

THE ART OF ORIGAMI AT BROSHIM SCHOOL

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Broshim Special School in Ramat Aviv, Israel, has some 140 students, diagnosed as children of average intelligence and above, who suffer from severe emotional, adaptive and behavioral disturbances. The school sees itself as an agent of therapeutic-rehabilitative change and therefore admits students for a limited period of about four years. Its main goal being to enable the student to go back and be integrated in the regular school system. The school classes run from 1st to 10th grade (ages 6-16) and most of its graduates do in fact reintegrate in elementary schools, junior high schools, regular high schools and vocational schools, according to the needs and abilities of each one. Our staff includes special education teachers, teachers of specific subjects in crafts, art and sports, and also psychologists and social workers. As a public school it is linked to formal support systems of the Ministry of Education, Tel Aviv Municipality and the Psychological Service.

Students are referred to Broshim from regular educational settings in which they have failed, after many attempts at therapy, rehabilitation and help. All these experiences are traumatic. The message is: we have no solution for you – not with us. The student and his/her family experience failure, rejection, confusion, resistance, denial; they perceive everything acutely. The entire transition process, even if it is done professionally and with the parents' participation in the meetings of the placement committees, leaves them with a feeling of helplessness: "They decide where to send my child to school". At the same time, the student who is referred to Broshim after being diagnosed as having special needs is not admitted automatically. Although the school does not choose the students, they and their families have to undergo an intake procedure which is the basis for their admission to the school. They have to meet very clear criteria of suitability which are examined by the professional staff. The intake interview also serves the student and parents as a simulation of the working methods at Broshim, and an essential introduction to the absorption process. It is conducted in the principal's room, a room whose doors are always open, and attended by the school counselor, the psychologist, the teacher and above all a representative of the students. Here the staff's professional abilities first find expression, along with a demonstration of the values of mutual respect, listening, and placing a clear structure and boundaries of what is done and what isn't. Generally, the student representative's contribution is invaluable. The interview has no time limit and develops according to the individual case. Its purpose is dual: to verify the information received about the child and his/her family, receiving information directly from the child as a client, and to clarify the mutual aims, expectations and obligations. These will be the components of the psychological contract and will serve as a guideline for the individual program of work with the student.

Broshim's way of working is integrative. Along with the emphasis on achievements in the usual subjects, the student is exposed to intensive cultural, sports and social activities both as an individual and as a member of a group and of a community. The students take responsibility for helping new students to integrate, cultivating the garden and caring for the animals. They share in decision making processes regarding their syllabus and their situation, take an active part in decisions regarding other students and regarding the school's rules and procedures, help to solve real problems of their own and others. The management of the therapeutic educational work at Broshim reflects

“parallel processes” between the work within the staff, between the staff and the students, and within the student community. The work is based primarily on empowerment of all the individuals in the school to take full responsibility for themselves and their actions, and for others. Empowerment, according to the Broshim approach, is not delegating responsibility to others or ridding oneself of responsibility, but taking responsibility both for the individual and for the community. We often use the metaphor of the “Psychological contract” (Louis, 1995) to articulate the student – school interaction. The negotiations over the right to join the school lead to the formulation of a psychological contract between the sides. This concept, according to Kotter (1973), represents an (unwritten) agreement between the individual and the organization with regard to their mutual expectations. Each side, according to this definition, has certain expectations as to what it can receive from the other side and what it can and is prepared to give to the other side. Naturally, the more these expectations are congruent the more powerful the “contract”, and the higher the level of agreement the more effective, fruitful and satisfying the mutual relations. Rousseau (1995) adds that since the contract is a psychological one and not a real contract, the important thing is each side’s interpretation of the mutual relations, and specifically whether it creates an obligation to fulfill the expectations, aims and promises. Thus, at Broshim the aim of the intake interview and the subsequent absorption process is to create a kind of covenant between the sides for the purpose of effectuating the process in the long term.

To be effective, the interview needs to be comprised of two stages. First, the receiving organization has to thoroughly understand itself, its beliefs and demands. This condition requires the school to reexamine itself periodically to clarify its aims and values. Without them it is impossible to form clear expectations. The second stage requires communicative ability so that the expectations with regard to the giving and receiving will really be understood by the other side and not blurred by intervening processes of attribution and interpretation. Therefore, the fact that the decision and the responsibility for the decision is transferred to the individual is demonstrated by the student’s obligation to declare in the interview whether she/he wishes to join the school and undertake the concomitant obligations.

