Ben-Shachar (2008) is convinced that the path to human happiness is not the road itself: "There is no road to happiness—happiness is the road." People who possess an identity of capability are filled with objectives, but they know how to enjoy the challenge on the way to fulfilling them. They believe that change is possible. Lack of success at one point or another on the road to fulfillment will urge them to mobilize all their hidden creativity and at times mobilize others to overcome the obstacle and find alternative ways to advance their objectives. Despair is stagnating and draining. People with an optimistic approach see the good in themselves and in others. Their attitude helps them recruit their strengths in order to face the challenges of life.

These ten characteristics and skills are the foundation upon which the three-step program for building an identity of capability is based. The objective is to offer the participants knowledge and skills that can increase freedom, choice, and a sense that they lead in their lives. Even if they are in need of support in various areas of their lives—they remember that they are free to choose the frameworks and people who support them in any context. The first step in this process is to learn from the past as well as to let it go. It is difficult to move towards a future of hope with a heavy load of despair and painful and pointless memories of the past. Cognitive work is therefore required to enable learning from the lessons of the past, while at the same time learning and assimilating empowering cognitive paradigms that will ignite process of growth.

Paradigms that Promote and Detain Building an Identity of Capability

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Epictetus was a Greek Stoic philosopher who lived from 55 to 135. He was known to have said: "What really frightens and dismays us is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them." The cognitive approach to psychology attributes significant importance to a person's interpretation of events in his or her life because they influence his or her thoughts and behavior. The previous and current realities experienced by children and adults with complex learning disabilities are what build their personal narrative—their personal life story that they weave throughout their existential journey. People's personal stories contain memories, insights, and feelings about themselves, other people, and life in general. They are also liable to include distorted thoughts and paradigms that delay the continuation of their lives. Basic negative beliefs are liable to increase doubt regarding the possibilities for a better future, finding the meaning of existence, or any other change that could promote quality of life.

During my encounters with adults in "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" course I learned that as long as people cling to these detaining perceptions they prevent themselves from absorbing messages that could broaden their perspective and increase hope. For this reason it is necessary to transform negative internal dialogue and detainment paradigms to positive internal dialogue and promoting paradigms that will serve as the basis and prepare for the process of growth and establishment of an identity of capability. These constitute the essential infrastructures for a journey of learning that enables growth and empowerment. During conversations with adults with complex learning disabilities I identified numerous patterns that detain growth and proposed alternative paradigms to replace them, which I call "guiding principles for living." Despite the fact that people often resist changes in attitudes, it appears that many of my students adopted these alternative paradigms after being exposed to them during the program and translated them from theory into practice in their lives.

The following are the 15 Guidelines for Living. These guidelines, together with their corresponding detaining paradigms that were revealed to me by my students will be discussed in this chapter:

1. Failures are an excellent "school" for living.
2. Our personal dreams need to be grounded in reality and fulfilled gradually.
3. It is important to designate life objectives. They are the reason for getting up in the morning.
4. The challenge of living is to oppose physical and mental gravity.
5. Listen to the whispers of your body and soul, or you will hear their shouts later.
6. When one skill is absent or impaired, others will emerge and develop.
7. Every person has something to give.
8. Everyone needs various types of support.
9. The art of life is to find the balance in everything. Life is not black and white, but also contains a scale of gray.
10. Living is a complex art. Everyone owns a brush with which they can design their life.

11. Loving others requires self-love (based on Erich Fromm).
12. People are not responsible for their disabilities. They are responsible for the way they choose to live with them.
13. Whatever is not flexible breaks easily.
14. Be like a giraffe and not a hedgehog.
15. "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." (Eleanor Roosevelt)

1. **Failures are an excellent "School" for Living** (vs. "I'm a Failure")

Failure is lack of success or not meeting objectives. The natural experience of such situations pose a threat to the self. Consequently the tendency is to resort to defense mechanisms such as avoidance, denial, or suppression. However, during early childhood before the ego develops children energetically explore and examine the world and practice and test their capabilities without exhibiting inflexibility or guilt when they do not succeed. As the conscience grows, reactions to failure become more complex through a dynamic process with the environment. Social comparison in kindergarten and elementary school combined with processes of grading their performance and negative assessment of abilities by parents, teachers, peers, and society in general intensify guilt, self-disappointment and failure.

Students with complex learning disabilities are sometimes labelled as failing or lacking ability and are rejected or unappreciated. The negative voice they absorb from statements or facial expressions are transformed into an endlessly resounding echo that develops into a "self-stigma". In many cases adults with learning disabilities blame themselves for situations in which they were unable to meet learning expectations rather than blaming the choice that led them to failure or lack of environmental support. It will not be long before the person develops detaining thinking patterns such as "Studying and I don't get along." There is consequently a need to reassess the manner in which they relate to failure and how we relate to it. Thomas Edison, who is said to have invented the electric light bulb, said: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that don't work. Every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward." Despite the fact that failure exacts an emotional price, we must utilize it to learn a lesson from it, draw conclusions and choose alternative ways to achieve the objective. Avoiding dealing with failure is equivalent to paying university tuition without earning a degree. Many disciplines would never have developed without first analyzing various failures intensely, drawing conclusions, and implementing them in work and regulations. Similarly, people who are experts in their lives and are in the process of growth must view failure—regardless of how oppressive and disappointing it may be—as a means of becoming more deeply acquainted with themselves and others. They must analyze the failure and see their conclusions as a tool for empowerment that they can add to their existential toolbox. Many students whom I met during the course "Identity of Capability" were amazed when they performed a group analysis of a "failure from the past" and saw how powerful the insights

were that they derived from the experience. The exercise made them realize that "every dark cloud has a silver lining." Assimilating this principle into their lives enabled them to feel relief and to begin a process of reconciliation with the past and with themselves.

2. **Our personal dreams need to be grounded in reality and fulfilled gradually** (vs. "What will become of me? Nothing works out in my life, so I've stopped making plans. If I don't have expectations, I won't be disappointed.")

There is a saying that "a pessimist is an optimist with experience". Frequent failures are liable to extinguish our enthusiasm for life and to arouse apprehension about making plans or forming personal dreams. During one of our meetings a student reported that she no longer expects anything from herself or from life because during a recent meeting with her "emotional counselor" she was advised not to have expectations in order not to be disappointed. Here, too, there is a need for a renewed perception of the concept of personal visions or dreams. I tend to imagine possible and realistic dreams for my students as those built similarly to the dream described in the Biblical story in which Jacob fled from his brother Esau and experienced an apparition of G-d: "He had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it." Dreams are our ambitions that reach the heavens. They can be fulfilled as long as the "ladder" resting on the earth (the process) connects the earth with the ground of reality. The dream must be suitable to the ground of the individual's abilities, talents, and personal resources, but the person must also plan the process—the ladder. The individual must designate intermediate objectives along the ladder that will lead to the fulfillment of the dream. Constructing the ladder enables a reflective process about advancement towards the dream as well as awareness of the fact that fulfilling a dream requires patience. There is an Ethiopian folk proverb that states: "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet." At times the process of fulfilling a dream takes place slowly and "Angels of G-d ascend and descend"—the individual takes a step forward then retreats one or two steps back. The ladder analogy illustrates that as long as we are in the process of climbing towards the fulfillment of a dream, we distance ourselves further and further away from our point of origin that is our comfort zone. In the case of adults with complex learning disabilities, the vision is often an expression of environmental expectations rather than their personal vision. Many of them promise themselves that despite the fact that they have no matriculation certificate and have difficulty with math, reading, writing, and English they will accomplish a great deal in the future: They will complete an academic degree, own a business, and achieve prestige and fame. Many repeatedly experience failures on the path towards fulfilling their dream because it is incompatible with their abilities.

A person should know that every dream has a spectrum for fulfilling it. It is preferable to assess the various possibilities of an occupation and suppress the impulse to fulfill "the impossible dream" rather than insisting on fulfilling it. People who express disappointment that they can never become teachers can pursue counseling, mentoring, or become classroom assistants. Those interested in being

on stage do not need to be performers in the national theater, but can still utilize their abilities by performing in a theater group at their local cultural center. This is not a compromise, but rather a professional destiny that is compatible to a person's abilities. The working world demands a wide variety of jobs, and our society encourages excellence and produces "top stars" but does not reserve room for those who are far from the summit of fulfilling their desires.

Despite this, every person has the right to be as much of him/herself as possible. I illustrate this with a story that I wrote for my students called "The Refrigerator Story" that illustrates the meaning of "being yourself as much as you can."

One winter evening during the last class at the university a student dreamed about a slice of pizza that he had left in the refrigerator in his dorm room. When he returned to his room he threw open the refrigerator door and was shocked to discover that his roommate had beaten him to it, and had eaten the slice of pizza. He went to bed hungry and frustrated, hoping that he would find comfort in sleep, but his stomach began to tell him: "I'm hungry and empty and don't want to go to sleep!" He returned to the refrigerator and glanced inside, but there was nothing to eat. He slammed the refrigerator door shut in disappointment and considered going back to bed, but his empty stomach continued to complain. He opened the refrigerator again and examined what was inside more closely. He found half an onion that had sprouted a green shoot, a soft wrinkled tomato, an egg that had an expiration date for the next day, a can of tuna fish that had been opened four days ago on which was written "Use up to five days after opening", and a plastic bottle of cold water. He suddenly had a brilliant idea: he would fry the onion, tomato, and egg and make "Shakshuka" (an oriental tomato sauce and egg dish) but he wondered what to do with the tuna fish. He remembered a waitress in a restaurant who had offered him a "Balkan Shakshuka". She had explained that it was made with Bulgarian cheese that comes from the Balkans and it was therefore called a "Balkan Shakshuka". He remembered that canned tuna fish is commonly used in Tunisian dishes and sandwiches, so he would make the world's first "Tunisian Shakshuka" by adding tuna to the dish! He completed the meal with a glass of cold water and felt pride in his creativity.

We are like the refrigerator! Sometimes we want to be something (a slice of pizza) that is not available. There is no need for us "to go to sleep hungry" and continue to live with feelings of disappointment and frustration that we could not realize ourselves and obtain what we wanted. If we look carefully at the contents of our "refrigerator"—our abilities—we will see that something that does not look tempting or promising at first glance can appear to be unique and useful after it is examined more closely.

Why a refrigerator? A refrigerator has a light that goes on every time it is opened. This is the way things should be when people think about themselves and their abilities. People on what they possess. Refrigerators also have a freezer. We need to freeze our disabilities and weak points. Many of my students ask: "Why not throw them out?" The reason is that our disabilities and weak points are also part of us. Sometimes we grow from them, use them to claim what we are entitled to, or to receive benefits and other needs. Shedding light on our strong points while accepting our limitations is a basic condition for establishing dreams that can be fulfilled.

3. **It is important to designate life objectives. They are the reason for getting up in the morning.** (vs. "I'm bored. Everyday day is the same, so what's the point?")

Existential meaning is a motivating force for living. Every individual must have aspirations and objectives that will add significance and meaning to his life and will enrich them.

Nevertheless existential meaning is not easy to find. People who live their lives without existential meaning or existential goals may feel what Frankl (1984) called "an existential vacuum"—losing their way and the personal significance of their lives. According to Frankl, this reality is increasing in modern society because of automation in the working world and at home and loss of the traditions by which people's roles in life were determined. Consequently people have more leisure time, which can lead to boredom and an existential vacuum. This increases existential frustration and anxiety—fear of a "pointless life". Sometimes despair is the realization that life ends, and if there is death, what is the point of living?

Paradoxically, the philosopher Carl Popper (1977) claims that if life did not have an end, it would have no meaning. Ironically, the idea that life has an end increases its meaning for people, and impels them to give it meaning. The individual's subjective answer to the question: "Why am I alive?" is largely responsible for attributing meaning to life, identity, and destiny.

People in modern society must define the significance of life for themselves. The greatest challenge is finding the existential objective, and the path to fulfillment is derived from that objective. The principles of Frankl's logotherapy (meaning-based therapy) are based on the well-known saying of Fredrich Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." A person's urge to get up each morning is closely connected to his or her plans and personal ambitions of the previous evening. Expectation, preparation and excitement are motivating factors in people's lives. Adhering to an existential goal (that is compatible to one's abilities) and determination enable overcoming difficulties on the way to fulfilling it. Henry Ford remarked that "Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals." He wished to say that when a person is focused on the current immediate difficulty rather than looking at the broad picture, every obstacle appears like a dead end. As a person who proceeds according to the existential meaning that he defined for himself, Frankl views suffering as a path to fulfillment and a source of hope, while another person who lacks existential meaning views suffering as a source of despair. For example, people with a complex learning disability who live in a sheltered housing setup with support who set an existential goal of developing their functional independence will not complain about the guidance they receive or resent the tasks they are required to perform. Short-range despair is long-range hope. The belief that freedom is currently and temporarily limited to enable defining choices and independence in the future can transform moments of despair into great hope. In contrast, another resident of the same framework who has not indicated a similar objective will view the same existential reality as a source of despair, limitation, and hopelessness.

How do we find existential meaning? Eisenberg (1986) cites five areas in Frankl's approach through which a person can find meaning in life: "Self-discovery, choice, uniqueness, and responsibility—which lead to self-transcendence.

Frankl views "self-transcendence as a tool for finding the meaning of life. He explains the essence of this concept in the following words: "Human existence is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualization" (Frankl 1984). This implies that life is a journey that must be focused on the outside and not only on our inner souls. A person must urge himself or herself to have experiences in a variety of areas in his or her life with others, to observe processes and nature, and to give in order to benefit others.

If self-transcendence is the climax of existential meaning, how do we attain it? Let us examine these five components more thoroughly:

A. **Self-discovery**—The first thing that is required is a process of deep self-observation about the difficulties with which the individual is coping. These difficulties must be recognized while shedding light on strengths and power. Viewing one's abilities and difficulties in an honest, balanced manner is the basis for the journey towards finding existential meaning that can be actualized. However, many adults with complex learning disabilities have difficulty identifying and imagining their capabilities because they are excessively occupied with their disability and the existential difficulties that stem from it.
B. **Uniqueness—**In continuation of self-discovery a person must ask himself or herself which of the many possible strengths they possess are relatively unique.
C. **Choice**—This concept does not focus only on people's existence as creatures who choose the interpretation of the events of their lives and their circumstances. People's awareness that they possess capabilities enables them to decide what to do with their strengths. A person is a creature who chooses the meaning of his or her life at every stage and is responsible for his or her choices. That responsibility is a great existential task. It is less common among adults with complex learning disabilities who have experience increased levels of over-protection, and have sometimes been limited in their choices throughout their lives as well. Without choices there are no successes or failures, and without successes and failures learning or development cannot take place. Choice will always be between alternatives, and a person is obligated to create alternatives before making a choice. For example, if during the stages of self-discovery and finding uniqueness I find that I have excellent physical ability and coordination, I will be able to be an athlete, do work that requires physical exertion, or pursue extreme sports in my leisure time. Creating alternatives is important because many people who designate a single existential goal think in terms of "all or nothing." Failure to attain that single goal makes them vulnerable to despair and lack of existential meaning because they have no other alternative.
D. **Responsibility**—It is important to assume responsibility for successes and failures. This involves interpreting factors that led to success so that they can be replicated in the future, and understanding the possible factors that led to failure in order to choose other alternative paths to avoid similar failures in the

future. The ability to do this makes a person an expert in his or her life in many aspects. The medical world would have had difficulty progressing if it had not learned from previous successes and instances of medical failures. Similarly, people must give themselves credit for the choices they made in order to reach success and assume responsibility for those that prevented it. When a person understands that he or she is an expert in a certain field, he or she is ready to move on to the next stage.

E. **Self-Transcendence**—The fifth stage in finding existential meaning is self-transcendence. A person will have difficulty finding existential meaning, purpose, and happiness in momentary personal pleasures. True existential meaning is transcendence above myself, my inner world, and my needs and focusing on the needs of others. Giving to others involves confirmation of my ability to give. If there is also suffering in the world, creating a circle of giving will alleviate it for both the donor and the recipient

Existential meaning is the engine of people's lives. It will be created when individuals believe and know that they have strengths and some of which are unique. They should assume that someone else in the world needs them and that they have something significant to offer others.

4. **The Challenge of Living is to Oppose Physical and Mental Gravity** (vs. "My memories from school eat away at me every day. That's why I have bad moods.")

Gravity is the physical force that exists between two masses and pulls them towards each other. Gravity exerts its physical force upon us, and we can use the analogy of gravity to describe forces that act upon us mentally and emotionally as well. We can stand erect thanks to the development of our muscular ability that has been developing since the day we were born, and we must also strive to develop our "mental muscles". Our world is filled with beauty, joy, and excitement, but also contains pain, loss, sorrow, and frustration. Our ability to cope with these things depends upon developing, training, and strengthening our mental muscles. It is difficult for people who are seriously physically ill to oppose the force of gravity and they are often confined to bedrest. People with mental illness are often depressed, and we often describe such a mental state as being "down", while we describe a person who feels enthusiastic about life and able to oppose the gravitational forces of life as being "high". Such people live with the burden of life's challenges, but do not sink into it.

When speaking with my students I compare life with a journey in a hot air balloon. A balloon requires a flame in order to rise, and when it loses height extra weight needs to be discarded so that it can rise again. A person is analogy of a balloon, and when he or she feels low it is necessary to shed heavy burdens that prevent him or her from "standing erect." Gestalt psychology emphasizes the importance of processing, freeing, forgetting, and forgiving, letting go of the past, and living for the present. The ability to forgive testifies to strength—not weak-

ness. Clinging to anger, animosity, and victimhood wastes energy (the flame that enables the balloon to rise). It chains us to the past and prevents us from moving forward towards the future. People need a personal toolbox to help maintain their body and soul. If they feel lonely they need to know who is available at all times, initiate contact with them, to open their hearts to them, and ask for their help. It is important for all people—including those with complex learning disabilities—to develop subjective awareness and emotional language so that they can listen to what is in their hearts, focus, and name their physical and emotional needs. They must then strive to locate an answer to these existential needs before a crisis develops.

5. **Listen to the whispers of your body and soul, or you will hear their shouts later on** (vs. "I work like a dog and people take advantage of me, but I have to thank them. I'm tired of it.")

It is not enough to oppose the force of gravity. A person must constantly listen to his or her body and soul. Listening can teach a person whether or not the physiological, social, and emotional-mental existential needs of his or her life are being met. Many years ago I met my siblings during a visit to my parents' home. My sister, who is a doctor, gave me a book she had received as a thank-you gift from one of her patients, and explained: "I think you'll enjoy this more than I will." It was a small book that contained a collection of insights from elderly people, and the above sentence was one that caught my eye. At that time my body was whispering to me, but I didn't heed it because I felt that my professional and family obligations were more important than my body's bothersome whisperings. It was whispering to me that if I didn't put less pressure on my body—particularly on my shoulders and back, it would resort to an 'act of protest.' I silenced it frequently. One busy Friday the whispers coming from my lower back increased, but I still did not listen. My young son was not feeling well and asked me to pick him up. When I did so a shout emerged from my lower back—and from my mouth. I was forced to remain in bed for eight days. I had a lot of time to conduct a dialogue with my back and with the rest of my body, to observe, and to promise that from now on I would try to listen when my body whispered to me before the whispers became a shout.

Our soul also whispers to us and tells us how it feels. When we feel the first signs of pressure, insult, loneliness, or despair we must observe and try to locate the possible sources by ourselves or with others, and determine which changes we need to make in our lives to moderate these feelings. Ignoring stressors and allowing pressure to build up is liable to lead to a mental-emotional crisis. Our inner voice not only warns us: "don't do that" but, in many cases tells us what is the correct thing to do. The hectic pace of modern life has deprived many of us of the ability to stop and listen to our hearts, our bodies, and our surroundings. The balance between the voices of our bodies and souls is an important key to existential balance and physical-mental health.

6. **When one skill is absent or impaired, others will emerge and develop.** (vs. "When I compare myself to other people my age I envy them. Where are they and where am I?").

People who feel frustrated because of a disability and sense that they lack capabilities in areas of life must know that in many cases a lack in one area forces people to develop survival tactics that can lead to unique skills in other areas. For example, many students with ADHD develop a sense of humor that enables them to cope with momentary or continuous hardships, become socially integrated, and acquire a place or a role that helps them become socially integrated. Many people who experienced continuous difficulties in their lives have developed coping strategies that eventually became methods of intervention that helped others. During my meetings with adults with complex learning disabilities we discuss this idea, and I ask them how they sense their disability has helped them grow. My dialogues with them have taught me that many of them had complex learning difficulties when they were in school, and the resulting flawed experiences led to the development of keen emotional language, sensitivity to social injustices, and often a developed sense of justice. When cognitive abilities are challenging, extensive emotional abilities may develop to take their place. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgensztern from Kotzk was known to say: "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart." It is my understanding that submissiveness of the heart and the knowledge that I am not complete will help me to become whole because that it what I am striving to be. I understand that I have to work on constantly improving my abilities and my relationships with others in the various environments of my life. The very modesty that develops following difficulties helps us understand the value of successes and the required creativity that led to them. When people are aware of their human fragility while at the same time sensing gratitude for the strengths and the good that surround them, they become more emotionally balanced. These two complementary forces make them whole.

7. **Everyone has something to give** (vs. "I have no degree. I have no diploma. Who would want me? Why would anyone want to hire me?").

Many people with low self-worth think that they do not have sufficient capabilities to contribute to others. This feeling becomes especially prominent among people who have transformed their disability into the focal point of their identity. A person must recognize his or her self-worth and to envision their abilities in order to join the public sphere, become integrated with others, and take part in relations of give and take. The basic assumption of any thinking person must be that he or she has value and that there are others who can benefit from the good that they possess. The basic belief that I have nothing to give is liable to develop into shame, avoidance, and social anxiety. During one of my meetings with a group of students with learning disabilities and complex CP who were in their 20 s we discussed this issue. I asked them what help they receive from their parents, and how they could help their parents. A large number of the participants answered that because of lack of financial resources and their limited physical function they felt

that their parents need something significant from them, but they have nothing to offer them. The discussion took place near the time of "Family Day" [the Israeli equivalent to Mother's Day and Father's Day]. After we added concepts such as satisfaction, gratitude, and empathy there were different opinions among the group. One student said that he would write his parents a poem, and another said that he would buy his parents a bouquet of flowers, but since he had never received an allowance he would ask his sister for help. The belief that I have something to give is one of the fundamental building blocks that serve as the basis for an identity of capability. It is essential for people to believe this. It is also essential for others around them to reflect their abilities—whether they are physical abilities, specific personality characteristics, or even just a heartwarming smile. Public space is similar to a public fund. The guiding principle needs to be that as long as I contribute to the fund with my deeds for others—I have the right to receive support and help from others. Giving constitutes a confirmation of my ability to give. Erich Fromm, the humanist psychologist (1956) stated that: "In the sphere of material things giving means being rich. Not he who has much is rich, but he who gives much. ….. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other—but that he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives from his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor… He does not give in order to receive; giving is in itself exquisite joy."

Parents, teachers, and service-providers have the educational obligation to give their children and students the opportunity to give, and not see them merely as recipients.

8. **Every person needs various types of support** (vs. "It's unpleasant to be a person with special needs, a student in special education, or receive benefits. It constantly reminds me that I'm different.")

People who require support over a long period of time are liable to develop dependence or,—even worse—to develop learned helplessness. For many people, diagnosis of a learning disability, ADHD, or any other disability and the resulting adaptations, pharmaceutical treatment, or financial benefits exacerbates their sense of being different. In these cases recognition of the disability is the condition for receiving support. This recognition can be transformed into a label both subjectively and socially. Some students who require an educational aid in class report ambivalence towards this service. Some defined their educational aid as the person responsible for perpetuating their classmates' perception of them as being different, particularly in cases in which the aid's services were visible. Attributing legitimacy for receiving support is an important component in establishing an identity of capability. We see a similar phenomenon among people with disabilities who sense ambivalence when they attempt to exact their rights. The book of Genesis states that after G-d created man he said: "It is not good for the man to be alone." One person cannot provide all human needs by himself or herself. One person cannot feel belonging, love, appreciation, and at times fulfillment if they are alone. People need others around them. In all social aspects people need to identify the sources of support that are available, to be helped by them, and to

gain a sense of confidence from them. People need to understand that support creates the conditions for optimal integration within the public sphere, and it is therefore every person's right to utilize it. In may cases a person must remember that these rights are awarded him or her as an equal citizen by right and not out of mercy. At the same time people whose role it is to support persons with complex learning disabilities must remember that they are providing a service that is directed towards personal growth and improving quality of life. They must therefore refrain from cultivating an authoritative relationship and instead promote an enabling and containing atmosphere. It is also advisable to give roles to those receiving the services so that they will feel that others also need them and their abilities. For example, people with complex learning disabilities are experts regarding their lives and they possess practical life experience, knowledge and wisdom that they have accumulated over the years. Consequently, they can help service providers to optimally and precisely plan the type of services they will provide. The "Inclusive University" program was developed over time with the help of an advising committee that consists of graduates of the program. This committee helps to define the learning and developmental needs of adults with complex learning disabilities and initially designs the instruction contents of the program that will provide an empowering academic solution. This is a moral expression of the idea that while services are being provided "for" people it is necessary to design services "with" people and consult with representatives of those receiving the services. This implements the idea that "Who is wise? He who learns from every man." (Ethics of the Fathers, 4:1).

