Implementation of
"Learning from Success" Model on Learning Disabilities Students

[1]Zeev Greenberg and [2]Ayala Cohen
[1]Department of Multidisciplinary Studies,
[2]Department of Social Work,
Tel Hai Academic College, Israel Upper Galilee, 12210, Israel

Abstract: Problem statement: Students who have difficulties with studies lack study skills, demonstrate inconsistent achievements and are generally assigned to low-level study groups. In light of this situation, they tend to develop a poor self-image and low self-esteem. Therefore it is important to identify the coping skills that lead to success, which can serve as a model for the work of education systems. The purpose of this article is to describe learning from success model that involves the examination of events that can be translated into modes of action that promote future success. The research is innovative in its application of the model, which is commonly used among professionals, in work with high-school students. **Approach:** The research is qualitative, based on analysis of project presentations created by the students according to the learning from success model and discussions held after showing the presentations. The research examined the principles of action that led to the success of these students in national final exams, by means of reflection on their learning. **Results:** The results of the research indicate that use of the learning from success model highlights the importance of studying in small groups and learning from peers, which help students develop a sense of success and personal responsibility. **Conclusion:** The model can be applied with students in order to identify the principles of action that contribute to their success in final exams. In addition, during application of the model, the students develop a sense of success and personal responsibility for studying.

Key words: Inconsistent achievements, low self-esteem, personal responsibility, research examined, project presentations, created according

INTRODUCTION

This article presents the application of the learning from success model with students who have difficulties with studies. The specific characteristics and difficulties of these students affect their faith in their ability to succeed. The article examines the processes that led to a change in the students' perception of their ability to success, based on analysis of project presentations that the students created according to the learning from success model and discussions they held afterwards. The aim of the research was two-fold: first, to identify the processes of studying for the final exams that contributed to a change among the students and second, examination of the application of the learning from success model with them. We hypothesized that the experience of success of these students would serve as a basis for developing their self-efficacy regarding the future.

Characteristics of students: The students enrolled in the special program for students who have difficulties with studies usually come from disadvantaged social

groups, display poor study habits and have inconsistent scholastic achievements. These characteristics lead to a poor self-image and low self-esteem. The students in the program are assigned to small classes, in which they receive additional teaching hours, a skilled teaching staff and emotional support. Emphasis is also placed on the social aspect of the class in order to enable the students the optimal conditions for success.

The main goals of the program are to increase the percentage of students who pass the standardized final exams (matriculation), to increase the number of students who continue on to post-secondary studies and to reduce the high-school dropout rate.

Reflective learning: Learning as a reflective activity means learning during which the student looks inward at his learning (introspection) and observes it reflectively, identifying and decoding new situations that evolve in the course of learning, evaluating his actions and revising in the course of deliberating with

Corresponding Author: Ayala Cohen, Department of Social Work, Tel Hai Academic College, Israel Upper Galilee, 12210, Israel Tel: +972-54-7694997 Fax: +972-4-9884597

himself and others and reacting to feedback from different sources. [These processes] enable the student to compare his path with possible alternatives, to reformulate previous knowledge, to suggest solutions he did not think of in the first stage of planning the learning and to develop new understanding and new concepts (Shafriri and Bozu, 1998).

The learning from success model is based on theories of action and reflective practice, which deal with reflective learning in the course of and based on actions (Argryris and Schon, 1974; Schon, 1995; 1990; 1991). Later researchers implemented learning from success during reflection on action (Rosenfeld *et al.*, 1995) and examined its contribution to developing actionable knowledge (Sykes and Goldman, 2000).

Conditions that promote motivation to learn: The motivation of students constitutes an important component of their success in studies and therefore the literature includes extensive consideration of the factors that contribute to increasing the motivation to learn (Soric, 2009). Therefore, examination of the processes that inspire and promote the motivation to learn may provide useful information for educators. The learning from success method helps discover and identify these processes.