Rousseau also discusses at length the possibility that the psychological contract might be breached. This breach, too, takes place at the level of perception when one of the parties to the contract feels that he/she or the other side are not fulfilling an obligation that they undertook. As with any contract, responses are expressed at various levels. At the cognitive level, conflicts and gaps are formed between the expectations of both sides, and they have to be contended with by explaining and clarifying information, by reviewing the conditions and boundaries and renegotiating expectations and obligations. At the affective level, there are sometimes extreme emotional reactions of frustration, disappointment and dissatisfaction with the relationship. The longer treatment of the sources of this reaction are deferred, the more the frustration is liable to grow and become aggravated. Therefore it is important to stop and deal with the “here and now” (e.g., at the level of trust between teacher and student on the background of inappropriate behavior). We see that honoring or breaching the psychological contract involve not only the cognitive aspect but also affective and behavioral aspects. Finally, we must remember that that a given individual simultaneously maintains various psychological contracts with individuals and groups in his/her environment. Correct management of such a variety of relationships requires a high level of self awareness,

openness, flexibility, dynamism and consistence. A teacher in a small class also formulates, encourages, examines, and reformulates such complicated contracts not only with the students but also with the parents and colleagues at work. Our origami project serve as a good demonstration of our educational approach.

The art of origami is the art of paper folding (in Japanese “ori” means to fold and “kami” means paper). At Broshim, it has become one of the most effective educational tools and it plays a major role in our rehabilitative process. Origami as an art form involves colorful papers, freedom to experiment and a relaxed environment. It offers an opportunity for imaginative work as well as a non threatening non competitive situation. It allows the student freedom to innovate, create and invent new forms such as a variety of animal and birds as well as other models. One of the famous creations of Origami is the Crane which symbolizes peace.

Origami facilitates intellectual stimulation because it involves planning and thinking ahead. It also involves physical manipulation of material. It is a process that can be recorded and replicated. One can work according to instructions but one can also work independently and freely. It enhances interaction with others mostly in terms of collaboration and mutual assistance. The student can design a form, fold it and then teach others how to do it. Thus it enhances cooperation and feedback. It is thus enriching emotionally, expanding mentally and developing motorically. Because there always is a product it enhances the experience of psychological success (Hall, 1976). For students whose main educational history involves failure and rejection, this positive experience may be an important one. It may become valuable when accompanied by recognition and encouragement from significant others, especially peers and parents. The occupation with the paper folding and sometimes with the paper itself often becomes quite “obsessive” for those students who are turned on by origami. In extreme cases students who get hooked and quickly master the art may turn to it as a way to escape. Both students B. and D. for example keep the color papers in their bags and when in a state of tension or anger turn to them and work on a project on their own initiative and thus relax.

The work with origami allows us to activate students without referring to it as a therapy or treatment. Many of our adolescent students who seem to resist the idea of treatment react very favorably to this open ended engagement in work-art. Students with disabilities or impairments (motor, spacial perception, logic) are often helped by a slow process of paper folding which can be learned at its own pace, can be repeated numerous times, and can generate a sequence of visible successes. This sensation of “yes, I can” is at the core of our empowerment process. Gradually, such instances of psychological success evolve to individual initiative and choices of more advanced projects. This progress is facilitate by steps of action, feedback, understanding, satisfaction, and further challenge. Good example of a successful process are students S. and R. who “got hooked” on paper folding, mastered the art, and now coach new students in origami. Both create new complex designs.

One of the benefits of origami is the work on delicate motor skills. The children improve skill that they lack without focusing on those as problems. For instance they can fold papers without the need to use scissors for precise cutting of lines which they are not capable of and of which they fear peer ridicule. D. is a highly intelligent boy who suffers from learning disabilities as well as motoric problems. He got very excited

about origami. His mother was afraid that because of his impairments and shaky hands he would not be able to succeed. We designed a special program for him which allows him to excel in paper folding. He became one of our leading origami artists by using his intellectual and creative abilities.

B. also suffers from LD. He was referred to Broshim because in the regular school he experienced bouts of anger and exhibited low motivation to learn. When he was introduced to origami B. was not yet assigned to a classroom but was treated individually. He was immediately attracted to paper folding and became quite obsessed with it. At the same time he refused to cooperate in reading classes. Miri, the origami teacher, bonded with him with intimate attention and love. She established a trusting relationship with him and taught him to understand the need for time allocation and planning. He stated to plan his own schedule combining reading and origami. This turned into a collaborative effort with the reading teacher as well. In fact, this type of cooperation is crucial for the success of the holistic process that Broshim emphasizes.

Origami also integrates in regular classroom activities both as therapeutic and learning means. Teachers who work on projects utilize the origami teacher both during classtime and recessions for art work and exhibits. The school walls often carry students creations. Furthermore, parents too often participate in such individual or class projects.