9. **The Art of Life is to find the balance in everything. Life is not black and white, but also contains a scale of gray.** (vs. "There are people for whom everything goes easily and smoothly. For me, everything is difficult.")

A person's perception of reality has repercussions upon his or her emotional world and, consequently, on his or her life choices and relations with others. Adolescence is characterized by dichotomous thinking of good and bad, success and failure, love and hate, admiration and rejection. When the process of adolescence continues into later stages in life people tend to think in terms of black and white. The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Beck (1979) who developed cognitive therapy saw a direct connection between dichotomous thinking processes and the development of depression. Beck coined the concept of "the cognitive triangle of depression". According to his doctrine, there are three components of automatic negative thoughts which are the catalyst for the development of depression: a negative one-dimensional **view of oneself** and one's abilities *("I'm a failure, studying and I don't suit each other"*), a negative **view of the world** *("Everyone is against me. I'm tired of criticism and of trying to please others.")*, and **viewing the future as hopeless** *("No matter how hard I try people slam the door in my face because of my disability, so what will become of me?")*. Beck claimed that distortions of one-dimensional thinking increase stress and sadness in our lives. For example, exacerbation of negative experiences while negating the significance of positive experiences. In addition, over-generalization such as ("I didn't get the

job—nobody is ever going to hire me. Now I will remain unemployed for ever.") and assuming personal responsibility for every event that happens ("I'm sure that my mother is sad because of me. She doesn't say that, but I know that I'm the only child she is worried about."). Dichotomous thinking also transforms existential reality into a reality that is extremely difficult to contend with. It increases and intensifies intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and consequently lowers the individual's self-worth. People who became stars overnight are worshipped by society and are the recipients of admiration. As a result, many mediocre people ask themselves: "Why should I even try?".

A child who is tagged in class as being "lazy", "unmotivated", "rejected", or "disturbed" without being praised for his or her strengths will assimilate a negative stigma and view himself or herself in a negative context during adulthood as well. External criticism becomes an "entrapped echo" of internal criticism that creates "self-stigma". People frequently have a tendency to assess and judge their actions in terms of good or bad, success or failure. However, even if people choose to judge themselves, they must give themselves a fair trial. No judge will enter the courtroom without providing the accused person with a defense. Many people judge themselves without allowing their inner advocate's voice to be heard and preserve their rights. Developing self-advocacy and a multi-dimensional view of oneself, one's characteristics, capabilities, and a balanced perception of others are extremely important for mental balance and quality of life.

For this reason, Judaism refers to people's characteristics and capabilities as "*midot*"—dimensions. This implies that there are no good or bad characteristics. The question is to what degree does a person make use of his or her characteristics within a particular context and to what extent does he or she know to regulate them in personal and interpersonal situations. For example, violence is forbidden during interpersonal connections, but is permitted on the battlefield. Inflexibility is an important trait for preserving beliefs and values, but is undesirable in partnerships or in educational processes as in expressed in the idea that "meticulousness cannot teach."

Life is not black and white, but contains various shades of gray. During moments of joy we are saddened to think of those who did not live to be part of our happiness, and in moments of sadness we are surrounded by good. A student who senses that he or she did not do well on an exam and receives a low grade may view the low grade as a failure, but at the same time he or she needs to remember that the grade indicates that there were questions that he or she answered correctly. A balanced and multi-dimensional perspective of life experiences is essential for mental well-being.

10. **Living is a complex art. Everyone owns a brush with which they can design their life.** (vs. "When I was a child things were hard for me and people took care of me, but who will help me in the future?")

People with complex learning disabilities experience frequent transitions between frameworks when an appropriate place cannot be found. After completing school adults with complex learning disabilities must design their future and plan how to

fulfill their personal vision and make life decisions. For many, thinking about the future arouses intense anxiety due to previous complex experiences of successes and failures. They have a history of social comparison to their peers and family in the mainstream, and they have limited possibilities of pursuing professional training that has been adapted to their abilities and is compatible to their ambitions. Wishing for a life that is free of worries is not realistic. The cycle of human life is fraught with transition from one stage of development to another. Various developmental theorists emphasized cognitive, emotional, and functional points of view regarding human development. The characteristic that all of these theories have in common is that every stage of development entails a developmental challenge or conflict. If a person meets the challenge, he or she is ready to move on to the next stage. Failing to do so may result in a developmental deficiency or fixation. I have learned that a cycle of perspective exists alongside the cycle of life. The manner in which a child perceives adulthood is not the same as how an adult experiences adulthood. The manner in which an adult perceives old age is different than the manner in which an adolescent perceives it. This is in keeping with the proverb: "Things seen from there appear differently than things seen from here."

People who are fearful of the future tend to idealize the past. Many of my students who have difficulty finding their professional destiny or establishing a partnership tend to look at their early childhood longingly, at the time when a continuous game was legitimate and they had not yet been measured according to their learning achievements. At the same time, every age has both pleasant and challenging aspects of despair and hope. Many imagine childhood as a worry-free age, but this far from the truth. Children depend upon their environment, live in a world they do not understand, and are required to learn many abilities that they will use during their life journey. Old age, on the other hand, is perceived as an age that is filled with challenges connected to our health and functional recession, but in reality people who reach retirement age are frequently more financially secure, not occupied with the question of "who will I become?", and their self—worth depends upon their experience, expertise, and achievements. If they established a unified family and achieved goals and other objectives throughout their lives, they will enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Sasha, my neighbor, was close to 90 years old. He spoke seven languages, but despite the fact that he arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union more than 50 years ago, he still did not speak Hebrew. One day I met Sasha when I was returning home. As usual, he attempted to start a conversation. He began with the sentence: "A la vie comme à la guerre" (Life is like a war). Sasha's life philosophy was summed up in that sentence, and he continued to relate his life experiences in several languages: "Baby wants to nurse but his mother doesn't hear him crying: It is a war. Child wants friends in kindergarten but they reject him: War. Child wants to follow what the teacher is saying, but has trouble understanding the material: war. In high school he wants a girlfriend, but is rejected: war. He wants leave from the army but is refused: war. He then tries to get a job, but is not hired: war. Raising children—war. Now I'm an old man and want to read a book so I

won't be lonely but I cannot see—war. Every age has its war," summarized Sasha. Sasha's soliloquy describes the challenges involved during every stage of live. The urge for fulfillment is often interrupted by barriers. Adults with complex learning disabilities are constantly fighting a war because challenges blatantly appear at every stage of development. For these people finding a professional destiny, building a partnership, and many other areas of life constitute a continuous battle as they strive for a life that is similar in content and essence to those of people in the mainstream.

11. **Loving others requires self-love** (vs. "Sometimes I hate people. People don't know the real me. I put on a mask. I've learned to play the game.")

The humanistic psychologist Fromm (1956) reviewed his doctrine regarding human love in his book "The Art of Loving". Fromm claimed that love is an extremely essential motivating force in people's lives and is necessary for attaining a full and satisfying social life and for mental and personal welfare. The guiding principle throughout Fromm's book is that people who do not truly love themselves will be unable to truly love others. According to Fromm, self-love and selfishness are not synonyms but are opposites. Self-love is a condition for loving others, while selfishness is a reality in which people are not only incapable of loving others but also do not love themselves. Self-love is my awareness of my abilities and talents that benefit others around me, seeing my strengths, and accepting myself with my weaknesses and difficulties. I understand that I am free to make choices in my life and to translate them into productivity and action. I often hear my students explain that they love and admire other people but don't love themselves. This type of love is characterized by pleasing others and at times fear of being taken advantage of. Loving others without self-love conceals jealousy and frustration because the success of others shows my lack of success. Consequently, it is important that all people—especially people with complex learning disabilities—establish an identity of capability which will reflect their abilities and strengths and realize them. This will increase their self-love. When we read the proverb "Love others as you love yourself" we tend to emphasize the word "love", but it is important to emphasize the word "yourself" as well. People will be free to share their talents and abilities with others only after they experience love from others around them and love themselves. This does not imply adopting narcissistic patterns and concentrating on oneself. People who do not love themselves will have difficulty complimenting others, their partner, or colleagues for fear that increasing the value of others will detract from their own value. They will often adopt patterns of avoidance for fear that they are not good enough to be part of the common community.

12. **People are not responsible for their disabilities. They are responsible for the way they choose to live with them.** (vs. "There are "normal" people and there are people with special needs. That's the way things are. It harms your self-confidence. You feel like you don't belong.")

It is important to point out that among people with disabilities in general, and with complex learning disabilities in particular—a disability is what Viktor Frankel termed a situation of "limited freedom". This is a natural continuation of the item discussed previously. A disability is not something that people choose, it is not negotiable but a given situation. Consequently a person is not responsible for its existence and there is no reason to feel shame or inferior value because of it. Some people attempt to fight the existence of the disability that was forced upon them. Others resort to victimizing themselves, and still others deny it. It is my understanding that there is no choice other than to reconcile with a disability, live with it, strive for self-actualization with it, and not allow it to dictate one's dreams or one's life. Knowledge about a learning disability or any other disability increases the understanding that it has a cause, and that cause is not the person who lives with it. Understanding the disability and its source and characteristics frees a person from responsibility for its existence and enables him or her a little more control and choice.

One of my favorite stories is from the Ta'anit Tractate of the Talmud in which Rabbi Elazar meets an ugly man on his way to a lesson. The ugly man greeted him, and the Rabbi asked him: "How ugly you are! Tell me, are all the people from your city as ugly as you?" The "ugly" man answered: "Go to the One who created me and complain to Him that He created me like an ugly vessel." Rabbi Elazar understood his mistake and bowed down beseeching the man to forgive him. The "ugly man" refused and told him to go to the Creator of Man and complain: "Why have you created this ugly vessel?" Rabbi Elazar followed the man to the city pleading for forgiveness, but the man still refused. When they reached the city, where the residents greeted him: "Peace be with you, our Rabbi and Teacher." The ugly man replied: "If he is a Rabbi and teacher, let there not be many more like him." When the people asked why he wished this, the man related what had happened, and the residents of the city begged him to forgive the rabbi. The ugly man agreed saying: "For your sake I will forgive him, but on the condition that he not behave this way in the future." The rabbi was relieved and proceeded to the house of study where he began his lesson with the following analogy: "Man must always be flexible like a reed that bends in the wind, and not hard and rigid like the cedar." The moral of this story is the importance of humility and the danger of pride. However, I would like to present another aspect of the story: The hero of the story is the ugly man who refused to assume responsibility for his Creator in Heaven. I feel that the important point in this story is the connection between its two main motifs: Freeing oneself from responsibility for one's disability and the importance of humility on the part of the observer and his or her relation to the disability. No one is immune from disabilities. Some are born with them and others will acquire them as they grow old. This insight should increase self-acceptance among those with disabilities as well as responsibility on the part of society to offer support and avoid processes of labelling. This should not only be because of moral reasons but also because the understanding that the attitudes and standards a person setts regarding people with disabilities might be those he or she will experience if they become people with disabilities.

The manner in which a person perceives his or her disability has repercussions upon their quality of life throughout his or her life. A disability or handicap is not a secret or a taboo—but an existential reality. It is not the primary characteristic in an individual's identity, but a single component among many. A person has the choice and responsibility of determining how to incorporate it and to determine the degree of importance and place to give it in his or her life.

13. **Whatever is not flexible breaks easily** (vs. "I have difficulty with new things. You never know what will happen.")

Flexibility is an` important tool for adjustment. Life is filled with changes and transitions that create a strong significant imbalance in many areas. For many of us, crises require us to stop, adapt, and sometimes to recalculate our route. Regaining balance demands mobilizing ourselves for a three—stage process: Firstly: reconciliation and accepting reality as it exists, Secondly: searching for ways of coping, and learning roles that are derived from the change or transition, for example, what does it mean to be a soldier, what skills and roles will I need to acquire and develop as a student in professional training, as a partner or as a parent, and thirdly: to prepare for the future—since life is in constant motion. In addition to the need to adjust to transitions many adults with complex learning disabilities often encounter conflictual situations that stem from unrealistic expectations on the part of the environment or themselves. They experience frustration or disappointment, difficulties in becoming integrated into the mainstream, and sometimes criticism and devaluation by their environment (which sometimes includes their system of support). This reality is liable to arouse intense anxiety that will sometimes be expressed in avoidance and inflexibility—which are interwoven. I tend to say that a "hard head" rests on a "soft heart". The tendency to resort to avoidance during stressful situations is liable to create many lost connections and opportunities. Unsuccessful job interviews, for example, are liable to result in avoidance and expressions of closure and inflexibility towards any job offer. Criticism, insult, or rejection by certain people can result in severing all connections with them. Unsuccessful "dates" may cause a person to reject possibilities of finding a partner. All these can create a bitter and diminishing world. Inflexibility creates pseudo-control. Instead, tools and strategies should be acquired for dealing with crises and transitions. There is a worrisome tendency towards exaggerated self-criticism and an inflexible conscience among adults with complex learning disabilities Moderate flexibility of this characteristic will enable a better quality of life.

14. **Be like a giraffe and not a hedgehog** (vs. "I've learned not to answer. I close up or leave whenever people criticize me or disrespect me.")

It is always advisable to look at the entire picture with a bird's eye view during any life event—particularly during threatening situations. This type of observation offers a broader and more detailed picture of reality with both its risks and opportunities. The problem is that during a crisis many people tend to resort to

avoidance and introversion and to focus on what is bothering them instead of focusing on the opportunities and resources that can be derived from it. Hedgehogs roll into a ball and extend their quills when threatened. The giraffe, on the other hand, extends its neck to gain a wider view and identify the source of the threat while at the same time locating a sanctuary or resources of help. Children and adults with complex learning disabilities are liable to close up and focus on threats and barriers without identifying the resources they or others around them possess that would enable them to build strategies to overcome the predicament.

15. **"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." (Eleanor Roosevelt)** (vs. "Other children insulted me and ostracized me. I still remember that.")

An identity of capability is the principle component for the resilient personality. However, some people are particularly vulnerable to criticism or ridicule, while others remain indifferent. People often carry a personal knapsack filled with loaded with memories of criticism they received from strangers and significant people in their lives. Often external criticism that was directed during childhood is transformed into a negative internal dialogue in a person's current existence. This "inner voice" frequently makes sure to remind people about their weak points and shortcomings and implants a chronic weakness. The person is liable to believe that the contents of destructive criticism or insult reflect his or her abilities or personality. For people with a negative self-image, any slight criticism is liable to tip the scales against them. People with a high level of self-worth conduct a primarily positive internal dialogue and are therefore able to set antibodies into action against destructive criticism or insult. They can listen to it, process it, reject it, scorn it, or be built from it. As long as negative echoes from the past dictate a person's present, he or she will have difficulty establishing a positive self-value and conducting full and satisfying interrelations with others, including the ability to deal with criticism. People with complex learning disabilities often tell me that they were ostracized during their school years, were criticized by teachers, and bullied and humiliated by their peers. Many have difficulty forgetting and forgiving these incidents. Sometimes there is no need to criticize or offend—the tendency towards social comparison regarding grades, social integration, and other areas of life intensified the experience of being different that leads to feelings of incapability. Feelings of inferiority quickly follow.

Is the tendency to be offended easily inborn? Possibly. Malka and Alexandrovitz (1987) studied inborn characteristics in the mid-twentieth century among preschool children and found seven characteristics—among them the level of response to stimuli and the ability to calm oneself—are inborn. Some babies react strongly to certain stimuli and have trouble calming down without intervention even when they are only a few months old. Aron (2014) coined the term "highly sensitive person" and also found that some children are restless and highly sensitive to stimuli from their environment. One of the characteristics of this phenomenon is higher sensitivity to the behavior of the environment and a higher likelihood of being hurt as a result. We can therefore say that the tendency to be hurt or insulted is a combination of inborn and acquired factors.

During one of the lessons in the course "Identity of Capability" we discussed this guiding life principle. A student named Roy asked me: "What am I supposed to do if two different people told me the same thing?" He hesitated for a moment and then added: "Both of them said I'm ugly. What does that mean? How am I supposed to accept that?" I asked him what came into his mind at that moment. Roy answered: "If two people thought the same thing, than perhaps they're right." I asked him: "At that moment couldn't you see the human ugliness of those two people? Beauty is a matter of taste and it's hard to define it unequivocally. But there is no doubt that there were two people with ugly components in their personality standing in front of you who were attempting to raise their own value by lowering yours. It's a low, mean thing to do that shows that people like that have no other way of feeling worthy." I asked him if they had known him for a long time and he explained that they had known each other only slightly for a short time. The helplessness that he had experienced at school and the patterns of avoidance that he had adopted as a child had become a pattern of behavior in Roy's life as an adult. Following the incident involving Roy we focused on six tools for dealing with insult:

1. **First, we must ask which people are insulting us**. Are they someone significant whom we know well? If not, their remarks have no basis.
2. **We must remember that our inability to deal with insults when we were children does not reflect our ability to deal with it now.** We must identify patterns of acquired helplessness and patterns of response that we adapted in the past and work to break free of them in the present. Often the greatest challenge in adulthood is to let go of the image and representation of the vulnerable, weak, and helpless child that we built for ourselves during our childhood.
3. **It is necessary to distinguish between deliberate insult and criticism** meant to correct a situation or behavior. Not all criticism is insulting. Some people criticize us because they care about us. On the other hand, there are others who deliberately insult in order to tease and humiliate others in order to sense that they are strong and in control.
4. **Preserving painful memories of being insulted is equivalent to building a temple to commemorate the person who insulted us.** They do not deserve this. Instead, we should build a temple to commemorate those whose words and deeds helped build our self-worth. The ability to forgive and forget enables true freedom from burdens that weigh down our soul and make it difficult for it to rise to new summits.
5. **Being insulted implies cooperating with the person insulting us and to agree with what they say or with their superiority.** Is that the way things truly are? The insults of others are one-dimensional, while we have the ability and the obligation to teach ourselves the right to relate to what was said. If I choose to judge myself I must give myself a fair verdict and allow my inner defense to make its voice heard.

Every person needs a knapsack of tools for knowing how to respond to people who tease and insult. Often the power of the response minimizes the insult. I had

a student who underwent extensive head injuries during childhood that impaired his motor and learning abilities. During one of the lessons when we dealt with self-stigma he asked: "What do I do when people in the street yell: "Hey, look at that cripple! Look at that disabled guy!" I asked him what he usually did., and he answered: "I quietly go home and I'm sad that this is my fate." I suggested that the next time someone called him a "cripple" that he respond by replying: "The politically correct term is 'A man with a disability." Now he is equipped with a reflexive answer in case people insult him in the future.

When we parted at the end of the lesson Roy gave me a broad smile of relief and said: "Yes, there are people who are ugly inside."

The Three-Step Approach to Building an Identity of Capability

The Model of the Three-Step Approach

Many adults with complex learning disabilities receive extensive emotional support and help in school from early childhood and grow up to become self——confident adults who sense that they are essential. However, my impression is that most adults with complex learning disabilities feel less capable than their peers in the mainstream.

The first section of this book dealt with understanding the emotional world of adults with complex learning disabilities. It discussed the manner in which they perceive their learning disability, attention deficit disorder, or moderate to low intelligence and their consequent difficulties with self-management and function, making decisions, experiencing autonomy, and other areas. These hardships are liable to have negative repercussions upon the development of an identity of capability and, consequently, on quality of life and fulfillment in their lives.

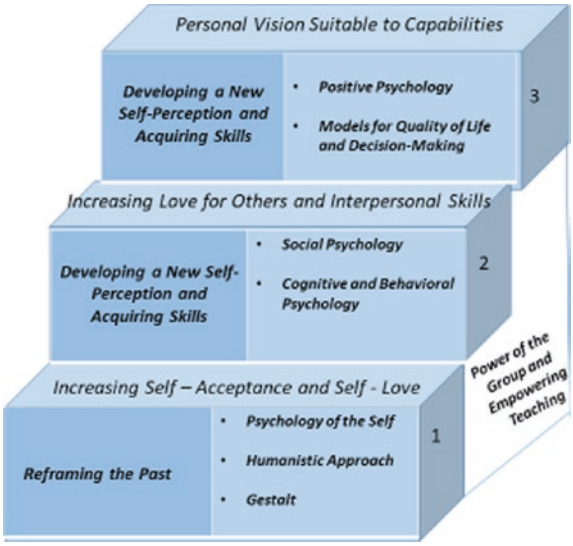
I realized that there was a need to develop a comprehensive and structured program for positive self——establishment for adults with complex learning disabilities that would answer the emotional needs for acceptance of the learning disability and increasing self——value, while focusing on the individual's strengths. Such a program would enable them to process unsolved emotional burdens, better understand internal processes they are undergoing, recognize their difficulties, and - most importantly - help them to shed light on their hidden strengths. This led to the development of the "Three-Step Approach to an Identity of Capability" which is taught within the framework of the curse "Identity of Capability——Introduction to Practical Psychology". The course is devoted to personal empowerment of adults with complex learning disabilities, developing self——awareness, and designating realistic personal life goals that focus on establishing partnerships and occupational fulfillment. The title of the course offers legitimacy for life difficulties. The art of life is to live one's life while familiarizing oneself with the raw materials that are engraved in every person and creating a full life from them.

The second part of the name testifies to the manner in which we relate to the issues that are discussed. Participants in the program are exposed to a world of theoretical academic content through the study of selected issues in the field of psychology pertaining to their lives. These contents are presented in a cognitively-accessible manner in a group setup. I will discuss the power of cognitive accessibility and the group in the next chapter.

In his book "The Art of Loving" Erich Fromm discusses love as a motivating force in people's lives and emphasizes that a person who has difficulty loving himself or herself will have difficulty loving others. Consequently, the point of origin in the course "Identity of Capability" is that increasing self——awareness, forming and crystalizing an identity and shedding light on our strengths are the principle keys to building a full, satisfying personal and social life. The guiding principle for this program is that self——acceptance and corrective experiences will lead to the development of an identity of capability. This will serve as an accelerator for strengthening self——confidence and developing social connections.

Each of the stages in the "Three Stage Approach to an Identity of Capability" contains a unique world of content and serves as a basis for development in the next stage.

The first step focuses on self-acceptance, self——love, and composing a positive "identity card". The second stage focuses on love of others in general, acquiring interpersonal skills, and perfecting an interpersonal toolbox. The third stage deals with the essence of human happiness and constructing a personal dream that is compatible to capability.



The Three-Step Model for an Identity of Capability

This chapter will review the content worlds of the program and the rationale for choosing, organizing and arranging them in the order in which they are presented.

The components of an identity of capability that are the focal point of each stage will be presented at the beginning of the discussion of each stage.

Increasing Self-love

Contents

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- **Focus: Self-awareness and Accepting Reality, Focusing on Strengths, Developing a Positive Self-image, and Differentiation**

The first step in building an identity of capability is "self-discovery". This is a process of honest and courageous observation that examines the existing personal narrative and the experiences and events that led to its formation. The detaining and growth insights derived from it and the repercussions on the person's thoughts, feelings, and how he or she carries on with his or her life will also be examined. This stage contains the following guidelines.

Converting Detaining Paradigms to Growth Paradigms

The personal narrative that people build for themselves reflects their interpretation of their life experiences in terms of good and bad, strength and weakness, success and failure, despair and hope. As any attitude, these insights arouse feelings and impact people's daily lives. People who perceive their lives as negative experience will have difficulty developing hope. Antonak and Livneh (1988) found that the individual's positions is consistent, but that it can undergo change. The process of changing positions is possible, but requires a reassessment of the emotional and cognitive components and, consequently—the behavioral and functional components as well. The program therefore opens with a guided discussion that involves several exercises (including viewing and analyzing films as a tool for projection, cards, and introductory exercises) about the participants' personal life journey. Since this is the beginning of the process there is a need to use projective tools and dialogue that do not require a great deal of exposure on the part of the participants. The participants choose to relate many painful life stories. They describe processes ranging from partial integration to rejection in school, the desire to learn while coping with learning difficulties, and confusion and embarrassment when attempting to find a partner. They describe jealousy and frustration over what they perceive as the success of their siblings and peers, difficulties becoming integrated into the working world, and many other topics. The discussion focuses on central themes and an empowering discussion about them using a debriefing technique that is used in treating trauma. In this technique the facilitator listens to life stories and then asks about the feelings the events aroused. At a later point the facilitator repeats the life stories again, while emphasizing the lessons and morals that are hidden within them and reflects the strengths of the participants in the stories they built. The facilitator identifies points of hope for the future involving possible change in the existential reality, and encourages the participants to believe that change is possible.