The self-determination model (Deci *et al.*, 1991) refers to the dynamic of the motivation to learn, creating a continuum of motivation between two poles: external motivation and internal motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2000). He claims that the more internal the motives, the higher the quality of the motivation. This model assumes that human behavior is based on three innate needs: the need for autonomy, the need for ability and the need for relationships and belonging (Deci *et al.*, 1991).

Promoting learning also requires consideration of the social context in which the process takes place. Students should sometimes work in pairs or teams, with teachers removing themselves from the center of the activity and developing "research communities" in the class (Zvi, 1990; Brooks and Brooks, 1999; Deci *et al.*, 1991; Schunk, 1991).

Research has shown that the relationship between teachers and students affects the development of the students' motivation to learn. It has been found that teachers who invest effort in building relationships of trust with their students succeed in promoting the students' belief in them, based on the teachers' belief in them. The creation of a warm emotional atmosphere by teachers contributes to increased self-confidence among the students, thereby affecting their achievements, as well (Daniels and Arapostathis, 2005; Deci *et al.*, 1991; Deci *et al.*, 2001). In addition, several researchers (Gottfried, 1985; Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000; Krapp

et al., 1992; Schunk *et al.*, 2008; Waugh, 2002) have shown that internal motivation affects the use of cognitive strategies that lead to improved scholastic achievements, increased self-efficacy and greater self-esteem among students.

The learning from success model: The learning from success model can be taught and applied in many diverse organizational frameworks. There is extensive documentation of its implementation among social workers, where the study of events and analysis of past successes is used to promote professional learning and progress on the individual and organizational level (Rosenfeld *et al.*, 1995; Rosenfeld and Sykes, 1998). It has also been applied in schools for the promotion of staff learning by teachers and management (Schechter *et al.*, 2004; 2008). However, there is no available documentation of the model's application among school students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research population: The research sample consisted of 54 eleventh-grade students from three classes of the special program for students who have difficulties with studies in three different high schools. The students selected were those whose grades on the standardized final exams in tenth grade were higher than the grades they received from their teachers and who volunteered to participate in the research. The students could leave the process at any point and no incentives were offered to those who chose to complete it. None of the students dropped out during the stage of working in pairs, but 13 dropped out during the stage of working in groups.

Procedure: The learning from success model was applied separately in the three schools. In each school, a group of about 20 students who had difficulty with studies was formed. The groups were formed at the beginning of the school year in the eleventh grade, immediately after announcement of the results of the tenth-grade standardized final exams. The students were acquainted with one another and the facilitators of the process were teachers who served as the coordinators for teaching this method in the school. In other words, they were not the teachers with whom the students had studied for the standardized exams. The work of all three groups consisted of 15 sessions during about half of the school year, during which the students learned the principles of the method. The students worked in pairs, where each partner asked the other questions based on a structured guide for inquiry, divided into stages, in order to identify the main factors that they felt contributed to success. Each of the pairs laid out this information in a presentation, according to

the stages proscribed by the model stages. After completion of the work in pairs, the students convened to work in a group, where all the presentations were shown and a discussion was held in which each pair reported on the inquiry it had conducted. Questions about activities that had led to success, as well as the degree of relevance they had to success in future tests were examined. The discussions of the group were taped and transcribed.

Instrument for data collection and analysis: The research instrument consisted of the presentations prepared by the student pairs, as well as the transcriptions of the discussions held afterwards in the group. The researchers each analyzed the data separately and they then discussed their findings and formulated agreed themes.

Limitations of the research: The first limitation of the research is related to the ability to generalize a case study. However, it seems that despite the type of research, it is reasonable to assume that the findings may be applicable to other schools with similar student populations.

A second limitation is that participation in the research was voluntary and therefore we did not obtain information about those who chose not to participate. Nevertheless, since the purpose was to identify factors that promote successful learning and to study the application of the model, the information collected is adequate for these purposes.

