Child to child approach to promote Inclusive Education

Pilot project - Jerusalem Centre for Disabled Children, Palestine

Presentation at the International Seminar on Inclusive Education, Agra, India . 1-7 March 1998

**By Maysa Hawwash, Palestine**

Context
This presentation reports on the implementation of [a pilot project](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/promote.docx) which took place in a mainstream school located within a rehabilitation centre for disabled children. The Jerusalem Centre for Disabled Children (JCDC) or better known as the 'Amira Basma Centre' is situated on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, Palestine. It opened its doors as a rehabilitation centre in 1965 when the area was still under control of Jordan. It offered rehabilitation for children with impairments as a result of poliomyelitis. After 1967 the area became occupied by Israel. Since then the centre has developed to become a National Referral Centre for Palestinian children from the Central and Northern part of the West Bank and Gaza. These children are referred from Community Based Rehabilitation programmes or Intermediate Level Services for evaluation and short term intensive rehabilitation. The majority of children who receive services of JCDC at present have impairments as a result of cerebral palsy.

In 1987 a mainstream primary school was opened. It started small and at first only for children with disabilities who received rehabilitation at JCDC. But gradually non disabled children from the direct neighborhood of the JCDC were also attending the school. Over the years the number of children with disabilities became less. They either graduated or found access to schools in their own communities. At present the school consists of two kindergarten classes and a primary school up to sixth grade. There are 11 teachers and 185 students. As the building is physically accessible for most children it is a welcoming environment for children with disabilities. As a result there are 27 disabled children from the neighborhood attending the school. As this is quite unique for a Palestinian school we wanted to learn from this experience as it may provide valuable information for other people promoting inclusive education in Palestine. The presence of rehabilitation and education professionals in the near vicinity of the school gave us the opportunity to explore their roles as resource personnel to support inclusive education.

# Child-to-Child Approach

**Aim:**

* Children will be more responsible for the health of themselves and their communities.

**Ideas:**

* Children learn better by doing (Active learning).
* Children learn better from each other.
* Children as partners in promoting health and issues of concern to their communities.
* Children influence adults.

**6 Step Approach:**

1. Identify a problem (health related or other issues of concern )
2. Finding out more about it (collecting information, surveys, interviews, etc.)
3. Plan for action
4. Implementing the plan
5. Sharing and evaluating the experience
6. Doing it better

To prepare the school environment to be more welcoming to all children, the Child-to-Child approach was used in this pilot project. The Child-to-Child approach has traditionally focused on issues of health. However, health is looked at from a view which is wider than merely the absence of disease. It stresses the importance of happy relationships and that is where issues of disability comes in.

The approach also addresses issues of learning and links what is learned now with what we do now. It links with what we learn in the classroom with what we do out of class and at home. The approach promotes experimental learning and the use of a wide range of teaching strategies. It sees children as equal partners who are able to make a difference in their communities.

The present Child-to-Child activity sheet covering disability recommends the use of simulation activities, whereby children are blind folded etc. and activities to learn to discover disabilities. However simulation activities have been criticised by disabled people for promoting a feeling of pity. Simulation activities tends to put an emphasis on the individual model of disability whereby the 'problem' is situated in the individual. This pilot project tries out a newly developed activity sheet focusing on issues of exclusion/inclusion and how all children can be included through a change in the environment. Emphasis on disability is avoided.

**Aims:**

* Children are encouraged to take responsibility towards including all children in classroom settings and in their communities.

**Ideas:**

* All children are special and have individual differences and needs
* All children need friends
* All children need to be equal partners in education
* Children together can come with creative ideas to overcome barriers to inclusion
* Children influence adults

# 2. The Pilot Project

**2.1.** The aim of the pilot project was to learn from the experiences from disabled children, non disabled children, parents and teachers who have been involved in putting inclusive education in practice. The teachers, parents and children from the second grade of the school at JCDC were involved as they have 7 (out of 23) children with disabilities in the classroom. We were especially interested in:

* Testing the appropriateness of a newly developed Child-to-Child activity sheet.
* The support system needed to make inclusion successful, real and sustainable.
* Developing a training manual for teachers, parents and professionals to promote inclusive education.

Activity sheets are used as part of the Child-to-Child approach which is an approach to active learning establishing closer links with what is learned in the school with the community. The activity sheet is used as a resource for the first of the six steps of the Child-to-Child approach, raising awareness. Activities were developed addressing issues of exclusion and inclusion. Different methods were incorporated in the activities to emphasise the need for a wide range of teaching methodology for inclusion. Methods include role-play, games, drawings, stories and observations.

To make inclusion possible teacher support is important. During the pilot project we were looking at support in the f orm of parents, children, rehabilitation workers, colleagues and Disabled People's Union. Representatives of them participated in the pilot project.

As Inclusive Education is a new concept with a philosophical base developed in the West. We felt it necessary to develop a series of workshops to discuss issues related to disability and exclusion. Issues covered included the social and individual model of disability, images of disabled people, attitudes formation and change and principles of Inclusive Education. The participants did also experience all the classroom activities from the Child-to-Child activity sheet.

The activities were then implemented with the children in the classroom. Both the children and teachers evaluated the activities and gave recommendations for improvements. The teachers and children were also involved in a pre- and post-test, consisting of classroom observations and drawings.

# Results

**Activity sheet:**

* The activities of the sheet were evaluated by the children, the teachers and disabled people as appropriate for Palestinian society, with some minor adaptations.
* The activities are considered to promote the principles of inclusive education concerning accepting differences and increasing tolerance.
* The activities are considered to promote the principles of inclusive education concerning teaching methodologies. It made the teachers question their teaching practices.
* The activities fit into the Child-to-Child approach as it raised enough awareness to trigger off action.

**Training manual:**

* The training as identified was successful in preparing the teachers to implement the activities with the children independently.
* It is recommended to include the pre- and post- test into the training, especially the classroom observations, as this was an important trigger for change.
* It was acknowledged by all participants that training is needed to be able to implement the activities with the children successfully.

**Support system:**

The support system identified by the teachers included the professionals. They are important for the technical support, environmental adaptations etc.. The administration was also important to receive support from as they are the decision makers. Flexibility on their part and interest in promoting inclusive education is an important aspect of the success of inclusion.

Parents support was not discussed in great detail as the school has limited involvement of parents up till now. The parents are very informed about what is happening in the school but are not involved as such. This needs further investigation and follow-up in the future. Another aspect which needs further investigation is the support from a group of parents of children with disabilities. The present Palestinian Union of Disabled Persons does not have representation of parents yet.

We additionally recommend that the activities be implemented in different schools, in different settings and with different age groups. It is also recommended to use the activity sheet in coordination with a full Child-to-Child project, going through all the six steps.

**Reference:**
**Title:** Child-to-Child Approach to Promote Inclusive Education
**Author:** Hawwash, M
**Date:** 1998