One of the techniques I use, which I call an "**empathic monologue**" involves rebuilding personal stories. The technique enables the construction of an entire story for which the main objective is shedding light on strengths and absolving the participants of responsibility for things for which they are not responsible. In this technique the story presented by the participant is rebuilt by the facilitator, who asks permission to tell the story in place of the speaker. The facilitator builds the story in a manner that includes cause and effect, gain and loss, reasoning for

actions taken by the participant, empathy, compassion, an outcry, warning about needs that were derived from the story and legitimization of feelings. The facilitator also presents expectations in the name of the participant that he or she would expect from himself or herself and from others. The participant whose empathic monologue was presented then agrees, disagrees, or adds details to make the story more correct or exact. In many cases the individual's story serves as an accelerator for a process in which the group builds a broader story that also incorporates experiences of the other members of the group in similar contexts. For example, Joseph (pseudonym) said that he was not a real person and was constantly play-acting and people never knew who he truly was. He explained: "I'm only the real me in my family." He told about numerous transitions between schools, how he constantly attempted to make friends with his classmates who rejected him, hit him, and called him names. He concluded the story by saying: "People make me feel stressed. I don't like people. I feel better when I'm on my own in peace and quiet." I then presented him with the following empathic monologue: "I've liked being with people all my life, feeling accepted, belonging, and love. My family always loved me and I always felt that I belonged. Outside it was a different story. I wandered between many different educational frameworks, and it was difficult for me to feel that I belonged. I was always placed in schools where the other children in the class were already friends and it was difficult for me to break into their social circle. I had difficulty in my studies and I was a quiet, introverted, and vulnerable boy. The "wolf pack" in the class saw my weaknesses and began to torment me. I didn't stand a chance. They thought they were strong, but that just shows how weak they were. Most of the boys who tormented me were not good students. Evidently tormenting and insulting me was the only way they could feel they were "worth something". Today I understand that there were bad people in the story, but I wasn't one of them. There is no reason for me to continue to perpetuate bad people in my life. I like people and want friends, but my scars from school continue to bother me. Today I understand that I had no choice about any of the school frameworks I was placed in, and everything was decided for me. Today I understand that I can choose my friends and where I want to belong. It's in my hands. I'll make sure that people are worthy of my trust. If so, I'll enjoy being with them and get to know them better."

This stage is extremely important. The participants are eager to tell their stories, but at the same time they are assessing how much they can trust the facilitator and the group. During the following meetings the participants study the principles of the cognitive–behavioral approach to psychology according to which the individual's emotional world is derived from the interpretation of events he or she has experienced. A new, more positive interpretation will result in more positive feelings. These will, in turn, result in better personal-emotional conducting of the individual's subjective experience. During this stage the participants are presented with the Guidelines for Living, which were described in the previous chapter. The presentation of these principles is directed towards offering legitimacy to difficulties, while emphasizing the hidden opportunity in each experience and challenge. These guiding principles constitute growth paradigms for living and are interwoven within each topic of the program.

Desensitization to Dealing with Disabilities

Many adults with complex learning disabilities are not thoroughly familiar with their disability and its causes and have trouble defining and focusing on their difficulties. They remember undergoing various types of diagnosis, but are unable to report what the findings were. *("My mother has them. She knows. Ask her.")* Lack of knowledge is liable to lead to anxiety and even to developing incorrect or imaginary explanations about the causes of the disability. Reif (2004) found that reframing the manner in which college students with learning disabilities perceive their difficulties and knowledge about their disability resulted in a more positive perception of both themselves and their disability, which had positive repercussions on their academic achievements. Many meetings during this part of the three-stage program are consequently devoted to understanding the disability and its roots. The participants are exposed to comprehensive knowledge about learning disabilities such as dyslexia—difficulty with reading, dysgraphia—difficulties with writing and organizing writing, dyscalculia—difficulty with understanding mathematics and performing mathematical activities, and dysnomia—difficulty naming things, conceptualizing, and difficulty with recalling an output of words. They learn about ADHD and possible causes for the development of attention deficit disorder. They ask numerous questions and connect them to their personal experiences. I remember that during the first meeting when the program began we opened a discussion about existential meaning. A participant named Dana (pseudonym) stopped the lesson to ask: "Just a moment! Before we talk about meaning I need to understand: am I retarded?" I answered that I had the impression that she was not, and she continued: "How do you know?" I answered that during our introductory meeting she had described her schooling, a course in child care that she had successfully completed and several matriculation exams in which she had received satisfactory scores. I explained that it appeared to me that in light of the fact that she lived in supportive housing for adults with learning disabilities she did not have an intellectual disability. Dana did not relent: "So why did people say that I had a developmental delay when I was a child? My father said I was lazy and didn't know how to learn, and that I had ability but that I just didn't want to. The opposite is true: I want to learn but I don't have the ability. What's my problem?" I stopped the meeting and asked the participants if they would like to know more about learning disabilities. They all answered that they would. We devoted the lesson to learning about complex learning disabilities and the accepted terms for intellectual disabilities. At the end of the lesson Dana said: "Now I know for sure that I have a learning disability. I'm going to tell my father that I'm ambitious and not lazy. I like to learn but I have all the possible learning disabilities. The fact that despite all my difficulties I have certificate in child care shows that I have a desire to learn. Today I understand that children need to be taught how to learn instead of telling them that they are lazy." This is an example of rebuilding a personal narrative. Dana was so occupied with the echoes of her past that she was surprised that I remembered all of her accomplishments that she had accumulated in her life which she had described during our acceptance interview. Understanding her disability freed her from the sense that she was

responsible for its existence. She assimilated the empowering messages as reflected in her summarizing monologue.

After the participants study the characteristics of various learning disabilities they learn about the emotional world of adults with learning disabilities. It appears that their practical knowledge is extensive and contains insights, even if it is unorganized. The participants then learn about the structure of didactic, neurological, and psychological tests ("I remember when they gave me that test and they showed me pictures! Now I understand what they did to me!") They are also given diagnostic reports to read. They are surprised to read about strengths and hidden strong points in these reports. ("I didn't know that my report also showed my good points and strengths.") Later they are exposed to learning strategies and practice them. If there are people in the group with physical disabilities, epilepsy, or high function ADS alongside learning disabilities, the facilitator relates to these as well. The participants usually request this after discussing learning disabilities because they are interested in acquiring a deeper knowledge of these disabilities and to learn about themselves from different aspects.

The objective of this part of the program that focuses on desensitization to disabilities is to understand that the person who is diagnosed with a disability did not cause it. They therefore are not responsible for it and need not apologize for its existence, be ashamed of it, or view it as a well-guarded "secret". A disability is not the essence of a person with a complex learning disability, but one component of many that are the foundation for his or her identity. It is part of the individual, and he or she has the choice of fighting it, surrendering to it, feeling a victim of it, or reconciling with it and viewing areas in which it encourages the growth of strengths and abilities that he or she would not know about in other circumstances.

Understanding the Process of Building Self-worth

After the participants have acquired a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of complex learning disabilities the group begins a journey in which they learn to focus on the unique strengths and abilities of each group member. The participants learn about theories regarding the formation of self-image and the complexity of the abilities of adults with complex learning disabilities. They identify that alongside difficulties in various areas they also possess many abilities. They learn about Gardner's multiple intelligences (1993) and examine themselves to determine in which forms of intelligence they excel. They learn about the formation of the self as described by major theorists such as Rogers who discussed the conflict that arises in the encounter between the "ideal self" (the self the person strives for) and the "real self" (the self that is perceived as realistic). They also learn that large gaps between the two can result in despair, while small gaps will encourage people to challenge themselves with existential goals. They learn about intra-personality and interpersonal factors in the formation of the self, barriers to building self-value, and possible actions to rehabilitate it. They slowly begin to develop an inner dialogue that is focused on strengths and abili-

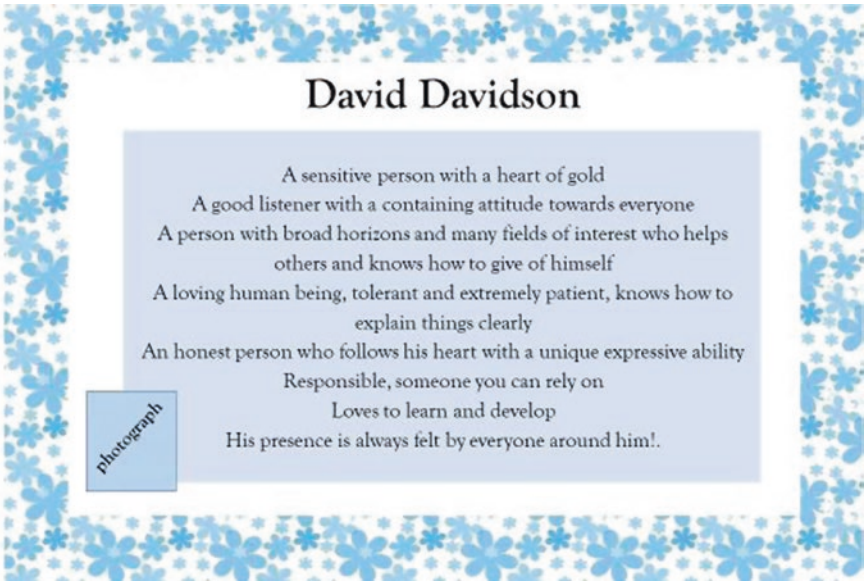
ties. They learn about Erikson's stages of development, and each examines and assesses which developmental challenges they fulfilled and which areas they need to continue to focus on and grow. The stormy inner emotional world is replaced with an empowering dialogue that provides the participants new organization, conceptualization, knowledge, and language. They begin to use this newly acquired language and are excited by the new knowledge and order that it creates in their lives and in their perception of themselves.

Constructing an Identity Card of Capability

This part of the program is directed towards literally constructing an "identity card of capability" for each participant. After the participants develop more positive paradigms in relation to themselves, learn to understand their disability, begin to accept it, and are exposed to the concept of self-worth and its components, they learn about the strengths approach and about finding their personal existential meaning. This process combines theoretical knowledge that is taught in structured lectures and dynamic workshops in which the group plays an important part. The focus is on becoming familiar with the systems approach and understanding the individual as a system. The participants are then exposed to humanistic approaches that view people as being basically good. Focus is placed on Viktor Frankl's logotherapy approach. Frankl claimed a person needs to discover himself or herself through a courageous deep process of observation and learning about his or her strengths and weaknesses in order to find existential meaning. The person must then recognize their unique abilities that he or she can utilize to benefit others. The participants report strengths they identify in themselves through a series of exercises. Each strength they report must be "evidence-based". The participants and the facilitator mutually reflect the points of strength they observe in each member of the group. These reflections are not merely compliments, but a process of reflection based on facts. The positive characteristics of each individual are listed on a chart under each person's name, and more characteristics are added during each meeting. Every strength that is identified for each participant is immediately conceptualized and reflected. This important process enables the participants to enrich their world of concepts regarding human characteristics. General characteristics such as: "She's a nice woman" are not included in the identity card building process. I recall that during one of the meetings devoted to building identity cards a woman named Doris (pseudonym) identified the strength of one of the other women as "She's funny. She's actually not funny, but she smiles. How can I explain? Her smile is special." I asked: "Does she have a conquering smile? A smile that conquers your heart?" "Yes," She answered. "That's it exactly." As the meeting progressed she used that expression several times to describe other members of the group. Others turned to her and asked: "What's with you and conquering smiles?" She answered calmly and confidently: "I like this expression 'a conquering smile'" and smiled broadly.

At the end of the program each participant receives a diploma and a personal identity card that lists the strengths that were attributed to them throughout the

program. Human nature involves growth together with regression and consequently some participants are liable to revert to previous patterns of thinking after the program ends. Awarding a concrete document that lists strengths is therefore important. These identity cards are small and can be carried in a person's wallet or pocket. I sometimes tell my students facetiously that if they need to introduce themselves and they "forget" who they are and what their strengths really are, they can learn the contents of their identity card of capability by heart and prepare themselves for any "date", social encounter, or work interview. The identity card is testimony to the person's strengths that were identified during their participation in the program, and he or she can reread it and gain strength from it when they feel the need.



The above content appears on the "identity card" of one of the graduates of the program with a pseudonym. I am pleased that many graduates take their identity card out of their pocket or wallet and brandish it proudly even when we meet many years later. It is a pleasant experience to be aware of your strengths and to carry them with you wherever you go.

The Second Step—Increasing Love for Others

Contents

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- **Focus: Autonomy, Social Integration, and Assertive Behavior**

After the program participants have completed the first part of the learning process that is devoted to the corrective experience of reframing the past, increasing self-acceptance, focusing on their strengths, and increasing self-love, they are ready to become free to love others. They have now established the belief that they possess good with which they can influence others, and they are ready to enter the social sphere as people who have the ability to negotiate, receive, and influence others as equals. It is important that they become aware of social processes, develop an understanding of the needs of others, their own needs within social contexts and enrich their interpersonal toolbox alongside/together with the experience of capability.

We must first ask: What builds relationships between people? During meetings with my students I usually ask who their best friends are and why? I also ask who they have chosen to sever connection with and why. Their wise answers taught me to identify three major components regarding people's social preferences: One is **pleasant multi-sensory stimulation**—The first impression that we make on others is based on their ability to absorb us with their senses. The sense of sight examines how the person looks regarding his or her beauty, the nature of their body language, posture, mimicry, and facial expressions. Then we then process and analyze what we sensed in terms of pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad. Our sense of hearing reveals the person's tone of voice and content of speech: if it is brief or elaborate, slowly or rapid, is the massage clear or vague, significant or boring. Is the person we are communicating with delivering his massage warmly, and is his or her voice pleasant or disagreeable. Our sense of touch is also important. We assess whether others respect our personal space and if their handshake is firm or hesitant. Our sense of smell is also important and significant during interpersonal contacts. If another person's odor is pleasant it creates positive conditioning, while unpleasant odors create negative conditioning, rejection, and distaste. I tend to interpret our sense of taste as personal style—people tend to connect with others who have common values and lifestyles.

Another important component of social preference that increases interpersonal connections is **mutual provision of needs**. The exchange theory in the social sciences claims that interpersonal relations will develop and intensify when the connection is beneficial to both sides and is dependent on significant and mutual give and take. Providing physical, mental, and social needs is not sufficient. Regulating the provision of needs according to the intensity of the other person's need is extremely important. For example, if a person is determined to let someone know that "he will always be there for him" he may display a connection that is too oppressive. A person who is interested in demonstrating a lot of physical affection for someone else and be perceived as a "warm" friend is liable to quickly become clingy. The intensity of the need must dictate the intensity of the response. People who cannot regulate their responses are likely to be rejected by others because their intentions are good, but their actions are not. The third component that I have identified as important for building connections is **common**

time and experiences. Pleasant multi- sensory stimulation and mutual provision of needs are not sufficient. We meet many pleasant people for short periods of time during our lives, but our connection with them, tend to be brief. Long-term connections often undergo ups and downs. Overcoming difficulties and common experiences enable people to build a common language, memories, and history.

A study we conducted Hozmi and Roth (2009) compared the characteristics of social preferences among adults with complex learning disabilities with those of regular students. We found that adults with complex learning disabilities prefer friends who are physically attractive because they fear that being seen with friends who have physical deformation or neglect their physical appearance will have repercussions upon how society sees them. We also found that while regular students prefer friends who are honest, fair, generous, and interesting, adults with complex learning disabilities prefer friends who function independently in whom they can place confidence and seek support when needed. Many adults with complex learning disabilities live in assisted living frameworks in the community. They have a busy daily schedule filled with various social activities such as trips, interest groups, and lectures. My discussions with my students who live in these frameworks reveal that they sense a strong feeling of belonging. Most of them note that moving into an apartment with friends in the community constitutes a corrective experience that alleviated their former loneliness and detachment. It is evident that they are extremely closely-knit and share a life together that is interwoven with inner codes and language.

The participants in the three-step program are exposed to theories and studies that deal with building interpersonal connections, social acceptance, and social rejection. The focal points of this step in building an identity of capability are the attitudes of the individual and society towards disabilities, the foundations of social psychology, cognitive behavioral psychology, and interpersonal knowledge and skills. As in the previous step, discussions arouse many unsolved issues—some of which will be presented in the description of the components of this step.

Interpersonal Interaction and Its Repercussions Upon an Identity of Capability

Much has been written about the attitudes of society and the prejudices of some people regarding people with disabilities. According to Goffman (1963) prejudices develop when people lack knowledge about others. Lack of knowledge results in anxiety, which in turn leads to avoidance. This creates a negative cycle in which people avoid encountering people with disabilities. The absence of contact further decreases knowledge while increasing anxiety, and avoidance. People unconsciously tend to use defense mechanisms such as idealization and intellectualization in order to justify avoiding other people. They then develop excuses to eliminate the cognitive dissonance and justify their labelling and discriminatory behavior. These excuses serve as the foundation for prejudices.

When people with disabilities avoid taking a substantial part in social circles it intensifies prejudices. People in the wide society are unable to get to know them,

learn about their abilities, or benefit from them or from interpersonal contacts with them. Many adults with complex learning disabilities carry numerous memories of negative social experiences. They therefore tend to perceive themselves as flawed, and demonstrate avoidant behavior, a sense of learned helplessness, and at times social anxiety. These intensify when people with disabilities in general, and people with complex learning disabilities in particular, assimilate social labeling processes and develop "self-stigma". Researchers such as Corrigan (2002) describe the development of self-stigmas as a product of assimilating public stereotypes and external stigmas and transforming them into "self- discrimination". Yanos, Roe and Lysaker (2010) emphasize that a disability-based identity, which is a self-stigma, has numerous and significant impacts upon many different areas of life.

During this stage of the program the participants learn about theories that deal with attitudes in general and attitudes towards people with disabilities in particular. They learn that attitudes have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components and begin with a clear and in-depth process of clarifying their attitude towards society, society's attitude towards them, and—equally important—what the repercussions of these attitudes are upon their self-perception and their place in society. The participants recount instances of bullying by their classmates and their subsequent feelings of helplessness and not belonging, which emerge layer after layer. Some have difficulty letting go of the "child" they once were, and they continue to live with that child and perpetuate it together with the helplessness that enveloped them as children. They are surprised when the facilitator confronts them with the idea that the strengths that once characterized that child are not the same strengths and insights they possess today. They learn about positive social processes that encourage self-representation of persons with disabilities. They begin to see the guiding principles for living translated into practice that promotes positive self-perception that results in an increased quality of life. They assimilate the idea that information provided by policy-makers or other "figures of authority and power" will not change public attitudes regarding people with disabilities. They must be integrated into society with a deep sense that they have the right to take part in the public sphere. It is they who must explain about their disability first-hand when it becomes necessary. They, and only they, experience the challenges of reality and know what they want and expect from society. It is therefore their right and obligation to make this known as individuals or through organizations that advocate for them. Ed Roberts, a social activist in the American Disability Rights Movement, explained this well in his remarks in 1989: "If we have learned anything from the civil rights movement it is that the moment you let others speak for you, you lose."

One of the participants in the program with Williams Syndrome opened with an honest and painful monologue during the meeting that dealt with how society relates to people with disabilities: "I don't like coming here. It's not because the program isn't good or that I don't like the members of the group. I hate coming here because there is a woman who always sits at the bus stop and stares at me. I feel like she is looking me over from head to toe. I feel transparent and hurt and it's unpleasant. People are always looking at me, measuring me, and grading

me. I have to please others and I'm tired of it." When I asked her why she thinks the woman stares at her, she answered: "She's probably asking what is wrong with that poor woman? What's her problem? Is she sick? Is it contagious?" "Excellent!" I answered her. "No one can answer those questions better than you. The next time you see her staring at you at the bus stop, tell her: 'My name is Ruth (pseudonym). What you see is Williams Syndrome. It's not a problem, it's not an illness, and it isn't contagious. Have a nice day.'" She was surprised at the possibility of refusing to surrender to an embarrassing situation and promised to try. The week after the incident she arrived at the meeting smiling and pleased, and reported: "You should have seen the look on her face. Now she's the one who is uncomfortable. I'll be at the bus stop next week, but I'm not sure she'll be there…"

Social Integration and Social Skills

Social integration is an existential need that is an important component in an individual's quality of life. Social belonging can provide security and systems of support, enable social connections, and constitutes an arena for fulfillment and appreciation. Social integration consequently contributes to a person's emotional welfare and mental health. Experiences of social rejection, on the other hand, increase avoidance and introversion, harm self-image, or cause the individual to drop out of frameworks. Negative experiences can also be expressed in frustration towards others that takes the form of outbursts of anger, or the individual may turn their frustration upon themselves and resort to self-injury. Continuous rejection is liable to lead to the development of anxiety, depression, personality disorders, and other difficulties in mental health. Consequently, it is extremely important to increase integration of people with complex learning disabilities within public spheres when they are in school and in other contexts in their adult lives. Social leadership on the part of teachers, counselors, and other authoritative figures play a major role in encouraging social integration. They have the ability to offer children and adults social skills and to create social environments that are characterized by an inclusive climate, acceptance of diversity, and which identifies points of sharing and connection.

Bandura (1986) emphasizes that social abilities are also acquired by learning and imitating. Environments that exhibit anxiety or are judgmental towards difficulties experienced by children with complex learning disabilities arouse a sense of deficiency among the children themselves and their environment, while constructing a reality of "more equal" and "less equal". It is important that authoritative, educational, and other figures focus on the child's hidden capabilities, and create opportunities for these hidden capabilities to be actualized in daily living initiated occasions. Adopting Gardner's multiple intelligences approach (1996) that views people as having a variety of abilities besides cognitive ability will help identify these strengths and create opportunities for actualizing them.

In addition to an inclusive social climate, adults with complex learning disabilities should also be provided with knowledge about social development and with interpersonal skills.

Bandura cites several essential skills necessary for proper social integration:

Verbal Symbolization Capability People's ability to express themselves clearly.

Predicting Results and Planning The ability to understand the rules of the social game and to use proper judgement and awareness that "every deed begins with a thought."

Ability to Imitate and Learn from Others, Self-Control The ability of a child or adult to calm themselves in stressful situations such as hunger or fatigue, and to regulate their emotional responses according to the situation, and

Self-Reflection Capability The individual's ability to offer self-feedback for his or her behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Children and adults with complex learning disabilities are likely to display difficulties in these areas because of neurological or sensory difficulties and not because of lack of a social need. For example, children with dysnomia (difficulty with naming and verbal output) will have trouble expressing themselves clearly, which sometimes arouses impatience, scorn, or ridicule. Children with ADHD often display impulsive patterns of behavior such as interrupting others when they are speaking or playing, and speaking in class before they are called on. They sometimes insult others unintentionally when their inner personal thoughts cause them to "loosen their tongue" before they have time to consider the repercussions of what they say ("Grandma, why do your cheeks look like an accordion?"). All these are liable to lead to social rejection and even rejection by family members. Social behavior requires self-regulation—learning from mistakes and replicating successes. Without self-regulation people will repeat their mistakes. Those who have difficulty learning from their mistakes will be unable to plan their behavior and its results and will consequently make the same mistakes again and again. They will find it difficult to assimilate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral codes in society. The result will likely increase the danger of being rejected by groups of social belonging. Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral regulation are essential skills for social integration.

Social Integration Also Requires "Social Initiative". The ability to initiate contacts, conduct communication and preserve it through various channels, giving, surprising, initiating social events, and so on. Low self- worth and difficulties with organization and planning are liable to exacerbate difficulties in social integration. These difficulties are especially prevalent among children and adults with non-verbal learning disabilities (NVLD)—disabilities that are not in the areas of reading or writing. Their difficulties lie in the areas of arithmetic, spatial perception, problem-solving, executive functioning, and social integration—understanding social clues, intonation, and body language.

For these reasons we can understand that establishing a positive self is not enough to increase social integration. Acquiring social skills is also extremely important for people with complex learning disabilities. Many adults with complex learning disabilities whom I have met over the years noted that they received ther-

apy from emotional therapists to increase their social integration. Acquiring skills is important, but without a social arena that enables practicing and applying these tools the therapist's recommendations remain merely an idea and the person is left with his or her frustration and inevitable loneliness.

The second stage of the program focuses on transmitting social knowledge, creating opportunities for emotional processing, and acquiring skills in an inclusive and supportive social space. The participants learn about causes and characteristics of social integration among people with complex learning disabilities. They assimilate the importance of social initiative, self-regulation, reflection, imitation and refining their tools of expression. They learn that hate need not burn and love need not suffocate. They share past experiences and learn and grow from them. The social space of the group enables them to practice these tools under the guidance of the facilitator.