A third research limitation is the dropout of students during the work in groups, which made it impossible to learn from them about the advantages and disadvantages of using this method for them. However, the students dropped out after the work in groups and therefore some of the information was documented in the presentations and expressed in the group discussions.

Application of the model with the students: The model that was applied with the students consisted of a nine-step investigative process. Stages 1-4 were implemented in pairs, which were joined to form work groups for Stages 5-9.

Identifying success "worth learning". The research participants had difficulty thinking of success stories and were embarrassed to talk about their successes, especially those connected to studying. Because of these difficulties, they were initially asked to tell stories about success in any area of life and only afterwards were they asked to talk about success they had experienced on matriculation tests.

Summarizing the success "before" and "after". In this stage the students were asked to describe successful

learning activities in the tenth grade. Each student was asked to explain why, in his or her opinion, the new situation should be defined a success and what positive changes this success had created in their learning.

Examination of the positive products of the success. Every pair of participants prepared a presentation to be presented to the entire group. The questioning focused on the products of the success, that is, behavior that reflected the success identified in earlier stages, such as reading material, attending class, giving the right answers to practice questions and organizing the material. The students spoke about these products on a personal level (acquiring tools for learning and developing personal responsibility for studying) and on the group level (group solidarity, development of a positive learning environment, mutual help).

Examination of the cost of the success and identification of negative products. In this stage the students spoke about difficulties, deliberations and moments of crisis in learning. They cited the resources they had invested in the process, such as time, the need to compromise and be flexible in group work, exposure of their lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of the material to others and fear that the success would create high personal expectations that would lead to disappointment if not fulfilled.

Examining whether this was really success that justified the continuation of studies. Based on the discussion in the group, the participants agreed that despite the cost of the success, it was definitely a worthy model for learning and developing a plan for future action so that the experience would not be in vain.

Identifying the turning points and crossroads in the journey to success. In the course of the discussion, the students presented the deliberations that emerged while preparing their presentations regarding what activities were necessary for the journey to success. For example, one student recalled his deliberations when the teacher didn't give him the material he needed: should he obtain it himself or not? In this stage, the students began to understand the importance of planning activities that promote success.

Examination of the activities performed and reconstructing them for future success. The students made a list of the activities essential to obtaining success, so that others could learn from them. In one of the groups, a suggestion was made to hold a joint session with their teachers in order to learn together. The findings indicate that this learning session contributed to the students' understanding of the logic that guided the teachers and how they chose their different methods of instruction, constructed learning assignments and prepared the students for the final exams.

Deducting principles for future action. In this stage, detailed principles for action were formulated, in order to enable others to reach success, as well.

Definition of unresolved issues. Finally, the discussion focused on issues that were not fully covered in the earlier discussions, as well as enrichment of the existing knowledge in the group and ways to convey it to other students in the school. For example, a question arose whether principles that suited the subjects of the tenth-grade exams were also relevant for the other-more difficult-subjects of the tests administered in the eleventh and twelfth grades. Another issue addressed the willingness of future teachers to learn from the process and adopt the principles that had been formulated in the group.

Unique characteristics of applying the model with students: Implementation of the model among students is unique in that the source of the knowledge produced is a population that has experienced and now defines the success directly. In the beginning there was difficulty because the students were used to experiencing and dealing with scholastic failures. Another difficulty was related to working in groups. At first the students had difficulty, both because of attention problems and because of lack of understanding of the benefit that would emerge from listening to their friends.

RESULTS

The importance of learning in a small group and learning from peers: In the presentations that the student prepared during the preliminary inquiry stage, they noted that the teachers' suggestion of extra lessons in small groups was helpful. Until the preparation for this exam, they had never studied in small groups, but only in the regular classes of the program for students who have difficulty with studies. The analysis of the presentations indicated that learning in the small groups was significant to their success on the exam.