Our origami activities go well beyond the school's boundaries. The regional board of education for example developed an educational program to enhance "emotional intelligence" among children. Our students are active in the program especially in origami. They thus are able to present their competence and work at the regional level. When in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv there was a big peaceful demonstration against violence our students trained people how to fold peace cranes. When the Dalai Lama and the Pope recently visited Israel, Broshim students presented them with paper cranes. The late King Hussein of Jordan also received cranes from Israeli children during his illness.

Cases

D., age 8, fourth grade

Although he possesses a superb ability for logical and spacial thinking, D is lacking social and emotional skills and his behavior is much below his age. Since the first origami class he showed immense enthusiasm for it. One of his first designs was a candle holder for the holiday of Hanukkah. D. invited his mother (a single parent) to see his project and she was quite astonished by his achievement and complemented him for it. During origami sessions his behavior is exemplary. However, in his classroom he is disruptive and constantly teases and harasses his classmates. Together with his teacher we designed a special program of behavioral change for him. When he misbehaves in class he is not allowed to fold paper, but he may sit and watch others while they work. We noticed that he was capable of concentrating and memorizing the folding instructions. Thus he both trained himself to observe and think (reflective observation according to Kolb's learning model) while controlling his behavior. Sometimes when he finds it difficult to control himself the origami teacher is called in to sit with him in his class to calm him.

B., age 8, third grade

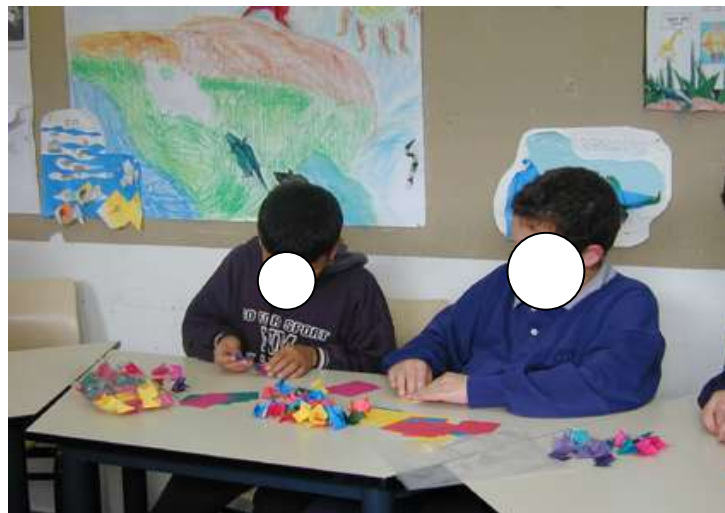
For three days B. excluded himself from the class because of rage and lack of will to cooperate. He spent most of the time walking aimlessly about the building and yard. He refused to join his class. Because of his LD whenever he fails to perform a task he would burst into rage and behave quite destructively. On the third day he was approached by the origami teacher who invited him to visit her in the origami room to relax and think about his situation. During a discussion he reconstructed the steps which lead to his "strike" in terms of an escalation of his relationships with his homeroom teacher. They analyzed it in terms of causes, stages and reactions. They then discussed a plan for restoring his position as a student in the same terms they use for designing an origami model. After two hours of intensive work and design he agreed to hold a meeting with the teachers in order to plan his return to class. He took full responsibility for his actions and described the events realistically. He was presented with a number of options and he agreed to think about them and make a decision. He typed and printed his analysis and solution himself and distributed it to both teachers. He kept a copy and gave one to the office to keep in his file. The final step was a mutual agreement that if he kept his promise he would be able to join the origami trainers' workshop which he wanted very much. The next day he returned to class and had two months of good conduct. He now participates in the workshop.

In conclusion

At Broshim, the point of departure is that the new student is in a “downward spiral”, in the course of which he/she experiences not just feelings of failure, negative motivation, and injury to the self concept and negative feedback from the environment, but also protest, anti-social, and sometimes aggressive and destructive, behavior. In their role as students, these children have a sense of failure and helplessness. Our aim is to change these dynamics to an “upward spiral”, to help them move to a position of inner control. Here too, the principle of parallel processes operates. A necessary condition for teachers to be able to foster positive feelings in their students is that the teachers themselves experience these feelings. Therefore the work with the staff is based on almost full participation in all the processes at the school, empowerment in everything connected with the fulfillment of their personal and professional potential, support, encouragement and realistic feedback. Teachers who experience personal success and belonging transmit these feelings to their environment. In the end, the student who experiences an upward spiral of psychological success internalizes a self concept that says: yes, I can decide, choose, learn, change. Even when there is a setback (failure, a violent outburst, a stumble) the students know that the school will support them, stop, deal with the situation, and that together they will solve the problem. Such programs as origami seems to have a unique contribution for the schools success in rehabilitating our students and allowing the opportunity to return to the educational mainstream.

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Class in the Origami Workshop room in Broshim School
(The student's faces are covered up to protect their identity)