One of the learning groups included a participant named Ron (pseudonym) who tended to speak in a loud voice. His behavior aroused quiet objection among members of the group, and they approached me during the break and spoke to me about it. I spoke with Ron during the break and asked him if he had experienced hearing problems when he was a child. He explained that he had undergone a procedure to insert typanostomy tubes in his ears and asked: "Why do you ask?" I explained that I enjoyed listening to what he had to say, but that sometimes he spoke very loudly and I wanted to know if it was because he was enthusiastic about the discussion or because of some other reason. Ron replied that he was not aware of this and apologized. I answered that there was no need to apologize, since he hadn't done anything wrong. We agreed that I would hold an imaginary "volume control button" in my hand and that whenever he raised his voice I would signal him to turn down the volume. We continued to do this for an entire year. At the end of the program the group told Ron that they enjoyed listening to him speak. Ron replied that he had been involved in a relationship for the past two months. "I didn't know why I didn't succeed in cultivating a relationship with a partner. After we talked about how important it was to regulate social contacts I understood my problem. I didn't know how to control my voice, and I would go out for a cup of coffee with girls and talk in a loud voice—even about personal matters…" This is an example of the power of the group as a social space that enables new interpersonal encounters, learning, and corrective social experiences. The power of groups in general and in the program in particular will be described in the next chapter.

Developing the Ability of Assertive Communication

Communication is described in this book as one of the ten important components necessary for establishing an identity of capability. It connects people and helps to develop mutual social ties. It is used to convey needs, accumulate, transfer, and share knowledge, and express opinions. People who choose not to communicate with their environment exclude themselves from circles of social belonging and endanger the provision of their existential needs. On the other hand

people who are interested in social connections but lack tools for pursuing it experience great frustration. Studies reveal a connection between lack of ability to express oneself and the display of challenging behavior. Lack of ability to express oneself is not only the product of an absence of neurological, mechanical, or muscular ability. People sometimes live in environments in which expression of emotions, wishes, or opinions is illegitimate. Sometimes they themselves view it as illegitimate, such as in cases in which they feel an obligation of gratitude to the society that "agrees" to include them. These realities create layers of intense frustration and impair the quality of life.

Communication is a basic and essential component in social life, but it is nevertheless extremely complex. It requires people to transmit ideas and thoughts by means of verbal symbolism within a reasonable amount of time. It includes many components—each of which is extremely significant in transmitting the message and has repercussions on the manner in which it will be received. The length of the message, mimicry, body language, manner of dress, tone of voice, facial color (pale or blushing), the distance between the speakers, perspiration, the rate at which the speaker breathes, the timing and the medium by which the message was transmitted—all have meaning. Clear communication decreases the chances for errors, mistakes, or conflicts to develop.

Many adults with complex learning disabilities are communicative and have connections with many family members and friends. However, many report numerous conflict situations because they have difficulty expressing themselves clearly. Sometimes the miscommunication is due to impatience and inability to retain attention for a lengthy period of time, or to sensory difficulties that hamper interpersonal interaction ("He sat and talked to me, but he shouted and he had an irritating voice. It bothered me, so I shouted for him to be quiet…").

Some people know exactly what they want to say but sense that revealing things is liable to decrease their value as others perceive it (I know that if I tell my girlfriend what I feel she'll think I'm not manly enough"). Developing assertive ability is an important component in establishing an identity of capability. Assertiveness is the ability to express one's opinion, wishes, and needs in a comfortable and confident manner while respecting others' wishes and needs as well. Assertiveness alleviates social anxiety and enables an individual to exert his or her rights while feeling equal and integrated in social space (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Assertiveness develops among people with a positive self-image who feel self-confident and believe they should "live and let live." Some people adopt passive patterns of communication because they fear that if they express their opinion they will come to harm. Others display verbal aggression, which is usually a product of continuous stress and a sense that life is an endless war, and in war the rule is: "If someone comes to kill you, you must kill them first." Assertive conduct includes the ability to represent oneself in society, to say "no" when one is not interested or does not agree to something, to demand privacy, to offer constructive criticism, accept compliments, and to initiate, conduct, and end conversations. Assertive people also preserve their basic right to "not know everything" and "not understand everything". They are not afraid to say "I don't know." Such a statement is extremely threatening for people with complex learning dis-

abilities because it reminds them of school experiences in which it was forbidden not to know something. They need privacy in their lives, but sense that it is not legitimate because there are always supportive figures present in their lives—even as adults—a reality that blurs their private space. How can they disagree with the person who guides and supports them? How is it possible to protest when the tendency is to please others in order to be accepted? How can individuals present themselves to others confidently when they are not satisfied with themselves?

Developing assertiveness is even more important for people with disabilities—including those with learning disabilities. They are often deliberately or inadvertently denied natural human rights when society decides that they are "less equal" or unqualified to make proper decisions. They are often forced to advocate for themselves—a term that implies that they must represent themselves and present their own interests attitudes, and needs. They must be on guard to ensure that their rights are realized and object when they sense they are being discriminated against. There were candidates for the course "Identity of Capability" which they wished to join, but decided to back down because they were worried about how their employer would react. Others hesitate to ask for adaptations in various contexts that will enable them to function optimally. I remember that during one of our meetings a woman named Judy (pseudonym) shared difficulties she was having at work with the other members of the group. She emphasized that she liked her place of work, but felt pressured and stressed throughout the day. When she was asked what the main cause was, she explained: "My memory isn't very good. Each morning my boss tells me what to do that day. I listen to him but after a minute I don't remember anything he said. I'm stressed all day because I'm afraid I'll forget to do something he asked. How can I work like this? It takes all the fun out of it." The members of the group suggested that she ask her boss to write down all the tasks he wants her to do each day. She objected "I can't do that! He's a good person, but if he knows I have learning disabilities and problems with my memory he'll fire me." At this point I permitted myself to intervene in the discussion and said that the issue here was not problems with memory or a learning disability. The focal point was the responsibility she displayed and her desire to do everything she was asked to do every day. I suggested that instead of going to her employer and telling him about her difficulties, she should tell him that she is extremely responsible and wants to do everything she is supposed to, and wants him to write everything down briefly so that she will be sure to remember everything. Judy was surprised at this direction of thinking and promised to try. Evidently she had difficulty demonstrating assertive behavior because she perceived her learning disability as being her main attribute rather than her responsible and diligent personality. For these reasons it is important to transmit skills in assertive conduct to adults with learning disabilities.

Establishing a positive self-worth and possessing communication skills are a major and important tool for becoming socially integrated as equals. Consequently, the students in the three-step program learn about communication and its components at this stage of the program. They learn about different styles of communication, and that "tact" implies saying the right thing to the right person in the right amount and the right context. They also learn to identify diffi-

culties in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral regulation—including communication. They develop awareness of the importance of regulating their voice. During the learning process some discover that they tend to whisper—a pattern that has become embedded in some people because they sometimes fear they will say something that is incorrect or imprecise. Some compel themselves to remain silent in social situations because of unpleasant situations and traumas they experienced previously in social frameworks or contexts. Studying assertive communication hones their understanding that restraint harms their quality of life, while, on the other hand, "wars" create enemies. They learn that sometimes their intrapersonal wars are projected onto others and are transformed into interpersonal conflicts. They learn that people who live at peace with themselves and are characterized by self-acceptance and positive self-worth can conduct themselves in a more assertive manner and in doing so, promote their self- determination, personal goals, and freedom.

An important and special portion of the program is devoted to developing the ability of assertiveness and to the understanding that it is a major and important tool for coping with internal and interpersonal conflicts. Members of the group also voluntarily take part in presenting a personal topic. They implement everything they learn within the group sphere that the program provides. Doubt and embarrassment begin to be replaced by conduct that is a little more assertive. They implement this tool outside the program as well, and share their successes and difficulties in their process of growth as adults who are demanding their right to a life of respect, equality, and self-determination.

The Third Step—Vision, Happiness, and Fulfillment

Contents

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- **Focus: Optimism, a Goal—Focused Approach, and Responsibility**

After the participants have increased self-acceptance, broadened their knowledge of social psychology, and established their ability to conduct themselves assertively they are ready to crystalize a personal vision and work to fulfill it. This is not an easy task. Adults with complex learning disabilities often tend to designate existential goals that are not compatible with their capabilities. In many cases their personal vision is not theirs, but an echo of environmental expectations or a surrender to social models of success. The objective of this part of the program is to enable the participants to listen to their inner voice and desires, view them as legitimate, and assess whether they are compatible to their capabilities. The message that is intertwined in building a personal vision is that as long as a person does not damage himself, herself, or others and as long as the vision is compatible with their capabilities and offers them a challenge—there is nothing to prevent them from designating goals and objectives and striving to fulfill them. Actualizing the vision requires autonomy, assuming personal responsibility, planning and self-management abilities, and decision-making skills. These are important skills which many adults with complex learning disabilities have experienced partially.

The third and final step of the program is devoted to understanding the roots of human happiness and to personally assessing how each participant can increase happiness in his or her life. The discussion focuses on four main components: human happiness and positive psychology, intimate relationships and partnerships, the working world, and, finally, decision-making processes.

Human Happiness and Positive Psychology

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States said: "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." In the Book of Deuteronomy G-d commanded people to "choose life." The Bible teaches us that the choice to live is to choose good and to do good. Man is an intelligent creature who is expected to distinguish between good and bad as he understands it. In his book "Childhood and Society (Erikson, 1950) cites Sigmund Freud's laconic answer to the question of what people need to do to live an honorable life of choice: "To love and to work." These two words that express the motive and meaning of life are love—being, and work—doing. To love and work implies enjoying the good in "being" while at the same time "doing"—to act and create, to fulfill, and sense satisfaction. Viktor Frankl viewed the meaning of existence and self-transcendence as the essence of happiness. Ben Shahar (2007) views happiness as an experience that combines enjoyment and meaning. He notes that doing is important in life but must be within an expanse and at a rate that will enable enjoyment from the process itself.

People strive for happiness, but do not always know where it lies or how to attain it. The Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus viewed happiness as the product of Man's interpretation of the way he or she views reality. In September, 2009 the BBC published an article entitled: "Depression Looms as Global Crisis" which described the rise in depression throughout the world. Martin Seligman and his

colleague Csikszentmihalyi (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) wrote an article which criticized the medical establishment for focusing on mental illnesses and the symptoms that characterize them rather than focusing on the strengths of individuals and factors that could increase mental welfare and human happiness. Their approach emphasizes how important it is for people to focus on the good that surrounds them and to become aware of it. They emphasized that people must learn to forgive and forget and to free themselves of negative feelings such as anger and animosity. Their article generated a dialogue about positive psychology that is directed towards the possible prevention of mental illness and its translation into practice that will promote quality of life. Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six main characteristics for increasing the individual's happiness:

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge**—Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective.
2. **Courage**—Bravery (proactivity in threatening situations), persistence, integrity, and vitality
3. **Humanity**—Love, kindness, and social intelligence
4. **Justice**—Citizenship, fairness, and leadership
5. **Temperance**—Forgiveness and mercy, humility, prudence, and self-regulation
6. **Transcendence**—Appreciation of beauty and excellence in life, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality

These traits reveal that human happiness is a combination of a desire to know, focus on strengths and good, interpersonal connections and a proactive approach to life.

Happiness is not only a sense of gratitude. In our striving for a meaningful life one of the major components is the expectation to act and the anticipation of actualizing expectations. We expect to complete our studies successfully, build homes and raise offspring and to see our children's happiness. We spend many decades working while planning our old age of choice and fulfillment. Something important is lacking in our lives if we have no expectations or longings. Each time people fulfill a dream in their lives they feel satisfaction, but with the fulfillment something is lost and they must designate new objectives. We live from vision to vision and from expectation to expectation. I see happiness as a product of four components: vision + abilities + motivation = fulfilment. These four components of human happiness are nourished by each other and nourish each other.

Vision Refers to the individual's ambitions. It is the force that motivates the individual to live as well as a product of fulfillment that the person experienced previously. Success urges us to cope with additional challenges that are slightly more complex. On the other hand, failures are liable to result not only in avoiding taking action, but from dreaming and striving as well.

Abilities People must assess their vision according to their abilities. They must learn to acquire the necessary skills that will enable them to fulfill it.

Motivation A vision and capabilities without motivation and a pro-active approach will not lead to fulfillment. The person must be aware of the benefits he or she and others will gain by fulfilling the vision. Sometimes the person will need external motivation if it is available, but optimally it is important that external motivation will be transformed into internal motivation. As convenient as it may be, external motivation is liable to turn into dependence and cloud personal welfare and happiness. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Yitzhak said: If a person tells you 'I have labored but did not succeed, don't believe him. If he says: "I did not labor, but I succeeded", don't believe him. If he says "I have labored and I have succeeded"—believe him. (Megillah 6b) This tractate implies that fulfillment is a product of labor and willingness to mobilize oneself to fulfill the vision step by step. These are important components of human happiness.

Fulfillment Fulfillment is not only realizing the objective. When a person succeeds in transforming a vision into reality, he or she receives an additional gift of knowing that they are capable of dreaming and fulfilling their dream. Fulfillment must be the motivating factor for the next vision in a continuous cycle, because designating objectives and striving to attain them are no less important than fulfilling them. Accordingly, in order to attain a meaningful life a person must create a continuous cycle of existence from vision to capabilities to motivation to fulfillment that leads to a new vision—thus repeating the process.

The three-step program of the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" is directed towards forming a vision, acknowledging abilities, increasing motivation and striving for fulfillment. After the participants have accumulated knowledge and shared their wisdom, focused on the good within themselves and within others they are better prepared to develop hope, designate objectives that suit their capabilities and to adhere to them. Most importantly, they are ready to demonstrate true love of themselves and of others, to contribute, and to perceive themselves as being worthy of receiving from others. This step in the road to developing an identity of capability helps them to acquire skills for establishing a personal vision that is compatible with the "identity card" they formulated at the end of the first step of the program. They learn to forgive and to reconcile with themselves. They focus on the good that surrounds them and develop the ability to pause and enjoy the good things that are hidden in the "here and now". They look towards the future with hope and dare to leave their comfort zone knowing that it is an essential condition for growth. They are encouraged to experience small successes in their lives and hope that these successes will urge them towards ambitions and additional successes. This part of the program focuses on love and the working world—which Freud designated as the key to human happiness. When he spoke about love, Freud was referring to erotic love of a partner, but the program deals with any close love that provides an answer to people's central need to love and to feel loved. Freud refers to work as a tool for economic existence, but it seems to me that any creativity in people's lives regardless of whether it is within the framework of a hobby or voluntary social action—is work.

Intimate Relationships and Complex Learning Disabilities

The basic theory presented in this book is that increasing self-awareness, forming and crystalizing an identity, and illuminating people's strengths are the main key to a person's chances for social integration and building a full and satisfying partnership.

"Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of ***being loved***, rather than that of ***loving***, of one's capacity to love. They know that love is a central factor in people's lives, but it never occurs to them that it is a skill that needs to be acquired and practiced." These words are the essence of a book by the humanist psychologist Erich Fromm which was published a little over a decade after World War II when the world was exposed to blazing hate and to its repercussions. It is no wonder that Fromm was forced to deal with the issue of love, and concluded that a person who does not truly love himself will have difficulty truly loving others.

The psychologist Eric Erikson, who proposed his developmental theory for the life cycle, also viewed positive identity as being the key to building intimate relationships and a life of labor and significance. Both Fromm and Erikson understood that social existence in general and interpersonal relationships in particular are based on "give and take". Consequently, the fundamental condition for cultivating relationships is for a person to believe that he or she possesses a bagful of inborn traits, capabilities, and talents that others need. Building an intimate relationship with a significant person is only possible after first "building an intimate relationship with oneself".

Building self-value and positive identity are the product of a person's ability to believe in the environment and in himself or herself, to experience autonomy, and successes in life, and to exist in environments that encourage creativity and strengthen the individual in all areas. People with disabilities are often perceived as needing figures to accompany and support them throughout their lives. In many cases they are "over-protected" from early childhood by caregivers. This is particularly true of people with cognitive disabilities and complex physical disabilities. The experience of living with a deficiency is liable to be more intense for people with physical disabilities. Research has shown that the difficulty of meeting the social expectations of "ideal beauty" places a heavy emotional burden on people—particularly women. People with mental illness experience a severe stigma on the part of the environment which often develops into a self-stigma. People on the autism spectrum desire an intimate relationship, but frequently cope with difficulties in areas such as communication, sensory aspects in intimate space, and misunderstanding social codes.

Adults with complex ADHD have difficulty retaining partnerships due to issues of incompatibility of their "personal rhythm" ("I'm fire and she's water. I like to run and she likes to be at home."), distractions while communicating with their partner in intimate moments, and difficulty completing tasks or request. People with ADHD have a tendency towards impulsive responses, which can result in hurt feelings that can accumulate. They have a need for constant change

and excitement, and financial difficulties can also arise ("When poverty knocks at the door, love flies out the window".

Many parents of adults with disabilities display ambivalence towards the possibility that their son or daughter will cultivate a relationship and raise children. On one hand, like all parents they long for continuity, while on the other hand they are fearful of the repercussions of their child's possible relationship upon their lives and the intensive support that they will need to offer the couple.

Relationships between two people with disabilities are complex—particularly among people with cognitive disabilities. In such cases, the relationship is not only between two individuals, but between the two families. I recall a meeting about "intimate relationships and disabilities" with parents of children with disabilities in which one of the fathers explained that he had to separate between his daughter, who had a complex learning disability, and her fiancé when he understood that his parents were not cooperating financially or idealistically in creating an infrastructure for the couple. He related that he felt guilty about his decision. Without dwelling on the details regarding his decision, the story illustrates the complexity that parents experience when this issue arises. The need for support of couples with disabilities resulted in the development of various programs within organizations to create a system of guidance and consultation for couples with complex disabilities to broaden the support that the couples and their families need.

The awakening of movements for self-advocacy of persons with disabilities also aroused demands for the right to self-fulfillment in the area of intimate relationships. Section 23 of the U.N. International Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities deals with the right to "respect, home, and the family". The section states that "States Parties shall take effective and appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in all matters relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships on an equal basis with others, so as to ensure that the right of all persons with disabilities who are of marriageable age to marry and to found a family on the basis of free and full consent of the intending spouses is recognized". The section also describes the right of parenthood.

However, merely describing rights is not enough. Parents, educators, and service-providers are obligated to enhance the identity and self-value of persons with disabilities, to increase their self-love, recognize their self-value, promote social integration, and offer them tools for empowering internal and interpersonal dialogue. Unfortunately a person's diagnosis often becomes the focal point of their identity. During a seminar that we held at the academy for adults with disabilities one of the participants who used a wheelchair said that she was determined to meet a person who can walk. When asked about the basis for her decision, she explained: "I deserve more." This remark implies that she wished to marry a person whom she perceived as being of greater value than her-self.

Relationships between people with and without disabilities are not a means to normalizing one's self. Intimate relationships are made possible when people reach a point when they believe in the good that lies within them and are interested in sharing that good with and for someone else. It is a partnership between two people who are equal but different.

In their book "Intimate Relationships—A Journey to Equality" Bergman and Cohn define intimacy as the individual's ability to expose his or her abilities and weaknesses to others, to feel safe, while at the same time experiencing containment. A person with a disability who has a positive self-worth will develop intimate relationships based on a sense of entitlement rather than pity.

The Book of Genesis states: "That *is* why a *man leaves his father and mother* and *is* united *to his* wife, and they become one flesh." The ability to "leave the parents' nest" is a condition for adhering to a partner. The American psychiatrist Murray Bowen (1978) coined the term "differentiation of the individual" and viewed it as an important component for establishing relations with a partner. According to Bowen, differentiation is attained when the individual develops a separate identity from that of his or her parents, knows how to balance between emotions and thoughts and between being together and apart, demonstrates the ability to calm down in stress situations, displays communication abilities, establishes objectives and is able to deal with frustrations while fulfilling those objectives as an adult.

Intimate relationship***s*** involve deep friendship and strong partnership. As in any situation of building cooperation, both people need to be aware of the common objective, what resources they intend to invest in the partnership, and what they expect from their partner. It is therefore clear that until a person crystalizes an identity of capability and is aware of his or her personal resources, needs, and values they wish to preserve, it will be difficult for them to meet a partner, listen, be listened to, negotiate, to build, and to be built.

Differentiation and the ability to conduct an intimate relationship are the foundations for a partnership, but they are not sufficient. Partnership is an art or regulation. It demands sharing material and emotional resources, knowing when to exercise restraint and when to give, when to open one's heart or to refrain from openness, when to hold on and when to let go, when to compromise and when to relent, when to enjoy being together and when to enjoy being alone. The partnership unit and shared home require skills of planning, managing a budget, organization, and making decisions. People with complex learning disabilities—particularly those who also have ADHD—will need various levels of continuous external support in order to actualize their love. This is a paradox since even if the couple feels close and builds intimacy, their space is not totally intimate.

Many of the adults with complex learning disabilities that I meet sense that their level of differentiation indicates that they are not yet ready for an intimate relationship and that they are not interested in a partnership at this stage of their lives. At the same time, they feel guilty that they cannot offer their parents this pleasure. Discussing this topic during the program enables the participants to assess to what degree they feel they are ready for a partnership and how differentiated they feel. Participants often ask me if I feel they are suitable to live with another person. I usually answer them half facetiously and half seriously: "Have you gotten married to yourself yet?".

The participants in the program learn theories about partnerships and families. They receive tools for building and retaining a partnership. They ask questions and litigate actual issues such as "What to tell and when?" Some discover

that the person sitting next to them arouses their interest and that they have a desire to get to know them better or even to pursue a partnership (This has happened occasionally during the program). The content of the program also deals with happiness and partnerships. A majority of the participants sense that despite the fact that a partnership is lacking in their lives, they are relatively happy. People who are married expect to receive what they need from their spouse, whereas single adults report that they sense intense belonging to their original families. Those who live in supportive housing with friends in the community sense that this is a type of family that provides them with their physiological, emotional, and social needs. Some resolve continuous cognitive dissonance ("If people my age need intimate relationships, than why don't I want one?") in light of the fact that partnerships require differentiation, I remember that Marty (pseudonym) said: "People are always pressuring me to get married, and that makes me feel stressed. I feel it's not time yet, but until now I never knew how to explain why. Now I know that it requires differentiation. I'm not there yet."

Partnerships are a solution for personal—mental needs for those who want them and feel ready. Those who do not feel ready to share their lives with another person view being single as a legitimate personal status and feel a sense of relief.

The first guideline for living that the participants learned in the first step of acquiring an identity of capability was that "Failures are an excellent school for living". At this stage of the program—at the end of the third step—they learn that every person they meet while dating is important, and that there are no failures in dating—only compatibility. They consequently eliminate statements from their personal lexicon such as "She threw me out dumped me?" or vise versa. Instead, they learn that every unsuccessful attempt is still an experience that will render the person more experience and better prepared for future meetings. Every dating experience enhances mental strengths to dare to leave their comfort zone. These encounters offer an opportunity to learn and draw conclusions from unsuccessful meetings and focus expectations regarding future partners.

Fromm said: "Love is not a feeling. It is an art that is learned." Domestic, educational, social, and service-providing environments should therefore focus on reflecting people's strengths and avoid criticism about their difficulties—particularly criticism regarding their disability. Environments that encourage them to recognize their strengths and place them at the heart of their identity will enable them to approach these interpersonal meetings for building intimate relationships as people who can give and not merely as recipients. Increasing autonomy and choice in their lives will enable them to choose to live with a partner if they wish and if they feel they are ready.

The Working World and Complex Learning Disabilities

Special education institutions or "small classrooms" in mainstream schools constitute a predominantly sheltered and protective framework where the educational path is clearly outlined. The transition to adulthood at the completion of school presents a difficult, significant crisis since many students who studied in

these frameworks have difficulty outlining their future path for continued growth and existence. Parents often lack knowledge about their children's possibilities for employment. The path begins with a search for professional training courses, but few programs are adapted to adults with complex learning disabilities. Some of these adults work at odd jobs that do not always suit their abilities or expectations. Others remain unemployed for long periods of time until they formulate a future occupational orientation that refers their subjective perception of their professional future. Future orientation arouses their motivation for change that they will venture to try. They are sometimes offered opportunities for professional rehabilitation, but they view this as merely intensifying the stigma, or a renewed confrontation with their complex learning disability. Those who were integrated into regular secondary school observe the growth processes of their "friends" from school, and the social comparison arouses anxiety. ("everyone has found their direction in life, but what will become of me?") Many of my students note that crystalizing an identity of capability is very important, but it is also important for them to establish a professional identity ("My brother is an attorney. He always says: 'I studied law, but I don't work as an attorney". It doesn't matter if I don't work in the same profession I study. I just want some sort of diploma."

Work is more than merely a framework that offers people a financial existence. We devote many of our waking hours to performing jobs and tasks for which we are responsible. It is my understanding that most people look for places of work that meet their physical needs (spatially and sensory adapted environments), emotional needs (financial, personal, and self-security, offer opportunities for self-fulfillment), and social needs (respect and admiration from colleagues and superiors, promote feelings of belonging and of being needed, significance, and advancement).

