Learning from success stories: What can we learn from educators who believe they have succeeded in providing support to socially neglected students?

They also see the possibility of a positive change in the students’ social status.

Three objectives were identified in the supportive strategies:

Success in the process is perceived as being connected to the third objective — social integration.

The findings enable us to enhance our understanding of how to support socially neglected students within the framework of school, thereby meeting these students’ unique needs.

With an emphasis on team work, initiative, and collaboration

As the children grow older, what started as social neglect at a young age may turn into social rejection.

A versatile status over time and in various social contexts.

How do the teachers perceive the socially neglected students?

Which strategies do the teachers perceive as being supportive of socially neglected children?

According to which criteria do teachers consider their support of socially neglected students as being successful?

Ten educators from different schools took part in the study. Most of them served in different educational roles over the years. We will list below the main role each had in the educational system.

Teaching art

The average seniority in teaching was 34 years.

The data for this study were selected from a broader data base which was collected in a study dealing with teachers’ support of students in social issues.

This question was aimed at collecting cases from the participants, which they themselves consider to have been successful. This is because the study focusses on the teachers’ perspective.

**Stage 2:** The ten case descriptions were examined to see whether they were suitable for analysis using the ‘learning from successes’ methodology. They were found suitable for the following reasons: (1) They described favorable results for the student, from the point of view of the participants in the study. (2) The results were described as being connected to professional actions of the teacher.

**Stage 3:** The ten case descriptions were analyzed according to three components of the ‘learning from successes’ methodology: (1) A description of the student’s condition ‘before’ intervention. This component relates to the first category, which deals with the way teachers perceive the socially neglected students. (2) Examination of the acts which, according to the professional, led him to success. This component relates to the second category, which deals with the teacher’s strategies. (3) A description of the student’s condition ‘after’ intervention. This component relates to the third category, which deals with the criteria, according to which the teachers consider the process as being successful. The participants’ statements concerning each component were collected. In order to enhance the understandings related to the questions of the study, certain categories were sorted into sub-categories according to the criterion that was salient in the words of the participants; i.e. topics which the participants emphasized and detailed.

The first addresses the way the teachers perceive the students; the second, with the strategies the teachers perceive as being supportive of these students.

The sentences in quotation marks are direct quotations of the participants in the study.

Focusing on the students’ weaknesses

She summarized her words by saying…

We can summarize/conclude by saying that teachers tend to focus on these students’ weaknesses, while simultaneously seeing the possibility of a positive change in his/her social status.

In order to achieve this goal,

The criteria according to which teachers consider their support of socially neglected students as being successful.

“He participates more in the lessons” or “She participates in school activities.”

“He doesn’t sit by himself reading a book during break time anymore.”

Finding friends was emphasized. For example: “He found his niche with friends similar to himself — quiet children with a common interest in sports and computers.”

… appeared in the words of the participants to a limited extent

Mapping the strategies they consider supportive of these students

When considering how the teachers perceive the socially neglected students, there was broad reference to the students’ weaknesses. Apparently, the low level of interaction and activity that characterizes these students makes it difficult for the teachers to notice their unique attributes.

The orientation of the professionals towards the student population is important, because it is likely to impact their approach towards them. Therefore, we can conclude that thought should be given to identifying these students’ strengths.

Building on the child’s strengths

Parallel to perceiving that which is lacking, the positive approach was raised, in which the teachers see the possibility of a positive change in these students’ social status, as documented in professional/research literature.

Regarding the strategies that teachers consider to be effective in supporting socially neglected students, three focal points, differentiated by their objectives, were identified: first, strengthening the student on an intrapersonal level; second, teaching social skills; and third, scheduling student interaction with a group of similar students .

One of the advantages in mapping the supporting goals is that more strategies can be suggested for each goal. For example, for the first objective, the strategy of making the student feel ‘present’ could be added. This strategy involves the teacher mentioning the pupil’s name in a natural context during the lesson. For the second objective, the pupils should be taught to be assertive, because this is often not included as one of their reactions. Assertiveness is a skill that contributes to the environment’s paying attention to the individual and taking him/her into consideration. On the third level, activities can take place in the classroom in which each student has a defined role, thus assuring the socially neglected student’s involvement.

Concerning the criteria according to which the teachers consider their support of socially neglected students as a success, prominent reference was given to the third objective — scheduling interaction with a group of similar students. It is significant to note that there was no broad reference to the objective of strengthening the student on an intrapersonal level (e.g., changes in the student’s self-perception), and to the objective of teaching social skills (e.g., having the student express his opinion). Apparently, the teachers attach great importance to the objective of social integration within a group of those similar to the student.

In future studies, the supportive process should be examined using empirical tools. In addition, the point of view of the students themselves should be included.

In teacher-training programs, it is important to raise awareness of these students and their unique needs, and to discuss strategies regarding the various supportive objectives.