Most adults with learning disabilities I meet are employed and are satisfied with the type of work they do, but for adults with complex learning disabilities and attention deficit the situation in the work market is complex in numerous aspects. Many qualifications for employment include skills that people acquire in school such as teamwork, social integration, understanding instructions, organization and planning, personal responsibility, being productive, the ability to adhere to predetermined schedules, understanding hierarchic organizational structure, and accepting authority. The need to deal with these skills surfaces when people reach working age. Adults with complex learning disabilities and ADHD often have difficulties with reading, arithmetic, memory, and understanding instructions. They may have additional difficulties such as being distracted and having trouble completing tasks, forgetfulness, difficulty delivering things due to lack of spatial orientation, lack of ability to organize time and a tendency towards impulsiveness that infringes on interpersonal relations with superiors, colleagues, and clients. Their perception of themselves as weak students arouses anxiety about the possibility of becoming integrated into professional training.

In addition to these barriers to entering the working world, they must also contend with negative attitudes on the part of employers which further decrease their possibilities for employment.

Unsuccessful experiences during childhood and adolescence and frequent criticism from colleagues and figures of authority often lead to the development of negative thought patterns that also increase avoidance of the aspect of employment in the lives of adults with complex learning disabilities. This does not imply that the person does not work. Many express frustration that they have no possibility of advancement in their place of work, while at the same time fear any possible promotion. Karen (pseudonym), a 33-year old woman with a complex learning disability, expressed frustration for a long time that her job in a coffee shop was limited to clearing tables. During one of our meetings she explained that her boss had suggested that she begin operating the cash register. When I congratulated her she lowered her gaze and said, "I won't accept that. How can I operate the cash register when I don't know arithmetic?" The members of the group assured her that operating the cash register would save her having to calculate sums by heart and recommended that she ask her boss for a trial period during which she would be trained by other experienced workers. She accepted the idea and discovered that her basic knowledge of arithmetic was enough to operate a cash register.

Describing the opportunities and barriers that confront adults with complex learning disabilities in the working world demonstrates the importance of an identity of capability for finding areas of employment that suit their personal capabilities and areas of interest. Adults with an identity of capability can market themselves as service providers, feel confident with being part of a staff, and conduct themselves assertively. An identity of capability ensures that they extract their rights and helps them build a possible path for advancement in their place of work or ***to seek*** alternatives. Assertiveness is also required when dealing with "professional rehabilitation workers" to whom they sometimes hesitate to report their employment expectations or their desire to change their place of work believing that "one bird in hand is worth two in the bush" and that "no one is waiting for us to come and work for them." Lucky people find work that is also their hobby. Those who are able to earn a living without sensing that work constitutes fulfillment but are hesitant to change jobs can gain satisfaction by enriching their leisure time. This reminds me of a remark made to me by a former colleague at the organization where I worked after completing my studies. As I left the office I remarked to him: "That's it, another day is over," and he answered me bright-eyed without hesitation:" Another evening is beginning! Up till now I've been doing what I have to do. Now I'm going to do what I want to do and love to do!" I learned something from him.

This part of the program focuses on adding knowledge about the role of work in peoples lives. It provides tools for thoroughly clarifying personal work preferences, choosing an occupation, and how to market oneself to get a job.

It also enables honest discussion about the barriers people feel in their places of work. The participants learn possible strategies for coping with these barriers and about their rights as workers that are anchored in labor laws. Some have had long-term difficulties at work that stem from their desire to please others, which they spoke about for the first time ("I worked in a hotel kitchen for 17 h a day. No one else worked like that, but I wanted to show that I was a good worker. Even-

tually I collapsed.") or their attempts to initiate something that usually ended in criticism ("I work in the baking goods area. I tried to help a customer who wanted to know where the flour was located and I was scolded by the supervisor.") They consult with other group members and often emerge empowered and equipped with tools to defend themselves in their places of work. They increase and establish their feelings that they are hired because someone believes in their ability to provide a service, has chosen to receive their services, and is willing to pay them for their help and contribution.

Decision-Making Processes

Living independently and a sense of capability involve making numerous decisions in our daily lives. Some of these are macro decisions regarding health issues, large purchases, moving to a new home, or strengthening or severing connections with other people. Others are smaller, everyday decisions such as what to wear, eat, say, whether to be insulted and when to extract judgement and when to relent. Decision-making is a learned skill. During the socialization process people are transformed from helpless creatures to intelligent beings who are capable of conducting their lives and making decisions. At first decisions are made for us, later they are made together with us, and eventually we are expected to make decisions for ourselves and for others.

Decision-making processes are complex. They require good judgement—the ability to distinguish between good and bad, exhibiting good judgement, the ability to weight our choices and assess their repercussions. Making decisions also requires the ability to set priorities, to distinguish between wants and needs, to plan, and to manage risks. Any decision-making process involves relinquishing something. When a person agrees to take medication he or she also chooses to deal with the side effects in order to alleviate the original problem. When choosing to buy an apartment a person must part with his or her money. A person wishing to marry must obligate himself or herself to fidelity and to forego other partnerships. Making decisions in our lives is an endless journey of assessing costs and benefits.

Freedom to choose increases our sense of control in our lives. Those who are denied freedom of choice feel suppressed. There is also a third group of people who were educated to understand that they are not capable of making certain choices by themselves. This may be due to objective difficulties such as dyscalculia, attention deficit disorder, or impulsiveness. They learned through trial and error that in many cases they are incapable of making proper choices, and have transformed that difficulty into a subjective negative belief and learned helplessness. A large part of the difficulty in making decisions stems from over-protectiveness and the fear of "expected failure" on the part of guiding figures because of the lack of availability of accessible cognitive knowledge that would enable better understanding of issues in making wise decisions. Some adults with complex learning disabilities report difficulty with delaying satisfaction and their tendency to fall into traps set by various marketing factors.

In most countries parents retain natural guardianship of their children until they reach the age of 18—at which point they become responsible for themselves. However, the Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law of 1962 in Israel states that a person who is incapable of dealing with his or her own matters must have a guardian appointed for them. The intention of the law is to protect those who are incapable of taking care of their own matters, it is liable in many cases to cause the person intense frustration due to the infringement on his or her freedom to define needs and solutions needed to ensure quality of life.

Section 12.3 of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that "States Parties shall take appropriate measures to provide access by persons with disabilities to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity". A model has consequently been developed in many countries such as Sweden, Canada, and Israel to supported decision-making. Decision supporters are committed to avoiding making decisions for their wards.

A large number of adults with complex learning disabilities have guardians who were appointed to manage their financial affairs, and in some cases the guardian is also responsible for making decisions regarding their physical health and medical care. If person has no guardian and live in supported living arrangements in the community, the parents appoint one of the members of the staff to exercise power of attorney to help the person manage his or her financial issues and make economic decisions.

Unfortunately, scant attention has been paid to the need for structured transmission of skills to people who are aided by these services. In order to enable people with complex learning disabilities to benefit from supported decision making it is essential to provide them with knowledge and skills for making decisions in many walks of life—particularly those pertaining to their bodies and their money. The law defines the role of decision-supporters as that of helping people locate information and making it accessible, but I am referring here to the need of a structured program that will familiarize them with relevant knowledge. They will thus become empowered partners in supported decision making processes. Such basic training should include relevant information—particularly in areas pertaining to becoming familiar with their bodies and health care as well as financial management. They should learn about legislation and rights regarding their quality of life, acquire skills, and practice decision making.

The subject of decision making is the final topic in the three—step program for building an identity of capability. Processes of developing insights or expanding knowledge are not sufficient. The participants are now required to use the knowledge they have acquired to make significant decisions regarding how they will continue their lives. They must learn from the past, look at the present, and plan the future. It will be a future in which they are empowered and ready to actualize their abilities, in which they are aware of their rights and are equipped with more tools for fulfilling their obligations. It is a future in which they dare to leave their comfort zone and increase control and choice in their lives.

The participants in the program become familiar with decision-making models and apply them. They learn to identify their characteristic patterns of decision-making—whether they judge carefully, act impulsively, or hesitate to make

decisions. They learn that before making any decision they must learn the issue thoroughly, create alternatives, and assess cost versus benefit for each of the alternatives. They must define major goals and measurable objectives that will enable them to assess the wisdom of their decision.

A person's legal capacity is revoked if he or she is incapable of assuming responsibility regarding their body and their money. Graduates of the program are consequently offered additional study programs that include Introduction to Law, Introduction to Medicine and Health, and Introduction to Economics and Financial Management. The course "Introduction to Law" provides knowledge and understanding of the rule of law and familiarizes the students with laws and conventions in which their rights are anchored. The course "Introduction to Medicine and Health" includes basic anatomy and physiology, basic concepts in medicine, pharmacy, nutrition, hygiene, preventive medicine, and health care systems. The ***financial management program*** provides students with basic concepts in economics, understanding of the banking world, various types of insurance and exacting insurance rights, smart consumerism, and financial issues pertaining to the working world.

The Working Model for Groups in "Identity of Capability– Introduction to Practical Psychology"

The principles and contents that form the basis for the three–step program are presented in the course "Identity of Capability–Introduction to Practical Psychology". The first part of the name of the course: "Identity of Capability" demonstrates that fulfilling the ambition for a full and satisfying life requires self-awareness of one's qualities and a positive self-image. It is an art that people must acquire and refine throughout the cycle of their lives. Each age has its challenges and infrastructures that people must create and develop for the next stages of their lives. The second part of the name of the course "Introduction to Practical Psychology" refers to the academic content-tools from the world of psychology that the participants study in order to enhance their personal empowerment and to improve their quality of life.

The objective of the program is to offer the participants a significant learning experience. The main curriculum was formed through a dialogue with the participants. It contains topics that are relevant to the challenges they experience in their lives. The program was first launched in 2002 and constituted a breakthrough that emphasized four guiding principles:

The first principle is integration and equality. The value of equality is exemplified by the integration of students who are not from the mainstream of academic studies within a non-academic-degree track. The second principle is cognitive accessibility and adaptation. Cognitive accessibility implies presenting academic study materials in simple language and creating a learning environment that is adapted to the students. These adaptations are also cultural. The third principle-Utilizing the power of the group – creates a social sphere that enables a "corrective social learning experience" and an arena for experimenting, processing feelings, and deepening and applying the study material.

The fourth principle–Empowering Teaching–is the use of academic instruction as a tool for personal growth and for building an identity of capability among students with complex learning disabilities. Empowering learning does not focus only on the learning contents. It relates to the student's emotional, behavioral, and functional aspects as well.

The program offers participants the possibility to "internally redesign themselves within a protected space". It empowers their souls and crystalizes their identity within a social space that increases their sense of social integration and inclusion. The program strives to offer its graduates a strong basis for building their future and their social and occupational integration. This section will describe the essence of the program's guiding principles in detail.

Integration and Striving for Equality in Academic Studies

Contents

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I felt that a program for self-empowerment should not take the form of a therapy group. On the other hand, I knew that teaching the contents in the form of a course was liable to arouse anxiety among the participants. Many of the people I met expressed frustration and regret at the lack of academic study tracks that are adapted to adults with complex learning disabilities, but at the same time they rejected the practical idea of studies due to anxiety over assignments and examinations and viewed it as "something that was due to fail from the start."

The principle of normalization that developed in the United States and Scandinavia at the end of the 1960s determined that people with disabilities have the right to become integrated into the communities in which they live as people who can choose who enjoy equal rights and live in an environment that is least restrictive/as unrestricted as possible. This principle accentuated the need for continuous services in various walks of life—including education that would be suitable to the abilities of persons with disabilities (Wolfensberger 1972). Section 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also emphasizes that "States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning… with reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements."

One of the guiding principles mentioned earlier in this book is that "Life is not black and white." The human population is not divided into those with ability to learn and those without. Persons with complex learning disabilities undoubtedly have the ability to learn, but they require an adapted academic space to actualize their ability. In many elementary and secondary schools these students are integrated within a spectrum of various frameworks ranging from special education classes or small classrooms within the mainstream school system to total integration within regular classrooms. It was natural to continue this spectrum in the academic world. This is how the Inclusive University program began, which focuses on the course "Identity of Capability – Introduction to Practical Psychology."

Since its establishment the "Inclusive University" program has grown and developed through constant dialogue with the students who participate in it. They are the ones who enjoy this service, advise about the needs that develop, and serve as a "compass" that points to accurate solutions. The vision of the inclusive university is to provide a wide variety of academic programs and courses that are cognitively accessible. Some of the courses offer credit towards an academic degree or occupational training in institutions or other higher education frameworks. The objective of the program is to enable people with complex learning disabilities who are interested in learning, personal growth, and establishing an identity of capability to find an academic channel that is suitable for them. Fulfilling their vision enables graduates of the program to become integrated and to contribute in the public sphere—equipped with an identity of capability, knowledge, and skills.

Shuker-Tauby and Hozmi (2020) conducted an evaluation research that attempted to examine to what degree participation in the course "Identity of Ca-

pability – Introduction to Practical Psychology" is connected to moderating self-stigma. The evaluation research findings revealed that adults with complex learning disabilities who live in their own homes or their parents' homes displayed lower levels of shame due to their complex learning disabilities and higher levels of hope for the future at the end of the program. After two decades of dialogue with students in the "Inclusive University" the framework now offers a wider range of programs, as shown in the "pyramid of study tracks".

The "Pyramid of Study Tracks" in the Inclusive University

The Study Tracks

1. **The Course "Identity of Capability – Introduction to Practical Psychology"**
   The core course in the "inclusive University" is directed towards establishing a personal identity of capability and self-determination, developing interpersonal abilities, and formulating a future orientation as described in the previous chapters in this book. This is the first and important step in an empowering experience that is designed to establish an internal locus of control—a subjective perception of oneself as the master and leader of one's life, and establishing the participants' belief in their ability to belong and to continue to learn and grow.
2. **Advanced Studies and Inclusive Academic Introductory Courses**
   Graduates of the course "Identity of Capability – Introduction to Practical Psychology" are offered advanced courses in two study tracks of separated and integrated groups.

a. **Advanced Studies in Segregated Groups**—This study track includes various introductory academic courses such as "Introduction to Economics," "Introduction to Law", "Introduction to Medicine and Health", "Introduction to Brain Science", and other topics. The advanced courses were developed following discussions with graduates of the program in which they noted that many

members of their families studied and work in these professions and they felt a desire to be included in professional family discussions. These courses acquaint students with the content world in these fields, establish the participants' self-worth, and offer them tools to increase independence in their lives.

b. **Inclusive Academic Introductory Courses**—Students asked to be integrated into academic studies on a broader basis within the framework of regular academic classes. The program was consequently broadened to include regular elective introductory semester or year courses that are part of the curriculum for bachelor's degree studies. These courses enable participants from the "Inclusive University" to become closely acquainted with the academic world and to assess whether they would like to continue academic studies in the future. The arrangement also promotes encounters between bachelor's degree students and students with complex learning disabilities and other disabilities. Studying together, lively conversation, and working in integrated groups to prepare final projects breaks down barriers and enables mutual processes of acquaintance, acceptance, and forming positive attitudes.

3. **Certified Professional Training programs**
   Many graduates of the program emphasized that a professional identity was important to them. As they put it: "It's important to us to develop a positive personal identity, but an occupational identity is even more important." Consequently, the Inclusive University also offers occupational training courses. These courses, like all other courses in the Inclusive University, are conducted in separate or integrated groups. The courses are held in various academic institutions with comprehensive adaptation and support alongside a structured module aimed at establishing a positive personal and occupational identity

4. **Inclusive Research Groups**
   As in any academic study track, the course "Identity of Capability – Introduction to Practical Psychology" includes a module about research methods. Including this module is an additional means of personal empowerment because the students sense that they are being exposed to the world of academic content with all its implications—even in a primary manner. After all, what are academic studies without research? Throughout the years during which the course has been offered the students have revealed an inquisitive approach. They learned to use research methods and even conducted a pioneer inclusive research in 2006 entitled "The Connection between Social Acceptance and the Individual's Personal Characteristics" which was published in a scientific journal. This lead to the development of inclusive research groups whose members are graduates of the course "Identity of Capability". These groups conduct research In light of the inclusive research approach.

During the past two decades we have witnessed the development of various research models in the area of disabilities. These studies are conducted by persons with disabilities who serve as research colleagues at various levels of participation. This approach was first documented at the beginning of the 1990s (Oliver 1992). Inclusive research and various models of participatory action research are an evolutionary outcome of a procedural change in the attitudes of society, and

the establishment of leadership groups and movements for self-determination of persons with disabilities ***throughout*** the world. These movements are united under the guiding value which they adopted: "Nothing about us – without us." The Inclusive research approach is an implementation of the extended value that calls for: "No more research about us without us".

Researchers in the "Inclusive Participatory Research" approach take part in designing the research questions, research tools, collecting data, and attributing meaning to the research findings. They also play an important and leading role in formulating research recommendations. Studies that were conducted in the framework of the inclusive research groups show the importance of the practical wisdom of the co-researchers. Their involvement in an academic research is extremely important and empowering due to the fact that they are taking part in the creation of a new body of knowledge. The findings and recommendations of these studies serve as an important tool for their self-advocacy. These studies enable them to broadcast their right to be equal participants in the social sphere while substantiating their claims and demands on findings of researches in which they participated.

5. **Guidance towards Academic Degree studies**
   Some of the graduates of the course "Identity of Capability" who took part in semester or one-year academic introductory courses are interested in continuing their studies towards a full academic degree. Some deliberate as to whether this study track is suitable for them and are often uncertain about what to study. Graduates who are interested in pursuing a full academic degree are offered guidance and mediation with academic frameworks that provide augmented support for students with complex learning disabilities and other disabilities.

This range of programs is designed to enable participants in the "Inclusive University" opportunities for continued development and growth through learning as long as they wish. There will be no more "falling between the cracks." Offering a selection of adapted academic programs enables them an opportunity to determine the study path that is best suited for them and decide how long they wish to continue to develop within it.

What is Cognitive Accessibility in the Academia?

Contents

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Exclusion or equality stem from social perceptions that rest on basic values built by society in different cultures over time. The social model distinguishes between an impairment—which is an existing physical, sensory, or neurological reality, and a disability—that is the result of social construct that creates barriers for people with disabilities in terms of attitudes, how society relates to them, and environmental infrastructures that prevent them from living as equals.

One of the guiding principles of operating the "three—step" program through the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" was that it was not enough merely to be physically integrated within the academia or within the program. Since any form of learning is the basis for growth and development, it is necessary to restore the participants' belief in their ability to learn. I have often heard candidates for the program say: "studying and I don't mix. We're not friends. I like learning, but learning doesn't like me…" People who have adopted a mindset that they are unable to learn will have difficulty formulating a personal vision that they can fulfill.

One of the most important objectives of the program is to offer the participants a corrective learning experience from the didactic standpoint. The idea that served as the basis for this decision was that in an age in which organizations and countries are passing legislation obligating physical and sensory accessibility in public spaces, a "cognitive ramp" should be created as well.

The concept of cognition refers to processes of absorbing, understanding, retaining, processing, and applying knowledge and the ability to use it through symbolic representation (language). This concept is also connected to people's ability to imagine, plan, hypothesize, and draw deductions and conclusions. Piaget (1980) felt that these abilities develop in sequence. Children must first display concrete operational thinking that is characteristic of ages 7–12 before they reach cognitive maturity and develop abstract thinking and the ability to infer and draw conclusions, which is attained from age 12 and up. All people are capable of learning and experience learning. In order to ensure optimal assimilation and retention of knowledge and skills it is important to consider the following issues: What is being learned? Is the content appropriate for the person's developmental age? Should the learning be a macro process of learning basic concepts, or a micro process of being more elaborate? How extensive should learning be? What are the best methods of instruction for the individual? The fundamental guideline that I adhere to in my meetings with adults with complex learning disabilities is that they can comprehend many subjects that we previously thought would be difficult for them to understand. We often encounter complex questions from young children such as "Where do babies come from?" or "What happened to Grandfather when he died? What does it mean to die?" We would not choose to ignore these questions or fail to answer them. Some people suffice with short abstract answers such as: "The stork brings babies." or "Babies are born out of love." When children don't relent and continue to ask questions, people are obligated to continue to answer them. The depth of the question dictates the depth of the answer. A great deal of thought is invested in adapting the contents and the amount of detail. Sometimes mediating material such as a book is used to illustrate the miracle of the creation of human life. The same is true for adults with

learning disabilities who are more cognitively mature. They are capable of learning, but at the same time they require simplification of content and language, illustration, and a reasonable quantity of subject matter that will enable them to assimilate the material.

When the program began in 2002 the concept of cognitive accessibility was still new to the academia. Instruction methods for the course were outlined together with the students in order to form the working methods for cognitive accessibility. This was accomplished by "learning from successes and failures." We have always asked each group of students: Who was your best teacher and why? What do you need in order to succeed in your studies? What helped you in the past, and what were the barriers to learning in your personal learning history? The participants' insights and practical wisdom were translated into working methods for cognitive accessibility in the academia.

The Principles of Cognitive Accessibility

1. **Training the Lecturers**—All the lecturers and facilitators have prior knowledge or experience of working with people who are coping with learning and adjustment disabilities, and they are obligated to adapt their teaching methods to the students' various learning styles. This is an important condition for creating an inclusive learning environment and for decreasing stress on the part of the students and the lecturers.
2. **Adapting Contents and Using Simple Language**—The study material consists of academic material that is taught in various departments of the university. However, the contents are taught using simple language and numerous and varied illustrations. Since people need different amounts of time to process knowledge, the material is taught at a rate that is suitable to the learning group. Simple language implies adhering to the concept or the main world of academic content, while mediating it for the participants. Mediating involves becoming familiar with the definition of the word in clear language, dividing the word into syllables, practicing its pronunciation, and presenting examples that illustrate how the concept is reflected in everyday life. For example, one lesson dealt with the structure of the personality according to Freud and the dynamics that exist between its components of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The explanation was accompanied by a slide showing a person with two cartoon figures above his head: one looked impulsive and aggressive, held a pitchfork, and represented the Id, The other figure wore a white robe with a halo above its head and represented the Super-Ego**.** The facilitator illustrated a dialogue between the Id and the Ego in which the Id asks for something that the Ego cannot provide. He therefore turns to the Super-Ego—which was represented by a wholesome elderly grandfather figure. The Superego possesses a conscience and knows the correct way the person should conduct himself. The facilitator added humorously that ***the Superego*** has a "special supermarket filled with defense mechanisms" that he offers the Id free of charge in order to calm him down. A great deal of humor and dramatization is used throughout

the presentation of Freud's theory in order to transform the theoretical audio stimulation to a memorable experience. The participants continue to assimilate the psycho-dynamic theory for many weeks after the lesson because it was transformed into an experience and its abstract concepts were presented clearly along with a verbal hint: The superego has a supermarket of defense mechanisms.

The presentations have large accessible titles and the contents of each slide include brief messages that are easy to absorb. Each slide is illustrated with a small appropriate picture that is often humorous. These illustrations provide hints that help the students to remember the theoretical content of what they have learned. When I ask the students where we left off at the end of the last lesson, they often describe the picture that was displayed on the slide. For example, the presentation that dealt with social acceptance included a slide that described what builds connections between people with a picture of two cats hugging each other. When I asked where we had left off at the end of the last lesson, most of the group answered in chorus: "We left off with the slide of two cats hugging each other," while a smaller number of students reported: "We left off at the connection between people." .

3. **Significant Participatory Learning**—The curriculum focuses on content that arouses motivation to learn and includes topics that the participants described as being important to them. Kluth et al. (2003) noted that involving students in forming their study program is an important component in academic accessibility and increases motivation to learn. The learning material is strongly connected to practical issues that occupy the students in their daily lives to enable optimal assimilation of the contents. In this way the group discussions are transformed into significant and active learning.
4. **Varying Instruction Methods**—Students with different learning disabilities have different abilities and a variety of difficulties. Varying the instruction methods enables the material to be accessible to a variety of students and their needs. For example, students with dyslexia require the use of visual channels during the lessons such as graphs, films, pictures, and hands-on experiences or using auditory channels such as stories presented as case studies for discussion. Every student is capable of retaining attention for a specific period of time ranging from a few minutes to an entire lesson. Varying the instruction methods is extremely helpful for participants with concentration deficit because switching to a new medium "restarts the attention countdown" from the beginning. For this reason, short breaks during the lesson are important. These pauses take the form of asking how a student is doing. For example, "Ron, how are you doing? Is everything OK? Is everything clear? Do you understand the topic? You look a bit thoughtful." Since I began teaching in the academia I have always paused during my lessons for "communication breaks" that are short recesses less than three minutes long. They allow students to convey messages to each other, answer urgent phone calls, or have a snack. These breaks are an important tool for alleviating pressure that accumulates particularly for students with regulation difficulties. Offering legit-

imacy for these needs creates trust. It is amazing to see how engaged they are in learning during the next part of the session.

5. **Empowerment**—The learning process and its content are perceived as empowering and are utilize to improving quality of life. Many students who are exposed to the learning content ask themselves: "What good is this to me? Why is this important?" The facilitator's role is to mediate between the necessity of the learning content and the participants' personal development. It is necessary to reflect strengths whenever the facilitator encounters them in order to mobilize the participants' motivation to learn.
6. **Learning as a Corrective Experience**—The learning experience must be enjoyable and constitute a corrective experience. This is done through use of humor and other methods of relieving tension and avoiding situations that will invoke stress. Many students have difficulty with reading and writing and become anxious at the thought that they won't manage to copy what is written on the board or summarize the main points of a Power Point presentation. A printed summary is consequently distributed to the students at the end of each lesson. The rate of progress for learning the material is determined by the facilitator according to the degree of interest the participants display or according to the depth of discussion that develops abut each topic. These actions are directed towards alleviating a sense of threat and stress during the meetings which are liable to detract from cognitive and emotional energy that needs to be devoted to learning.
7. **Cultural Adjustment**—Different cultures have different styles of learning as well as different patterns of cognition and ideologies. It is imperative to be sensitive to these differences when conducting lessons and group meetings. The facilitator must be familiar with the "thinking culture" as well as some basic words in the language of the participants who come from different cultural or religious backgrounds. This creates closeness and a sense that the facilitator is tuned-in to the participant's language and culture. If the participant is religious, portions of the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, or folk tales can be included to enable these participants to learn using their language. If there are students who celebrate different religious holidays, the facilitator should extend traditional holiday greetings. Teachers who are sensitive to the cultures of their students will cultivate their admiration and confidence, which will increase their motivation to learn.
8. **Encouraging Open Communication**—Legitimacy is offered to difficulties and mistakes and an effort is made to separate the wheat from the chaff. Even if a participant answered incorrectly, an effort is made to extract the part of his or her response that is correct—even if it is minor—and to offer positive reinforcement. The facilitator must also exhibit patience and ask that the group be patient if one of the participants uses augmentative or alternative communication. If there are participants who have trouble expressing themselves because of dysnomia or stuttering it is important that the facilitator or other participants not complete their sentences for them, Instead, the facilitator should reword the participant's response after he or she finished speaking to verify that the response was properly understood.

9. **Personal Guidance**—Despite the fact that the group is receiving knowledge designed to increase quality of life, a large number of participants have difficulty applying this knowledge to improve their quality of life. For this reason it is important to provide personal guidance for each member of the group to offer encouragement and to help them review the material, acquire learning strategies, and translate what they have learned into practical tools that they can utilize in their personal lives.
10. **Focusing on "Positive Strengths"**—Cognitive accessibility requires the facilitator to view each participant through the prism of multiple intelligences. The facilitator must become familiar with each student's unique strengths and difficulties and challenge him or her with tasks that are suitable to those abilities.
11. **Reframing "Failure"**—Negative internal dialogue constitutes a significant barrier to the learning process. Consequently, it is extremely important for the students to assimilate the idea that whoever does not try does not fail, and whoever does not fail does not learn. The role of the teacher as facilitator is to offer legitimacy to mistakes as long as the student views them as a natural part of his or her development and learns from them.
12. **Flexibility in Presenting Assignments**—All students are assigned uniform tasks, but they are presented in a flexible manner while taking their various disabilities into consideration. For example, students with dysgraphia can submit assignments in the form of a recording or drawing. Assignments are graded using comments without quantitative indexes. This moderates anxiety and encourages motivation to learn without students being drawn into social comparisons based on grades.
13. **Review and Memorization**—Each meeting begins with a brief review of previous lessons, particularly the main contents of the last lesson. This is done to provide the participants with a logical, procedural sequence of the material. The review also helps overcome difficulties with memory that many students experience.
14. **An Atmosphere of Acceptance**—Creating an atmosphere of respect and containment between members of the group and between the students and the lecturers alleviates anxiety and enables students to be cognitively free for learning.
15. **Equality**—Cognitive accessibility does not imply "offering special privileges" nor creating an inferior learning environment. The group is related to in the same manner as any other group of students in all aspects. They are exposed to academic content with all its implications. They are required to conduct mature, philosophical discussions about all matter and content, and are encouraged to take part in the essence of being students The main difference is in the manner in which the contents are presented and in the support that is offered to the participants. The student councils on the various campuses take them under their wing, issue them student cards, and invite them to take part in campus life.

These principles of cognitive accessibility will be described in further detail in the following chapter that deals with "Empowering Learning." During the past

two decades many additional pedagogical and technological tools and approaches for cognitive accessibility were developed. Facilitators who work with varied audiences should learn these principals, utilize them, and familiarize students with them in order to enable them optimal learning.

Findings of the Program Evaluation

An evaluative study was conducted about the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" from 2006 to 2009 (Hozmi 2009). The 62 students who participated in the study were asked to respond to an evaluation questionnaire and to rate the degree to which they has experienced changes in various aspects of their lives following their participation in the course.

The dimensions of the course related to the learning experience and its repercussions on their self-confidence in their ability to learn as well as their sense of personal empowerment. The items were rated on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 representing minimal change and 5 representing very significant change. The findings of the study are presented in the following table.

Findings of the evaluation of the three—step program

	Item	Average
1	The course was a pleasant experience for me	**4.78**
2	The course was interesting and enriching	**4.69**
3	I'm proud of my achievements in the course	**4.57**
4	The course helped me cope with my daily life	**4.35**
5	I've undergoing positive changes in my life since the course	**4.15**
6	The course helped me fulfill personal plans and dreams	**3.80**
7	I understand myself better following the course	**4.45**
8	I'm more aware of my strengths and abilities	**4.45**
9	I'm less occupied with my difficulties	**3.91**
10	I believe that failures are an excellent school for living	**4.21**
11	The course helped me develop my independence	**4.27**
12	I felt that the lecturers tried to explain the material clearly	**4.27**
13	The course topics were relevant to me	**4.51**
14	I believe in my ability to learn and advance following the course	**4.55**
15	I'm interested in continuing to study in similar programs	**4.51**

The quantitative evaluation questionnaire also contained several qualitative questions. Analysis of the qualitative responses revealed four themes that were referred to by the respondents:

1. **Establishing an Identity of Capability**—Many graduates reported a positive change in their self-worth. Z.P. noted that "the course increased my self-confidence. I learned to be assertive and to put passivity aside." D.H. sensed that people saw him differently and that he dared to give more of himself. K.A. said: "I feel more confident with my body and I no longer hide my injured hand."
2. **Developing a Positive Approach to Life**—P.H. summarized this as follows: "I learned to find a middle ground in life and to compromise." A.T. added: that he had developed insights from the course. "I learned that difficult means it's possible.
3. **Making Decisions About Important Transitions**—R.S. noted that after she completed the course she decided to move to a supportive living framework and that she was very certain that she had made the right choice. E.S. noted that she had decided to change her place of work.
4. **Motivation to Continue Studying**—92% of the respondents said that they were interested in continued studies in the Inclusive University. The open feedback revealed that many graduates were eager to broaden their knowledge in various walks of life. M.A. described this well: "People here relate to me differently. I'm going to keep studying. The main thing is that I will have more and more knowledge." M.Y. explained that she had been hesitant to enroll in in occupational training course through the National Insurance Institute, but after her experience in the course she decided to begin occupational training.

The findings of the evaluation revealed that the students view the course as a pleasant, interesting, and extremely enriching corrective experience. All their responses were rated within the category of "significant change" with the exception of items 6 and 9. From the students' responses it appears that the topics of the course were relevant and empowering for them. They became better aware of their abilities and difficulties, and developed insights and belief in their ability to learn as a result of the course. They are even interested in advanced study programs within the framework of the Inclusive University or other academic frameworks. However, it appears that many participants still have difficulty fulfilling their personal dreams and are still occupied with their personal difficulties that stem from their special needs. The students explained the findings by the fact that they had experienced significant changes in their lives due to their participation in the program, but the attitudes of their environment—their parents and advisors—remained unchanged. This comment emphasizes the need for assimilating the core of the three—step program among parents, caregivers, and other supportive figures as well. In light of the findings of the evaluation, the three-step program also includes seminars and training programs for staff members and parents that expose them to the main principles of the approach. The facilitator utilizes this opportunity to serve as a megaphone for the voices of the participants, their world of coping with challenges, their feelings, and their expectations of themselves and their environment.

This chapter dealt primarily with didactics—developing adapted instruction methods—rather than with pedagogy—the instructor's leadership and leading the students in the learning process. The components of the instructor's leadership will be discussed in greater detail in Section Five of this book, which is devoted entirely to the topic of "Empowering Teaching" due to its importance.

The Power of the Group in Building an Identity of Capability

Contents

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Many children and adults with complex learning disabilities experience loneliness. For this reason the working model for building an identity of capability is based on a group method that promotes growth and provides emotional support. In order to understand the power that lies in a group and the working model of the three-step approach, this chapter will review the impact and advantages of goal-focused guided group processes as the means for building an identity of capability.

The Group

The three-step program is conducted in a learning group which is a psycho-educational group. This format also enables emotional processing and obtaining advanced tools and skills alongside acquisition of knowledge.

Group practice developed alongside individual and family therapy. Since the group is one of the main components in the process of building an identity of capability, it is important to emphasize and recognize the power of group work for providing the cognitive, emotional, and functional needs of the individual.

The group experience enables a transformation from the sense that "Strangers can never understand" to a feeling of "We're all in the same boat"—an evolvement from a one-dimensional subjective perception of existence to a multi-faceted existence. Heap (1985) claimed that the power of the group lies in the fact that its members share information and feelings with each other, and it consequently offers them an opportunity to help and to be helped. Levi (2012) notes that the variety of opinions that exist in the group and the reservoir of knowledge and experience that is created within it render it a useful tool for problem solving and decision making from both the therapeutic and practical aspects. Preston–Shoot (1987) explains that in order for a group process to take place the members of the group must have a common background, common interests and experiences, and a specific objective that constitutes the rationale for their association. They must also depend on each other, feel closeness, conduct themselves according to the boundaries defined by the group, and be aware that the group process has a beginning and end.

During the course "Identity of Capability" the group creates a structured and guided arena for the participants that is designed to provide them with a corrective experience of success, reflection of strengths, and integration. Private experiences take on different perspectives, insights are exchanged, and the group members have an opportunity to learn from each other. A feeling is implanted among the group members that many of them had similar experiences in the past. Knowing that others have experienced the same complex journey universalizes challenges and normalizes the individual's narrative. Sharing a common fate quickly creates a strong sense of intimacy among the members of the group in the program. The component of structured knowledge that is imparted to the participants is strongly connected to their past and present. It constitutes a powerful stimulus for emotional dialogue and for obtaining tools for coping with memories of the past and challenges of the present. The learning process combines acquisition of knowledge with a therapeutic process.

Yalom (2006) describes 11 therapeutic components that exist in group processes.

1. **Instillation of hope**—Developing a positive approach among members of the group in light of colleagues who have coped effectively with experiences that are similar to theirs
2. **Universality**—Perception of a personal problem as something that is also experienced by others
3. **Imparting Information**—knowledge provided by the facilitator and mutual learning of group members who share their experiences, successes and failures
4. **Altruism**—a desire and an opportunity to give to others
5. **Corrective recapitulation of the primary family group**—Since the group is a type of family unit, group processes enable retrospective observation of previous family experiences.
6. **Development of Socializing Techniques**—This is a process directed at understanding the individual's cognitive patterns and processes relating to himself or herself and to others who are considered significant in his or her life. Understanding thoughts and feelings while connecting the past and present helps promote awareness of the sources of behavioral responses of group members in various aspects.
7. **Imitative Behavior**—Imitating patterns and approaches presented by the facilitator and by members of the group
8. **Socializing techniques**—The group serves as a micro-cosmos for observation**,** interpersonal learning (self-awareness alongside improving skills) and a corrective emotional experience
9. **Group Cohesiveness**—An experience of belonging and acceptance
10. **Catharsis**—The ability of individuals to free themselves of negative emotional burdens they are harboring and to share positive feelings
11. **Existential factors**—Recognizing what Viktor Frankl described as "borderline situations"—Despite the fact that life is fraught with challenges and confrontations, the responsibility and choice of how to deal with them is in the hands of the individual—regardless of the amount of support and guidance they receive from others.

Douglas (1995) noted that mutual dependence exists between members of the group and that it is important for them to recognize their mutual need for each other. In addition, it is necessary to take note of several components when planning the group such as the character of the group (natural or initiated), the location of the meetings (which also determines the context), the objective and goals of the group, its size, its duration, the type of activities and its orientation—the approach that guides the group process.

Models for Group Work

Various models of group work intervention have developed during the past few decades since the group therapy method began. Preston-Shoot (1987) cited nine different types of groups:

1. **Social groups**—The main objective of these groups is to eliminate social isolation and offer opportunities for enjoyment and positive social relations
2. **Psychotherapy Groups**—These groups are designed to solve personal problems and interpersonal issues.
3. **Consultation Groups**—Members mobilize themselves to deal with a common practical, emotional, or interpersonal problem and expect to gain skills or tools from the facilitator.
4. **Educational groups**—These groups are directed at providing information and skills in life abilities for adapting to life transitions.
5. **Social therapy groups**—These groups aim to increase adaptive behavior, change patterns of behavior that impede upon the participants' daily existence, offer group support, and provide experiences that members were denied previously
6. **Discussion groups**—These groups focus on issues of general interest to their members.
7. **Self-help groups**—The members in these groups have a common goal, and are dominantly involved with minimal involvement of the facilitator
8. **Self-direction groups**—These groups are similar in their makeup to self-help groups. The facilitator intermittently intervenes to advise the group regarding its direction of action.
9. **Social action groups**—These groups are directed at social change in social issues that are significant to the participants such as road safety or environmental issues.

The working model for the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" contains elements from all the types of groups mentioned above. However, it combines structured learning that focuses upon an identity of capability with patterns and characteristics of a group process that is therapeutic in nature. It is therefore characterizes a psychoeducational group.

Psychoeducational Groups

Glandding (1995) defined a psychoeducational group as a group that focuses primarily on imparting knowledge and education while also focusing on perceptions or a main topic that deal with mental or emotional aspects. The Association for Specialists in Group Work (1991) (ASGW) emphasized the importance of the educational and motivational aspects of these groups. The association views these groups as a service for teaching people who are coping with life events and for helping them to acquire skills to cope with the reality they are facing. Brown (2011) views psycho-educational groups as "hybrids" that constitute a combination of a classroom and therapy group that focuses first and foremost on cognition as well as on emotions and actions. She developed the KASS model that includes five essential components of the facilitator's role in conducting psycho-educational groups: ***knowledge, art, science, skills, and techniques***.

Knowledge The facilitator must be aware of group processes and the stages in the development of a group, be able to identify therapeutic elements within the process, be obligated to the rules of ethics, be knowledgeable about the issue for which the group was established, and to be familiar with relevant theoretical models such as the learning model and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Art The art of facilitating includes the degree of the facilitator's personal development. They must be able to understand processes of transference and counter-transference in the group. They must exhibit the ability to be containing, empathetic, and culturally sensitive. They also need to be aware of differences, be able to broadcast emotional presence as the facilitator, and to reflect processes that the group undergoes back to the group.

Science The facilitator must adopt an objective, logical approach, build the program and the meetings, evaluate its outcomes during and after the process, and ensure that it meets the needs of the group members.

Skills Brown notes that it is necessary to remember that skills are a means and not an end. Despite this, she views the following skills as essential for ensuring effective facilitation:

Teaching skills, enabling guidance, ability of the facilitator to serve as a role model, tools for resolving conflicts, and the ability to deal with exhibitions of anxiety.

Techniques Teaching strategies and the ability of "enabling guidance" including the use of exercises and illustrative games and role playing, use of films, presentations, and other aids, and discussion moderating skills.

The Association for Specialization in Group Work (ASGW, 1991) summarizes the differences between a therapy group and a psychoeducational group in the following table.

Psychoeducational groups versus therapy groups

Psychoeducational groups	Therapy groups
Focus on instruction and direction	Focus on experiences and emotions
Use of planned and structured activities	Moderate use of planned and structured activities
Objectives defined by the facilitator	Objectives determined by members of the group
Facilitators function as teachers and enablers	The facilitator guides, involves, and defends
Focus on prevention	Focus on self-awareness and mediation
There is no screening or acceptance process	Introductory processes and screening before group processes begin

Psychoeducational groups	Therapy groups
No predetermined number of participants before activities begin	Number of participants is liable to be limited
Groups may be large, up to 50 participants	Group is usually limited to ten participants
Emotional exposure is acceptable but no defined as a group objective	Expectation of emotional exposure
Privacy and confidentiality are not top priority	Privacy and confidentiality are significant components
Number of meetings is limited. Sometimes there is only one meeting	Usually based on several meetings
Task-based approach	Maintenance approach

The above table shows that when building a therapy group focus is placed on selecting members who have a common objective, while in a psycho-educational group the focal point when forming the group centers around content and on goals and objectives that the facilitators expect to achieve. However, it is possible to integrate therapeutic elements within a psycho-educational group as well.

The psycho-educational group model was chosen for this program on the basis of the various models for group work and in light of the unique needs of adults with complex learning disabilities that were presented in the first three sections of this book. This model combines dynamic aspects together with imparting knowledge and offering practical tools for coping with the life challenges that confront the program's participants. The group provides a protected space for redesigning the inner feelings and self-image of its members. It reduces the sense of loneliness and serves as a catalyst for initiating and maintaining social connections within the group and outside its framework.

The group in the three-step program consists of up to 18 members in order to enable goal-focused learning that combines peer discussion while enabling the facilitator to relate personally to each participant. The process of forming the group begins with introductory discussions with applicants to verify if they are truly interested and sufficiently mature to adequately participate in this continuous group process. During this interview they are also assessed to determine if they possess the necessary basic interpersonal skills—primarily the ability to listen. The group is built cautiously to ensure the participants a corrective social experience. Social support has a positive impact on the self-image of children and adults with learning disabilities (Forman 1988).

The role of the group in the "Three Step Approach" program is consequently that of providing a positive social experience that will serve as a corrective experience for unsuccessful social integration in the past.

It is important that the make-up of the group be balanced between homogenous abilities of the participants and heterogeneity. On one hand people should be able to meet with others who have slimier learning abilities, functional independence, and maturity, while on the other hand they should be sufficiently different in certain characteristics such as cultural background, occupation, age, and

gender to enable interesting discussions that include various viewpoints about the issues being discussed. Many participants define the group as their "second family." That is our intention.

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The Introductory Discussion with Candidates for the Program

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The facilitator's introductory discussions with candidates for the program are extremely significant. These introductory conversations constitute the entry into the process of change. Candidates arrive with apprehension and doubt about their capabilities and ability of self-fulfillment. They come to the introductory meeting with many questions and quandaries. Is the program suitable for me? What will be required of me during the process? Will I be able to deal with the content? What will it mean to become part of the academia if it was already difficult for me to learn when I was in high school? Who else will be in the group? They often ask me cautiously: "Will the others in the group be 'regular'?" (actual quote) "Will there be exams?" "Will it be difficult?" "What if I don't understand something?" "Are there tutors?" The content of the answers to these questions and the manner in which the facilitator responds must be carefully weighed and precise. The facilitator must answer the candidate in a manner that will decrease anxiety, transmit containment and acceptance, and offer legitimacy to his or her questions. Emphasis must be placed on the idea that this introductory interview is a mutual assessment: The facilitator must assess whether the candidate is suitable for the program, while the candidate must be convinced that he or she has made the right choice and that the facilitator's approach meets their needs. The introductory discussion provides an experience and a taste of the content and language that the candidates will encounter if they join the program. The meeting must build trust and openness. It must therefore be characteristic of a conversation between two people—rather than experience of diagnosis or measuring.

Many candidates assess the facilitator's patience to determine whether they can trust him or her. The facilitator must emphasize that he or she is obligated to preserve confidentiality and that the contents of their conversation will not be revealed to anyone without the candidate's permission. The facilitator must listen, encourage, and reflect strengths. If the candidate is suitable for the program, the facilitator must instill hope and implant the belief that change is possible.

The introductory meeting includes five components:

- **Personal information and contact details**—The candidate fills out a form with these items before the introductory meeting takes place. Reviewing the form offers an opportunity to assess the candidates' abilities in reading, writing, and dealing with a structured task independently and to estimate degree of support they will need during the program.
- **Learning and social history**—this part of the conversation also focuses on transmitting facts and details, but significant importance is attributed to the manner in which the person relates to them and to the personal narrative the candidate has built in light of their learning and social experiences.
- **Current occupation**—This part focuses on a description of the candidate's current job and what he or she does at work. The candidate is asked about his or her satisfaction with their place of work and about barriers at their work place if any exist. Candidates are also asked about their hobbies and other ways of fulfillment.
- **Personal vision**—After the discussion revolved around factual details the conversation begins to develop into an insightful and empowering emotional dialogue. The conversation moves to more personal issues as basic trust begins to

develop between the candidate and the facilitator. The facilitator requests permission to ask personal questions, and explains that the program is not an objective, but a means towards fulfillment, and it is therefore important to learn about the candidate's dreams and ambitions. Many candidates have difficulty expressing three wishes, and others declare: "I've stopped dreaming and hoping. Expectations bring pain."

- **The emotional world**—This final part of the conversation focuses on getting to know the candidate's emotional world. Questions are asked such as: "What things in your life make you happy? What is liable to make you sad? What makes you angry? What calms you down? What worries you? The facilitator listens empathetically to the candidate's responses. Since the candidate granted permission to inquire about these personal issues, the facilitator expresses thanks to the candidate for his or her trust and for sharing his or her personal world.

When the meeting ends the facilitator summarizes the important points and asks the candidate how he or she feels and whether or not he or she is interested in participating in the program. If the candidate has misgivings, the facilitator tries to determine their origin, and explains details about how the process will continue.

The group is an important component in the three—step program and in building an identity of capability, and the program is a continuous two-year process. It is therefore extremely important to become acquainted with the candidates from a social aspect. Those who are found to be suitable after the personal introductory meeting are invited to attend an introductory group meeting. This meeting consists of a structured program during which the candidates introduce themselves, discuss a designated topic, and engage in a brief learning experience similar to that which takes place during the program. This meeting enables the facilitator to closely observe the candidates' interpersonal skills and to become better acquainted with their personal worlds. There are instances in which candidates who conducted a lively conversation during the introductory meeting remained silent during the meeting with the group members, or demonstrated anxiety or aggression. Others become sensory stimulated in an overwhelming way and exhibit impatience or withdraw with an excuse: "May I leave now? I have to go somewhere."

Occasionally there are candidates who feel threatened in the presence of a group with learning disabilities and other disabilities. These are primarily people who were integrated in the mainstream educational system. "I've decided not to participate. I don't belong in this group. I'm different and I don't understand why you think I'm like them." (This is an actual quote).

At the end of the meeting the facilitator makes a statement that marks the beginning of the growth process: "Now—before we begin our journey together—is the time to contemplate and make a decision." An initial pact is drawn up that clarifies that there are no grades or tests. There are elective tasks. An initial empowering statement is delivered to the candidates: Having a complex learning disability is not a condition for participating in the program. The main criteria are

your motivation for change, desire to learn, and to become stronger, and having the necessary maturity to take part in an obligatory process. The facilitator concludes the meeting by clarifying that those who were found to be suitable for the program and who chose to embark on a journey together meet those criteria. This is the first instance in which strengths are reflected. It is an important expression that hints at what is ahead: Focusing on the personal resources that are hidden within each member and within the group as a unit that is capable of putting the past into perspective, implanting strength in the present, and developing hope for the future.

Empowering Teaching—Meaningful Learning in an Inclusive Climate

What is Empowering Teaching?

Contents

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The principles for teaching that have been developed in the Inclusive University in general and in the three-step program in particular are the main tool through which the central ideas are taught to the students. Since its establishment the Inclusive University has been based on the guideline of involving the students as experts in their lives. They are capable of letting others know about their needs in the optimal way if they are only given the opportunity.

Consequently the learning process begins with becoming acquainted with each student in the group and his or her life experiences—particularly learning experiences, insights from his or her life's journey, dreams, personal vision, and emotional world. Teachers cannot be sensitive to their students or make knowledge accessible to them without being closely acquainted with them as individuals, or without coordinating mutual expectations with the learning group. In an era when knowledge is accessible to everyone via the Internet the teacher's manner of guidance and educational leadership assumes multifold importance.

During a work meeting at one of the universities in which I worked, a senior lecturer burst into the room and exclaimed: "I know that I'm interrupting the discussion, but this is my last day of work in the Educational Department before I retire. I want to give a parting gift to those who are still working. It's an insight that I have gained over the 40 years that I have devoted to education. It all boils down to one sentence: The teacher's job is not to teach. The teacher's job is to make students want to learn." How true, and how challenging. Many years have passed since then, but that insight still echoes in my mind. This chapter will attempt to answer the question of how to arouse students' desire to learn.

Person—Centered Teaching

The teaching approach in the three-step Program views the recipient of the service as being at the center. Person-centered service is a therapeutic educational approach that was developed in the 1950s by the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. His approach is based on the values of a personal and unique view of the individual. It is essential to recognize the individual's right to privacy, independence, and choice, preserving his or her right to be an equal part of society, and to relate to people in a respectful and containing manner. Person-centered service focuses on the value that views the recipient as being "a person" and not a patient, ward, pupil, or any other term that refers to their disability. As Rogers stated: "In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?" (Rogers 1961).

The objective of this approach is to shed light on the person's strengths, values, personal resources—his or her general capabilities and unique characteristics, relate respectfully to his or her preferences, help him or her focus and form a personal vision and existential meaning. It is important to create environments that provide a solution for areas of interest and increase a sense of belonging Dialogue using this approach does not focus on the person's disability or limitations, but on strengths with which the person can live a meaningful life. Rogers claimed

that three essential characteristics were needed to apply his therapeutic approach: congruence (genuineness or realness), unconditional positive regard (acceptance and caring), and accurate empathic understanding.

Congruence—Genuineness and Realness The therapist must offer reliable service while being definite and transparent. The therapist does not hide behind masks, create an image, or play an unrealistic role. Rogers claimed that despite the fact that our feelings are not necessarily compatible with our behavior, it is extremely important to be transparent and honest with clients.

Unconditional Acceptance and Absence of Judgement According to Rogers' approach, the attitude towards the client must be positive and unconditional. Dialogue with clients must be characterized by acceptance, inclusion, consistency, warmth, and a humanistic approach.

Accurate Empathic Understanding Empathy implies entering the inner personal perceptional world of others as a temporary guest in their home, and to feel sensitivity to the emotions they are feeling, such as anger, confusion, fear, or any other emotion. Empathy implies temporarily living another person's life and carefully moving about within it without judgement.

Rogers coined the term "student-centered learning" at a later point in his professional life. In addition to the three principles of empathy, genuineness, and unconditional acceptance, his approach emphasizes the students' abilities, encourages development of personal and self-choice and direction (Rogers 1970). Rogers viewed the student's beliefs, knowledge, and experience as equally important to those of the teacher. Learning is a two-way process in which the teacher simultaneously nourishes and is nourished by the student's knowledge, values, and experience. The teacher creates an open, accepting atmosphere that encourages dialogue, while viewing himself or herself as a guiding, mentoring, and enabling factor in these processes who recognizes the value of each student and his or her ability to experience a process of growth.

The guideline that was adopted for the three-step approach and for all courses in the Inclusive University is based on three main objectives: utilizing learning processes towards building an identity of capability, a corrective learning experience, and cognitive accessibility of academic learning content that is meaningful and relevant to the students' lives. The initial working principles for the methods of guidance were predetermined, but I assumed that the students have learned from various learning experiences and it would therefore be advisable to learn from what they perceive as successful or negative learning experiences. For this reason discussions are held with students about their previous learning experiences to determine ways to optimize the current learning program as accurately as possible. The students are asked to recall a significant educational figure who was their best teacher and another who detained their personal development. The working methods for **Empowering Teaching**, which will be described in this section, were established in light of the comments of thousands of students who have studied in the Inclusive University. Four themes were identified from the stu-

dents responses to these questions, which are shown in the following table alongside the responses that characterize each theme.

"Good" and "Bad" teaching methods

Theme	Good teachers	Bad teachers
Teacher's personal characteristics	"Smiling, pleasant, patient, knows how to listen", "Transmits positive energy—caring, loves us and loves teaching", "A teacher who is first and foremost a person", "An advisor and counsellor, a parental figure", Supportive", "Retains eye contact and speaks at eye level", "A teacher who transmits a sense of mission", "Speaks in a pleasant voice"	"Judgmental", "Alienating", "Sour-faced", "Obstructing", "Boring", "Turned off and lifeless", "Frightening and tough", "Impervious, refuses to listen"6
Pedagogical characteristics	"Speaks at a rate that I can understand without racing or making me fall asleep", "Offers positive reinforcement", "Tells various stories and explains why it's important in life", "Tells jokes", "Invests effort outside class", "Reviews the previous lesson at the beginning of each lesson", "Taught me learning strategies", "Relates to mistakes with understanding", "Provides examples", "Provides tools for living"	"Doesn't know how to explain the material", "Talks too fast", "Punishes instead of understanding", "Gives surprise tests", "Fills up the board too quickly", "Gives very hard tests and failing grades", "Shouts", ""Tells me to be quiet instead of answering my questions", "Continues teaching during recess", "Uncreative in presenting material"
Teacher's perception of students	"Saw my potential, believed in my abilities and helped me discover what is special about myself", "Adopted me and didn't give up on me", "Identified my difficulties and tried to help", "Asked how I was doing—I knew that this teacher was a friend and not an enemy. Even if I didn't know any mathematics, I made an effort ", "Knew how to raise me up when I fell down"	"Extreme—thinks of students in black and white", "Didn't care about me", "Tagged me as problematic and sent me to a lower class to prepare lessons", "Didn't accept me or my difficulties", "Disregarded me, made me leave the classroom"
Attitude towards the student among peers	"Made sure the class treated me nicely", "Instills values and doesn't just teach", "Sensitive to situations", "Made me feel that I have something to give"	"Ignored me when I raised my hand in class and humiliated me in front of everyone if I made a mistake", "Called me up to the board to solve a problem in front of the class, and got angry when I didn't succeed", "Discriminated against weak students", "Humiliated me"

This table shows that from the **personal aspect** students expect to encounter teachers who exhibit parental traits: offer advice, are inclusive, loving, and pleasant. From the **pedagogical aspect** they expect teachers to know how to adapt their teaching methods to their learning audience, create a safe learning environment, have a sense of humor, and accept them without passing judgement. In regard to teachers' perception of students, teachers should serve as an anchor for growth and encouragement, instill hope, and believe in the student's ability to achieve personal growth. With regard to the teacher's attitude towards the class, they must not discriminate between students, avoid comparison, see what is special and different in each student, and create a safe and empowering interpersonal environment. These principles were translated into the basis for empowering teaching in the Inclusive University. These will be presented in this chapter in detail, while referring to the four main themes that were identified and presented in the previous table.

Teachers' Personal Characteristics—Between Parenting and Teaching

In ancient times the education of children was primarily in the hands of their parents. As educators, parents are responsible for imparting knowledge and values to their children together with skills to enrich their knowledge, encourage learning, and strengthen their identity, adaptation, and belonging. This will enable children to develop their independence so that they will be able to earn a living in the future for themselves and their families. The socialization process that children undergo is designed to prepare them to be members of their culture and society as well as influence their identity that is being formed.

As wisdom increased many parents were unable to keep up with the rapidly developing knowledge, and teaching began to develop as a profession that was in demand among various cultures and nations. The book of Deuteronomy commands parents to teach their children the laws: "Teach them to your children and talk about them." (Deuteronomy 11:19). Jewish Law states that if a father does not know how to teach he must ensure that someone else teaches his son instead. In the Hebrew language the word for "parent" and the word for "teacher" have the same root. It is no wonder that rabbis viewed students as offspring, as expressed by Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachmani: "If a person teaches the Torah to the son of his friend, it is as if he is teaching his own son." Many components of the educational approach and the expectations of the job of parents must be reflected in the teacher's job as well. Teachers are the messengers of parents. Consequently, many parents search for educational systems that are synonymous with the type of education and set of values they are attempting to impart to their children at home. In the same way that parents strive to continue their dynasty, heritage, traditions, and values through their offspring, teaching is connected to imparting knowledge, a heritage of content and profession, values, and norms from the source of knowledge (the teacher) to the students.

Teaching is a combination of imparting knowledge and parental functions due to the fact that the teacher is a messenger of the students' parents. Imparting knowledge is a task of values for human development, but its translation into practice is extremely complex.

Alfred Adler, the father of individual psychology, views parenthood as a combination of many functions that are aimed at raising children who are mentally healthy, competent, and connected to social life. The main components of these functions are:

Love, respect, setting boundaries, and above all, encouragement. I view these functions as being important guidelines that should also explain the function of the teacher. Teaching through love of the profession, of the subject matter, and most importantly—love of the students—is an important condition for teaching. Teachers' love and respect for their students renders legitimacy to setting boundaries and transforms the teacher into a positive significant other for his or her students. Boundaries in teaching are important and essential because teaching prepares people for living within a framework, and every framework has rules, ethics, and norms of behavior. The objective of boundaries is primarily to protect people from themselves. Students who have difficulty regulating their feelings, thoughts, and behavior are liable to hinder themselves and those around them.

In spite of the fact that the role of teachers as leaders offers them natural authority, their authority should be exercised wisely while implementing the idea that "strength lies in softness". Serving as significant figures for their students is what gives teachers the true authority to admonish them. Consistency and firmness are important in education, but teachers must be careful not to resort to aggression or passive aggression. The essence of empowering education is expressed in the saying: "The shy cannot learn, and the meticulous cannot teach." Teachers must encourage questions until the topic is understood and assimilated without being drawn into criticism or blame, which impede the connection and trust between students and teachers. My experience along my life journey as both a student and a teacher as well as numerous conversations I have had with students in the Inclusive University have taught me that strictness and threats made by teachers often indicate burnout, stress, or anxiety due to lack of tools for coping with the challenges of teaching—particularly students who need adapted learning environments. Strictness is not an expression of strength, but of helplessness. I recall an instance in which one of my students said that she had decided to enroll in a course to learn a profession and her teacher insulted her in front of the entire class by saying: "What kind of questions are you asking? This isn't a special education class!" She felt rejected, inferior, and that she did not belong because of her inability to understand. I explained to her that the lecturer should have been the one to feel inferior because he lacked the tools to deal with a heterogeneous group of students. I asked her: "If there was a new immigrant in the class who did not understand something because of a language barrier, would it have been legitimate for the lecturer to tell her that this isn't an English instruction class?" She understood what I meant and realized that the weak person in the story was not her, but the lecturer who had accepted her into the course, received payment, but had failed to adapt his teaching methods to her learning needs.

In addition to all these aspects, encouragement is also important. Encouragement implies reflecting the student's natural abilities, reinforcing success, and support in instances of failure. This mainly implies instilling hope that the student is capable of assimilating the knowledge, values, and norms of behavior and implanting the idea that he or she is not alone in the struggle to become stronger and grow.

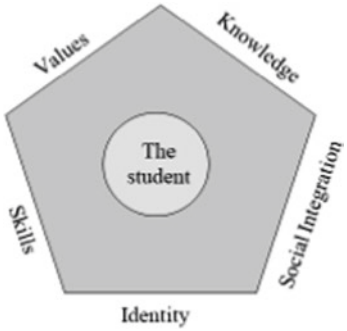
The parent-teacher approach is the basis for guidance and imparting knowledge in the Inclusive University as a whole and in the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" in particular—where teaching serves as the basis for establishing an identity of capability. The facilitator in these programs addresses the students as "Dear students" or "Beloved friends". Expressing feelings when teaching does not exceed boundaries. Explaining that it is important to receive feedback at the end of a lesson or sharing a participant's happiness is not disrespectful. The word "contentment"—which is the ambition of every parent—should also be included in a teacher's lexicon. I often witness my students' sense of satisfaction when they hear a sentence such as "You've made me feel extremely pleased. It was worth it to get up this morning!" Such statements are not educational manipulations. They are reflections of the facilitator's true feelings of love, respect, limits, and encouragement. They must be delivered in respectful language and in a pleasant tone that will penetrate the listeners' hearts—in keeping with the idea that "The words of the wise are delivered softly" as the Bible notes: "it is better to hear the quiet words of a wise person than the shouts of a foolish king." (Ecclesiastes 9:17)

Pedagogical Characteristics—The Pentagon of Empowering Teaching

Pedagogy is the methods used by educators to bring about optimal learning. Many teachers in the mainstream educational system learn pedagogy when they study for their teaching certificate, and teachers of special education learn unique teaching methods to use with students who require a different, adapted educational approach. Teachers in the mainstream who must deal with students with different learning needs who were integrated within their classes are often unaware of their needs and do not know how to adapt their teaching methods to enable these students optimal learning opportunities. Many academic lecturers lack structured knowledge of pedagogy, and many develop unique teaching methods (for better or worse)—by trial and error. Experience has taught me that everyone benefits when lecturers are attentive to the needs of their class and attempt to employ optimal teaching methods for students who need specific adaptation. After developing and adjusting tools for adaptive teaching I found myself listening to feedback from students in mainstream academic studies. They reported that despite the fact that the material was complex they could retain their attention for long periods of time if it was taught in a clear, varied, and illustrative manner. Continued conversations with them made me understand that teaching was not only didactics—developing ways of transmitting material, but a tool for em-

powering people—among whom are those on their way to acquiring a profession. I identify empowering teaching as a tool designed for attaining five main objectives: knowledge, values, skills, identity, and social integration. These five objectives are arranged in the form of a pentagon which I call the Pentagon of Empowering Teaching.

The Pentagon of empowering teaching



Knowledge The information and technological revolutions have created a new picture regarding the sources of power in society. Vast amounts of knowledge are developing at a rapid rate, and is readily available. Consequently, knowledge and wisdom are no longer the exclusive intellectual property of wise scholars and teachers. As a result, the challenge of teaching has become more complex. Lecturers in the academia are often asked: "If the presentation is available on the course website why should I bother coming to class?" "Why are you talking about an article that is included in our reading material?" "Why do I have to learn an entire lesson about a concept if I can read about it on Wikipedia in five minutes?" For this reason I feel that today the main question in teaching is that of motivation because many students are asking: "Why do I need to learn this?"

School learning, which takes place within the framework of compulsory education, differs from academic studies which in many cases are elective. Despite this, many students lack motivation to study by traditional methods, and it now appears that lecturers are forced to market the content world upon which their teaching focuses. The issue of **internal motivation** to learn is significant and important in any learning framework. Students' inner motivation to acquire knowledge stems from several motives: curiosity, competitiveness, and ambition for personal and social development. **External motivation** is equally important. External factors decrease or increase the motivation to learn. Beneficial thinking is human and legitimate, but if the benefit is unclear it is the facilitator's obligation to mediate it. Even if it is clear to the teacher why learning a particular field of knowledge is an important step for the student's professional or personal development, the student may see things from a different perspective. Mainstream students have often asked me why it is important to learn theories about human emotional development that were written one hundred years ago. I first offer an explanation to

arouse curiosity to learn about these theories in which I explain the relevance of the topic and instigate a critical academic discussion. This transforms the learning into active learning from which all the participants benefit. They sense that they also possess valuable knowledge about the topic in addition to the structured knowledge that I presented, and they feel stronger and are eager to join the discussion. When building the syllabus for a course it is important to present the course objectives clearly together with the benefits that students will gain for their personal and professional development. The topics should be presented in a logical order and the connections between them should be explained. Each lesson should begin with a presentation of the topic, its objectives, the reason for studying it, and its connection to previous topics.

Beginning the lesson with a stimulus for discussion such as viewing a film, reading a newspaper article, or presenting a central dilemma will enable learning the topic in a manner in which the teacher will benefit from the participants' theoretical and practical knowledge. Connecting the statements that the students make to the theory that the lesson focuses on will strengthen the speakers, who will understand that they came to a similar conclusion This is a technique that I often use. Participants are pleased to learn that their ideas are similar to theories that are associated with famous scholars.

Many lecturers present their knowledgeability to their listeners, but are less concerned with whether or not their main points and messages were absorbed. I have often attended conferences where speakers present slides filled with impressive graphs and text and speak far too quickly for the audience to comprehend. The topics they deal with are familiar to them, but not to their listeners. They use professional terminology in foreign languages without translating it. Lecturers must see themselves as providing a service. They are a pipeline and a tool for humbly transmitting knowledge, and must make sure that what they were talking about penetrates the consciousness and hearts of their listening audience. If the audience is diverse, lecturers must use creativity to illustrate and clarify what they have said so that it will be clear to everyone. If the contents are understood and the participants also acquired new personal and professional tools, a relay race has begun. The knowledge, which was initially possessed by the speaker, is spread to others, and a perceptual, scientific, or social change is created.

Exposure to knowledge does not ensure that students will assimilate it. It is necessary to relate to the emotional dimension as well and to bestow practical tools. The course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology" deals extensively with emotions. Teaching that deals with emotional processes sometimes creates dissonance. It is a process that involves changing attitudes because the facilitator expects that people will work to alter their detaining personal narrative in their lives that is based on negative paradigms. This is a process of changing attitudes, and as such it is liable to arouse difficulties. Despite the fact that attitudes can be changed, they tend to be consistent. In addition to the cognitive dimension that is involved in learning a new idea or theory, attention must also be devoted to emotional responses that it is liable to arouse. Tools must also be instilled for applying what has been learned. This has been the guideline for transmitting knowledge since the establishment of the Inclusive University. Each

lesson must include knowledge, relate to its emotional aspects, and tools must be obtained. Good teachers must know how to appeal to common sense and logic, while at the same time know how to excite and occasionally dramatize the content and exhibit empathy to arouse identification among the listeners. At the end of the process they must translate the knowledge into applicable tools, and emphasize the benefit of assimilating it. For example, in a lesson about dealing with loss the facilitator did not merely present various models, but used repercussive methods to instigate a discussion that would encourage an emotional dialogue based on experience. The students viewed a film in which the psychotherapist Viktor Frankl spoke about his personal loss during the Second World War. The film led to an honest, painful discussion about personal losses that the participants had experienced, and these were then connected to Cobbler Ross's theory about the stages of mourning. At the end of the session Karen (pseudonym) asked "But how can I use this theory to overcome the loss of my father? Years have gone by and I still can't get over his loss. The ensuing group discussion focused on possible tools for coping. The tools that the participants and the facilitator suggested included legitimization of feelings together with the understanding that Karen had not really processed her mourning and had not permitted herself "to let her father go". The members remarked that since her father had given her life, he would have wanted her to choose life. Living is a choice and every day should be filled with content that will enable the journey to continue. Karen understood that her life had halted after her father's death and she now had to resume the journey. Another major insight that arose within her during the discussion was that she was clinging to the past because she was afraid of the future—"What will happen if my mother dies as well?" She was told that her anxiety was legitimate, but if she focused on it she would not be free to enjoy her mother's presence. People must part from their parents, but they can find comfort in belonging to the family or other close groups they created. They suggested that Karen create a unit of belonging—Perhaps the time has come to invest effort in a stable partnership, strengthen the connection with siblings, nieces, nephews, or perhaps to establish closer friendships with peers in her housing framework. At the end of the lesson Karen said that the discussion had been moving and difficult for her and that she needed to process it, but in the same breath continued: "I'll never forget this lesson." The meeting drew a connection between study and action and between theory and real life challenges. This approach to instilling knowledge transforms learning into a significant and enlightening experience, and increases the chances that the knowledge will be absorbed and treasured by the student.

Values Education is a process of socialization for society and for a professional community, and therefore it also involves the provision of values. Values are fundamental social beliefs that determine what is right and moral in a particular society at a given time. Norms are derived from values. Western society has assimilated many values among which are equality, justice, human respect, self-determination, and fulfillment. Training for various professions also defines professional ethics that describe what is right to do and what must be avoided. People who conduct themselves according to accepted social values and norms that are ex-

pected of them as members of society are considered to be adjusted, will enjoy autonomy, and will be less subject to criticism or social sanctions. The role of teachers as representatives of society or a profession includes education for values. The classroom and group constitute a micro-cosmos for practicing these values. Values such as those mentioned earlier are extremely prevalent in classes of the three-step program. When I explain the meaning of the concept of values and ask the participants to give examples, they usually respond with "love of others." This value is translated into practice in the charter that is drawn up by the learning group that also includes the group's set of values: respect for different opinions, acceptance and avoiding judging any member of the group, striving for fulfillment, encouraging members to fulfill themselves, participation, justice, and equality. Lecturers must be conscious of teaching values because they serve as a role model, and should "practice what they preach".

Skills Teachers must bequeath their students with the tools and skills for applying the knowledge and values that they were taught. School teachers must teach their students learning strategies and not merely assign tasks. They must describe and clarify their expectations, and instill skills for performing them. During teachers' in-service training period and internship—focus is placed on translating the material they have learned into professional practice. In a psychoeducational group such as the three-step program that characterizes learning for an identity of capability it is not sufficient merely to provide knowledge and to offer "advice for living". It is essential to instill skills and offer opportunities to experiment with using them to succeed, understand what brought about success, and repeat it or to learn from failures and search for alternatives. These are the true keys for assimilating what has been learned and for empowering students. A proverb attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius states: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". It is the teacher's obligation to turn philosophical ideas into replicable practice. For example, during the lesson in which the members of the group learned the importance of self-love as a condition for social integration, they have difficulty translating this idea into a way of life. Because of this, some of them even go so far as to contest the idea: "That's easy to say, but impossible to do." In order for this empowering idea to become an empowering reality it must be translated into possible tools such as focusing on strengths, converting detaining patterns into self-appreciation and positive patterns of thinking. Using skills that are derived from knowledge change the world of the learning content to a professional routine or into the student's life routine.

Identity The renowned educator Janusz Korczak made a wise statement: "He who cares for *days*—sows wheat. He who cares for *years—plants trees.* He who cares for generations—educates people." The objective of education is to teach the next generation of humanity, its members, leaders, and functionaries who will see to people's needs. Educating young children requires establishing an identity of capability. Every student must feel that he or she has a right to be part of society and to participate in the social circle of "give and take"—deserving to receive

but also deserving to give through the knowledge, abilities and skills they have acquired. In order to attain this objective teachers must implant a sense of capability and envision the strengths that lie within every member of the group.

During professional training teachers establish their students' professional identity. Establishing a positive personal or professional identity is a major role of teachers and an important aspect of empowering teaching. Becoming acquainted with each student before learning begins enables teachers to designate personal goals for growth and for establishing an identity of capability. Teachers can take the necessary steps to make classroom and group processes more effective to attain these goals.

Social Integration The Russian–American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner theorized that people are part of consecutive contexts beginning with the family system, which is part of a community system, which is in turn part of a national system, etc. Each person, as a differentiated system, is a creature who influences these systems and is impacted by them (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The same holds true for a person who is part of a class or group, in which each person socially nourishes and is nourished by the group. As in every group, the process of the formation of a group of students involves growing closer and farther from one another, and at a later point the members of the group experience struggles for power and control. Members must then define the leaders and followers, who adheres to the rules, who is the clown who gives life to the group and enables interludes, and who are the scholars who retain the learning material. The group attains intimacy only after it has completed all these stages. The problem is that every group also unites against certain members who are rejected and become scapegoats. Some students are thirsty for knowledge, but because of difficulties becoming socially integrated and being rejected they have ended up wandering between frameworks or dropping out. We often hear about children who suffered harassment by their classmates and bear scars to the point at which their faith in other people was undermined. The role of the teacher is to see that every student is socially integrated. Sometimes difficulties with social integration stem from difficulties with regulation such as talking incessantly or hypersensitivity that results in loud complaints such as "Who ate tuna fish at recess? The smell is bothering me!" or "You're making too much noise. I can't study." "Why did you smoke at recess? I can't concentrate because of the smell." Oversensitivity combined with impulsive behavior are liable to arouse unregulated behavior and disproportionate responses, which result in rejection. Other students or teachers mistakenly perceive that the child is deliberately disturbing and distracting others during the meeting.

The role of the teacher is to increase the participation of every student in the group—classroom space and to help them acquire skills that will increase integration. Anna (pseudonym), a 25-year old woman with complex learning disabilities and high-functioning autism, walked out of the classroom in a fit of anger during the first meeting, claiming that she was being discriminated against: "You let everyone in the class speak five times. You even let someone speak six times, and

you only let me speak twice. You don't like me and I don't like being here." I responded by complimenting her for her ability to listen to the lesson while counting exactly how many times each person had spoken. I also commented that this showed that she had a phenomenal memory and that she doubtless had other abilities that I would like to learn about. I emphasized that everyone had the right to express themselves and that if she wanted to speak she must participate in the discussion and not relent. At the same time I clarified that the group was mature and that her classmates might perceive her response as immature. Since it was important to me for her to feel equal to everyone else, I suggested that if she ever felt injustice or any other issue during class she should pass me a note. At the beginning of the consequent lessons I asked who remembered what we had talked about during the previous lesson, and Anna was always the first one to offer a precise answer. I reflected to her how impressed I was with her memory and that it was good to know that we had a member like her in the group. Over time it became apparent that this constant mediation regarding Anna's essential role in the group earned her a positive reputation. The group constitutes an important fertile ground for new social experimentation and for increasing social integration.

In summary, the pentagonal model of empowering teaching defines the complexity of the role of teachers. Relating to teaching as a multi-dimensional process of intervention that is directed towards strengths, identity, and empowerment will not only contribute to optimal learning, but will also result in empowerment of students as people who will be able to perform an array of roles throughout their lives.

Teachers' Perception of Students–Teachers as Service Providers

Student-centered education is a concept that is included within the idea of person-centered service. It is an educational philosophy that views the teacher as a service—provider rather than an all-encompassing power with exclusive authority. The social exchange theory, which is derived from the social sciences, views any continuous and established social interaction as a relationship of "give and take." Interpersonal, therapeutic, or service-providing connections will continue as long as both parties benefit. There can be no leaders without voters, no business owners without clientele, and no teachers without students. Clients create and retain service providers and vise-versa. The amount of power on both sides is not always equal, but it is important for each side to recognize the importance of the other in order for their interaction to continue.

From the time the Inclusive University was established I have viewed it as a service, perceived the facilitators as service providers, and the members of the learning groups as consumers. Each lesson is an encounter in which an exchange takes place: The facilitators give what they have to offer while recognizing their students' contribution to their personal development and deeper knowledge of the issues being discussed. Ancient Jewish scholars who sanctified knowledge have shared their insights over thousands of years of teaching. One of these scholars, Rabbi Hanania, stated: "I have learned much from my teachers, more

from my colleagues, and the most from my students." (The Talmud, Ta'anit, Page 7a.) The Talmud also states that a teacher's greatness stems from humility, emphasizing: "Who is wise? He who learns from every man."

Empowering teaching focuses on the strengths of the individual and on the reflection of the facilitator to the group or an individual at any appropriate opportunity. It also focuses on the benefits the facilitator gains from the students' opinions and knowledge. The teacher views each member of the learning group as a student who possesses knowledge. Consequently, the dialogues that take place in the various learning groups contribute continuously to the body of knowledge that has been accumulated within the program. In addition, each student possesses unique skills that can help the facilitator such as technological abilities, technical skills, responsibility, or an exceptional memory. It is very important to give students roles and to make it clear that the teacher needs their skills. This offers students an opportunity to give as well as to receive. It is not sufficient merely to reflect strengths. Empowering teaching aims to create opportunities in which teachers and members of the group mutually depend and benefit from each other's strengths.

The respect that teachers acquire for their students creates their respect for their teachers. Words have the ability to harm or to heal. A teacher's words are designed to build their students' knowledge, their identity and self-value, and to enhance their ability to grow as participants in building society. It is therefore important that teachers identify their students' strong points in each expression and gesture and reflect them in real time. Teachers must be sure to sight every strong point or skill on their "growth-enhancing radar". For example, during recess a student informed me that he was "starving" and that he had forgotten to eat lunch because he had been in a hurry to get to a meeting. Lily immediately shared her sandwich with him and remarked: "Take this! I can never finish the sandwiches I make." This moving incident became etched in my memory and I immediately reflected to Lily how moved I was by her generosity and her sensitivity to her friend. This was one of her major characteristics that was recorded in her "Identity Card" that she received at the graduation ceremony together with her diploma. Teachers must perceive teaching as a process of formation and be aware that their leadership is significant to their students' personal or professional development.

Learning groups occasionally include students who exhibit difficulty regulating their behavior or feelings. They may behave in a manner they perceive as being positive such as over-participation, asking too many questions, or expressing excitement in a loud, irritating voice. Such students constitute a testing point for any teacher as to whether or not he or she deserves the students trust. Many graduates described a good teacher as "Someone who did not give up on me" and described bad teachers as someone who "Looked for any opportunity to get rid of me." The teacher's role is to help students learn to regulate undesirable forms of behavior by conducting a private discussion in order to reflect the repercussions of these behaviors or feelings to the student. Teachers must convey the message that they are very eager for the student to continue to participate in the group and to become socially integrated within it as much as possible. In such cases the stu-

dent and I often agree on a predetermined signal to make them aware of the need to moderate their behavior. Sometimes I send a personal message to their mobile phone or discretely pass them a note. These actions build the students' trust and help them sense that the teacher is there for them. Relating to them in a respectful, inclusive manner and providing their personal needs are a powerful means of building trust and connection between teachers and students.

The learning group provides all the needs that are described in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs: An adapted physical environment (including sensory adaptation), a sense that learning is taking place within a safe environment, increased personal esteem and self-confidence, love and belonging, respect and appreciation, and a learning experience that enables students to actualize their hidden potential.

Teachers must be more than patrons of knowledge or competent authorities in their area of expertise in order to become a significant other from whom the student wishes to learn. This is illustrated by the proverb: "Proper behavior precedes the Torah"—meaning that courtesy is more important than broad knowledge."

Teachers must relate to their students with empathy, trust, and transparency. Empathy is the ability to step into someone else's shoes. Teachers must broadcast to their students that they understand their feelings and respect their opinion even if they do not agree with it. Empathy can be expressed through an empathetic monologue—a technique that was described in previous chapters. An empathetic monologue involves repeating a narrative that was built by the participant and offering explanations and justification for why the person chose to respond to an interpersonal situation the way they did. The facilitator first makes it clear that he or she thoroughly understands their line of thinking before proposing an alternative opinion or position. Failing to do so is liable to arouse opposition. The facilitator then proposes an alternative interpretation and asks the participant whether he or she agrees. The use of empathy is illustrated by a story written by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov entitled "The Turkey Prince" in which a prince became insane and thought that he was a turkey. The prince felt compelled to sit naked under the table pecking at bones and pieces of bread like a turkey. All the royal physicians gave up hope of curing him until a sage arrived, undressed, and joined the prince under the table.

"Who are you?" asked the prince. "What are you doing here?"

The sage asked the prince in return: "What are you doing here?"

"I am a turkey," replied the prince.

"I'm also a turkey," answered the sage.

As time went by the sage requested that clothes be brought to them and asked the prince: "Do you think that if we wear clothes we'll stop being turkeys?" He then asked for plates with food and asked the prince: "Do you think that if we eat reg-

ular food we'll stop being turkeys?" After some time he proposed to the prince that they get up from under the table, and the prince agreed. This wonderful story illustrates that sometimes we have to "get under the table" to become tuned-in and understand another person's world before offering them advice. This is the essence of empathy in teaching.

The process of building an identity is characterized by sharing and exposing emotions. Ethical rules are one of the important factors in building trust in student–teacher relations. This means that from my first meeting with new participants or students I make it clear that anything they say to me will be held in confidence unless I receive their permission to share the contents of our conversation with factors whom they choose. In addition, many students who have difficulty summarizing the lesson ask permission to record it. The rule is that if a student records a lesson they are obligated not to expose it to anyone outside the learning group. They are asked to erase the recording after they have absorbed the learning material and assimilated the insights contained in the conversation that took place.

Empowering teaching obligates seeing the students within their contexts, understanding their cultures, and perceiving their coping in various aspects. I make sure to use concepts from my students' languages and cultures. If there are immigrants from other countries I try to learn a few words or humorous expressions in their native language. Some of these concepts are difficult for others to understand. If others in the group ask what we are talking about I ask the student's permission to explain, and if they hesitate I end the issue by explaining: "It's just something between us." Consequently, in addition to the initial introductory conversation it is important for teachers to continuously take an interest in how their students are doing, be aware of what they are coping with, and be available to them.

The class contract states that the facilitator also needs a recess, but if students need to share something with the facilitator or seek advice they can do so during recess. In less urgent cases students can contact the facilitator through electronic communication. Some students continue to contact me long after they have completed their studies in the program to share good news or positive transitions in their lives. Teachers who offer their students emotional support become significant others in their students' lives. This was expressed by Joel (pseudonym) who was asked to describe the best teacher he ever had. "When my father was ill my teacher notice that I was sad and asked what had happened. I said to myself that since he had asked I would tell him. Before every lesson began he continued to ask me: "Joel, how are you? How is your father?" That pleased me, and despite the fact that I didn't know or understand mathematics well, I made an effort for him. He was the only one who encouraged me just when I really needed it."

In summary, the manner in which empowering teachers relate to their students broadcasts respect, encouragement, and mutuality. They demonstrate empathy for their students, view each student in context, and take an interest in them. They reflect the strengths that they identify within them and make them and the group aware of them. They are available to their students and build mutual trust, and adhere to ethical rules that are required in teaching that involves emotional

processes. In this way they ensure the individual, class, or group a safe space for growth.

Creating a Safe Classroom Climate

One of the objectives of the Inclusive University is to create a corrective learning experience for the participants. Many of them describe feelings of anxiety when they were schoolchildren: "I felt like a duck in a shooting gallery. I was always afraid that I would be asked questions or that the teacher would call me up to the board because it was difficult for me to pay attention. I had a teacher who would deliberately humiliate me. My classmates constantly laughed at me. It was a nightmare. I understood that studying and I don't get along." Empowering teachers must exhibit leadership that ensures that the classroom and group space is safe for every student. They must first and foremost remember their students' names. Addressing every student by name promotes respect and closeness. This is one of the first challenges that I focus on during my meetings with each group. I use a list with a note or picture next to each student's name in order to cope with this challenge.

Empowering teachers must **help the group form as a driving power** for the growth of its members, and to establish a positive group identity. They must be acquainted with group processes as much as possible and be aware of the group dynamics that take place both within and outside the framework of the meetings. Participation in various virtual communication groups is essential for them to be aware of dialogues that take place between the students. Teachers must be available for questions, group or individual consultation, and be prepared to mediate or seek a compromise if conflicts or discord arise between students. The teacher's involvement serves as a role model as well as an additional educational channel through which he or she can suggest tools for coping with various challenges. This is an important channel of communication between the lecturer or the group facilitator that helps members of the group feel that they belong and are available for each other at any time (except at night). The facilitator occasionally needs to mediate in these matters as well. Some of the students have experienced social isolation in their lives, and having these channels of communication open and available after years of living in social "drought" is an empowering corrective experience. A fertile classroom climate constitutes a medium for educational and personal growth and increases the chances for every member of the learning group to grow.

A safe classroom climate is reflected in the **style of communication** among the members of the learning group. Honest, open communication that offers legitimacy for emotions and a variety of opinions is extremely important. This type of communication respects every member of the group. During controversial discussions Gail (pseudonym) tended to make remarks to the facilitator or her fellow group members such as "That's nonsense!" or "What you're saying is wrong." I explained to her good-naturedly several times that the spirit of dialogue in the academia requires different, more respectful responses such as "Permit me to dis-

agree with you, my learned friend" or: "Your opinion is interesting, but I feel differently." Using these statements became protocol until she assimilated them and began to use them frequently with a broad smile. Today, many years after completing her studies in the course "Identity of Capability—Introduction to Practical Psychology"—Gail has continued to study in various programs in the Inclusive University. Occasionally, at the height of a discussion and with much laughter, she turns to her discussion mates and says: "Permit me to disagree, my learned friends."

A safe classroom atmosphere creates an inclusive and relaxed **emotional climate** that enables everyone to confidently express their feelings with the knowledge that they are legitimate and desirable for processes of personal growth. Since the course deals with human spirit, I tell my students that "With feelings there are no truth or lies", and consequently they cannot say anything wrong. When I first began teaching I deliberated whether or not to use personal examples from my own life's journey to illustrate, explain, and clarify the learning content. My dilemma stemmed from the fact that professional ethics emphasize the need for distancing between the life of the advisor, counselor, or therapist and the client. Today I have no doubt that moderately exceeding this limitation and sharing personal examples help build the participants' trust. Such examples also serve as catalysts for open discussions that render emotional language as legitimate and enlightening. Students often want to get to know their teacher and are surprised to learn that their leader also experienced ups-and-downs, doubts, deliberations, and fears in his or her life. This helps them to normalize their own feelings as well.

Each Student is Related to as Being Unique and Special in a safe classroom climate. Instead of comparing between students, empowering teachers take care to illustrate and clarify to what extent the human variety in the group creates a single and special human mosaic that constitutes a whole. Instead of comparison and competition that arouse jealousy, impair self-image, and create unequal opportunities for those with difficulties in various areas, empowering teachers emphasize uniqueness and the relative value of each participant within the "group whole". Teachers in a class with students who have diverse abilities need to encourage **mutual support and giving** by all members of the group, with each person contributing his or her personal resources. For example, some students offer technical support to their peers (as well as to the lecturer). Some volunteer to bring coffee or a snack from the cafeteria at recess for a friend who has difficulty walking. Others take notes for their friends who have difficulty writing. Mutual responsibility plays an important role in forming the group, creating a corrective experience in social integration, and acknowledging the capability of the person who offered help.

A safe climate does not confront difficulties, but instead attempts to suggest **adaptations and tools for coping with them**. The Inclusive University makes didactic, sensory, and medical adaptations as well as changes in the ratio between time spent in class and intermissions. Students are almost never unexpectedly called

upon directly during class, and some assignments are elective. The students receive printed summaries of each lesson so that their attention during class will be devoted to learning rather than copying from the board or attempting to summarize the lesson content (a skill that is difficult for most people with complex learning disabilities).

A safe climate creates opportunities for success. For this reason there is flexibility in the format in which students submit assignments. Students who have difficulty writing can submit a recording or drawing and explain it to the lecturer or to the class. Feedback about students work is given verbally whenever possible rather than in quantitative grades. This enables students to understand that this learning space expects them to do their best, which is a challenge that all of them can contend with.

Adaptations are not only made in the didactic aspect. The lecturer must create **a sensory adapted environment**. The size of the classroom is an important factor in students' ability to retain attention. Over the years I have taught relatively large groups in small, crowded classrooms. In small classrooms visual or audio stimuli, smells, changes in room temperature, and even physical contact due to crowded conditions are intensely experienced and result in arousal and a disproportionate response. Moving to a more spacious classroom enable lessons to be conducted in a much better manner. If the classroom windows face a courtyard it is important for the windows to have curtains. The amount of stimuli that appear on the walls of the classroom also has impact on the students' ability to remain attentive. The waste basket should also be out of range of the students' sense of smell. A sensory-adapted environment moderates sensory arousal and enables optimal learning.

In addition to the importance of pedagogical and sensory adaptation it is important for the teacher to be aware of any **medical needs** or other requirements for each student. Towards the end of the introductory meeting after trust has been established, candidates are asked if they are generally healthy and if they have any medical issues that the facilitator should know about so that medical support can be alerted if necessary. Sometimes students with visual disabilities ask to have the lighting dimmed in areas of the classroom, and those with hearing disabilities require continuous eye contact so that they can see the lecturer's mouth and lip read. Occasionally there is a participant with epilepsy in the group, and the lecturer must be aware of this and know what to do if a seizure occurs.

Certain groups include students with hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels). I always carry small packets of sugar or sweets in my bag in case of an emergency. One of the groups included a student C.P with athetoid movements that are characterized by involuntary body movements. The student's arm moved involuntarily during the class. The woman sitting next to him mistakenly thought he was trying to make advances, and approached me during recess to tell me that she was upset at her neighbor's behavior. I explained to her what the cause of the issue was. We made sure that he sat at the edge of the circle so that he would not have to worry about suppressing his involuntary hand movements, others would not be distracted, and there would be no more misunderstandings. Students with a limited attention and concentration span require an adapted learning environment and are sometimes given a short intermission in the middle of the lesson.

A safe classroom climate creates an atmosphere of **hope for change and cheerful learning**. The leadership of the teacher or facilitator must transmit a positive spirit and cheerfulness during meetings. Each meeting should begin with "warmup" questions about how the students are feeling, an amusing incident that happened to the lecturer on the way to the meeting, a short discussion about current events, or an insight that the lecturer had about a student's remark. Statements such as: "Jason, I thought a lot about what you said during the meeting last week." This implies that what the student said was worthy of being mentioned and was significant enough for the lecturer to think about it for an entire week. "Many lectures in the academia take place once a week. Lecturers who open a meeting with a remark such as: "I'm happy to be with you again today" or just "Hello everyone, I've missed you!" (if that is true) let the class know that the lecturer is pleased to see them again. This is an illustrative example of teaching for growth in which the students are people who are significant to their educational leader.

The Use of Humor in Teaching

The use of humor in teaching is one of the most significant tools for making learning more cheerful and for relieving anxiety. There is ambivalence towards using humor in teaching due to the fear of crossing boundaries or promoting a comic atmosphere in the academia, as reflected in the expression: "One joke can dismiss a hundred admonishments."

Many teachers feel they have no natural ability to use humor. Using humor also involves "self-humor by the facilitator, and some feel threatened by this idea. Despite this, I view humor as an important tool in teaching as long as it is natural and not forced. Many studies emphasized the advantages of using humor in teaching. Shabinski and Martin (2010) found that the use of humor in learning meetings increases participation, enjoyment, and trust in student–teacher relations. They also found that humor improves achievements and memory, creates a positive long-term learning experience, relieves tension, promotes unity, and helps overcome classroom problems. However, humor must be used cautiously. Feedback conversations with many groups of graduates of the three-step program revealed many similar advantages of the use of humor in the program:

- **Humor relieves anxiety** "Humor increases happiness and helps us to open our minds to learning because we're not afraid. When you laugh your mind is open, and when you're afraid your mind is closed."
- **Humor brings the teacher and students closer** "I remember that you talked about funny things that happened to you and it helped me to open up and talk about thing."
- **Humor arouses curiosity and helps retain attention** "We were always waiting for you to tell another funny story."
- **Humor increases motivation to learn and to participate in meetings** "I waited for meetings all week. We deal with things seriously and learn here, but it's like coming to a stand-up comedy about life. It's fun!"

- **Humor helps to remember the learning contents** "Sometimes a joke or a funny story helped me remember what we were talking about."
- **Humor increases enjoyment and contributes to group unity** "Everything we learned and all the laughter turned us into a family. It's our inner humor. For example, every time someone was confused about something, you would say: 'What did I do to deserve this? Help me!" Now we all say it to each other and we say it at work…"

Use of humor in the classroom is spontaneous and develops as part of its entity. However, humor can also be used through various channels. Some require developing and perfecting skills and others require the ability to identify opportunities for humorous situations to establish a cheerful atmosphere:

Utilizing Situations to Develop Inner Humor Sometimes distracting situations occur in class. Since the situation has already developed it can be utilized as a humorous situation instead of resorting to criticism or rebuke. Once some mosquitos were buzzing around the classroom and disturbing the lesson. Many of the students attempted to swat them or squash them between their hands, making it difficult to continue the lesson. The hand clapping increased and the facilitator got up, bowed, and said: "Please hold your applause until the end of the lesson." Another incident occurred when the air conditioner in the classroom began to leak in the middle of an emotional discussion. The facilitator turned off the air conditioner and asked: "I see that this was also difficult for the air conditioner. Ben, do you have a tissue for it?" This remark led to an outburst of laughter that relieved the intense emotions in the class. These events create a setting that becomes an inner language from one meeting to the next and delights the participants.

Using Visual Humor The slides in presentations must have accentuated titles and a few rows of brief text next to an amusing picture, cartoon, or video clip. The funny pictures on the slides create conditioning that enables students to remember the contents and raise smiles or even laughter, as well as anticipation and curiosity about the surprise that will appear on the next slide.

Preparing Jokes About the Topic It is extremely important to accumulate jokes and to catalogue them according to the topics of the various meetings. Jokes create an illusion of a break from the lecture, but in essence, they are an additional channel that helps the participants focus their attention and show interest. After the joke their attention is renewed and their "attention countdown" starts again from the beginning.

Incorrect Words Deliberately using incorrect words is an amusing way to check and see whether students are paying attention. Some students attempt to correct the facilitator, while others realize that the mistake was made deliberately. This brings about laughter that spreads to the rest of the group. My late grandmother used to greet me when I came to visit by asking: "How do you veal?" I liked this

and adopted it. I would ask my students the same thing and they would answer in a similar way. Sometimes I would turn to students and say: "I admire your allergy in class" instead of "I admire your energy in class". These expressions eventually develop into inside jokes and contribute to the group's identity.

Using Comic Elements Ever since I began teaching I make a point of coming to class wearing a tie with a cartoon character. This sends a message that the meetings are serious, but have a comic element as well. Many students wait in the doorway to see what character will be pictured on my tie that day. During the lesson students sometime compliment me and say: "I like your tie," and I always answer: "So do I. And I'm keeping it." These ties serve as a comic element. Sometimes when I talk about a dramatic example of something I stop and say "Excuse me, I'm moved by what I've said" and wipe crocodile tears with my tie. I then pretend to wring the tie out and add: "Now you know two things about me. The first is that I am easily moved to tears, and the second is that I wear a tie to use as a handkerchief." Teachers who want to arouse their students' interest should adopt a personal comic element.

Laughing at Oneself This does not imply that teachers should laugh at or ridicule themselves in front of their students. A facilitator's self-humor transmits humility and a personal example of self-acceptance as well as a way of dealing with failures or what the individual perceives as weaknesses or shortcomings. I remember that I once stopped to wash my hands and face before the lesson began and was unprepared when the water sprayed out of the faucet and soaked my shirt and pants. When I entered the classroom my students looked at me in confusion and I came up with an anecdote I had thought up on the way to the classroom: "I know, I'm wet. Don't worry, it's only the bathroom faucet. I've been toilet trained since I was two." I was able to conduct the lesson and my students quickly ignored my unusual appearance.

Analyzing Short Funny Videos Students like to watch short films during class. They serve as a refreshing intermission and a change from frontal lecturing based on listening to experienced-based learning with audio-visual stimulation. The films have a plot that becomes etched in their memory. I select comedy films that are suitable to the objective of the lesson and conduct a comprehensive discussion about them.

Humorous Exercises Humorous learning exercises also arouse interest in the lesson. For example, the lesson that deals with communication begins with conducting and analyzing exercises in interpersonal communication. The exercises include conducting a conversation in pairs while sitting back to back or speaking in a monotone. These exercises are educational and are designed to illustrate the complexity of communication, but they are nevertheless amusing because the students have difficulty following the instructions. Another example is the use of role playing. During the lesson about relationships and partnerships a pair of students en-

act a "date" in front of the class. This amusing situation causes the class to erupt in laughter, but the exercise is followed by a serious and deep analysis.

Dramatization of Examples and Stories The nature of "Identity of Capability" program involves the use of examples and life stories. Describing the stories in a dry, factual manner eliminates the power and strength that lies within them. For this reason the facilitator attempts to present the example in a lively manner using acting and dramatization to describe the event more dramatically and arouse the participants. Voice is one of the facilitator's main working tools, and he or she should therefore be aware of the power hidden in the various tones of voice. There are messages that must be transmitted with pathos, excitement, in a humorous voice, or in a casual manner, and others that must be transmitted forcefully in a loud voice or even shouting to arouse listeners. It is extremely important for facilitators to use intonation that is appropriate for what is being said. Changing the tone of voice arouses the listeners' interest, moves them to learn, and creates a lively classroom climate.

These techniques contribute significantly towards creating a safe classroom climate, establishing a sense of belonging among members of the group, instilling hope, and increasing happiness while learning. They increase the participants' motivation to persevere, learn, and develop. It should be remembered that use of humor is liable to develop into chaos, and the facilitator's leadership must transmit the idea that as in all walks of life, there has to be a balance. For this reason, the facilitator must sometimes remind the participants that they must get back to theoretical learning until the next intermission of active learning.

Humor in teaching is extremely powerful, but it also involves numerous risks. Care must be taken not to use humor that is scornful, personal, or pokes fun at certain ethnic groups. Humor must be used in proportion and in the proper contexts. Facilitators must also keep in mind that classes contain a variety of students including those who have difficulty understanding humor because of cognitive disabilities, misunderstanding social codes, or mental and emotional conditions that prevent them from enjoying the medium of humor.

Supplementary Information

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Springer Texts in Education delivers high-quality instructional content for graduates and advanced graduates in all areas of Education and Educational Research. The textbook series is comprised of self-contained books with a broad and comprehensive coverage that are suitable for class as well as for individual self-study. All texts are authored by established experts in their fields and offer a solid methodological background, accompanied by pedagogical materials to serve students such as practical examples, exercises, case studies etc. Textbooks published in the Springer Texts in Education series are addressed to graduate and advanced graduate students, but also to researchers as important resources for their education, knowledge and teaching. Please contact Nick Melchior at textbooks.education@springer.com or your regular editorial contact person for queries or to submit your book proposal.

Epilogue

When people open their hearts to someone else who is significant to them, it is not only an expression of trust. They are entrusting that person with something valuable that is a part of their emotional world. The person they are speaking with than shares their secret, their feelings and becomes a partner in their coping. Significant interpersonal meetings form a person's personality. Throughout my professional life I have had the privilege of meeting people with complex learning disabilities who entrusted their life story to my heart and consciousness. These stories and the continuous dialogue with these people have helped me to understand what it means to strive for a full life, to overcome obstacles, the power of social integration, and how painful life can be without it. More than anything, I have learned that when there is a limitation in one existential area, a capability emerges in another. In many respects, my existence has been formed by my life journey and the stories that have been entrusted to my consciousness and my heart by people whom I have met along the way who have encountered despair and challenge alongside strengths and hope. They are interwoven in the lines of this book. The process of writing it helped me understand the meaning of the saying: "I have learned much from my teachers, but I have learned most of all from my students." Writing this book helped me understand how much I have learned about the art of life and about the power of choosing life anew each and every day. There is nothing more appropriate than to end this book with the words of a poem entitled "Thinking" by Walter D. Wintel:

If you think you are beaten, you are

If you think you dare not, you don't,
If you like to win, but you think you can't

It is almost certain you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you're lost

For out of the world we find,
Success begins with a fellow's will

It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are

You've got to think high to rise,
You've got to be sure of yourself before

You can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go

To the stronger or faster man,

But soon or late the man who wins

Is the man who thinks he can!

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