The students noted that learning in small groups promoted a sense of legitimation for accepting help, asking questions and coping with their difficulties. The group also helped them (a) overcome their embarrassment- "For me, the small group was the solution". Finally I could ask without being ashamed and answer out loud. There were only seven students in the group. Who did I have to be embarrassed of? Now I know that this worked "(b) show assertiveness-In the group learning I insisted that they explain things that were unclear to me" and (c) see the connection between asking questions and the sense of success-"In the small group I suddenly felt free to ask questions, to understand. We would sit in pairs, one asking and the other answering ... This gave me a good feeling. I told myself, 'Look, you're doing it'; this helped me a lot".

Other students spoke about the study methods they had learned in the process, such as organizing the material and creating a work plan. "I began learning strategies for studying and organizing my own work plan in stages. In the first stage, I read the booklet and wrote down the main points and summarized what was important. In the second stage, I went over the questions again, this time answering in my head, in an outline. In the third stage, I answered in my head without the summaries. In the fourth stage, I compared my summary with the booklet of summaries. "Another skill concerned focusing and concentrating on the study material: "I eliminated all external stimuli: no computer, no television, no friends. "Another student described learning with the help of his father, while applying the techniques he had learned in the small group: "I studied with Dad-we did questions and answers and I highlighted important words and sentences.

In the group discussion that followed the work in pairs, one of the students said, "Suddenly I understood that every individual has a unique way of learning. I never thought about my way of learning and doing so opened up new ways of thinking about how to study. "Some of the students drew conclusions about their own ability based on the ability of others": I understood that everyone was investing effort before the exam and each had his or her own method. This led me to the conclusion that if everyone else could succeed in raising their scores, I could too. It's only a matter of finding the my method, my way, because the peer group serves as a frame of reference and a source for mutual learning.

A sense of personal success: Regarding the contribution of studying for exams to the development of a sense of success, one of the students said: "I never thought of myself as successful, but suddenly when they asked questions I understood that I knew how to study and: The good score after the first pre-exam gave me a lot of motivation. Suddenly I saw I was succeeding and this encouraged me to continue investing. "Another student said": It gives me motivation, it gives me a great feeling. Suddenly you have drive. I got a good grade and that made me continue with my efforts, "and": When we divided into pairs as the teacher recommended, we asked each other questions. Suddenly I saw that I succeeded in answering some of the questions and I understood that I was succeeding in learning. Studying with a partner gave me the opportunity to say what I knew and I saw that I did know things.

Regarding the contribution of the model to promoting a sense of personal success in studying,

present and future, one of the students said: "In my opinion, after the work in the learning from success group, I understand that it is not just for learning in school. It is the right way on thinking in all aspects of life".

Personal responsibility: With respect to studying for exams, the students' remarks suggested that in addition to a sense of success and faith in their ability to succeed, a process of taking personal responsibility had also begun: "I understood that it was my responsibility. Now it's down to me. It's all on me, they did everything for me and now it's me and the study material. "Taking responsibility was expressed in an inability to hide behind despair and excuses for not doing things and was translated into actions that could promote success": I made sure I got a booklet of summaries because my teacher did not give me one, "and a sense of taking advantage of opportunities as part of the student's personal responsibility": I told myself, this is your chance to succeed.

The significance of partnership between the teacher and the students in learning from success: For the students, becoming aware of how the teachers worked and of the teachers' commitment to their success (from the focus on the study material, the open frank conversations between students and teachers and the teachers' encouragement and expression of faith in the students' success) helped them perceive the teachers as partners on their journey of learning: "It was a friendship between the teachers and us". The students also expressed appreciation for the teachers' commitment: "I suddenly understood that they are human beings too, that they care about the class and want us to succeed. Only when we created the presentation together did I understand what hard work the teachers invest so that we can come to the exam prepared and succeed. Until that session I had never seen the job of the teacher in this light".

Another example reflected the relationship between the teacher's belief in the student and the development of the student's commitment to study: "When the teacher told me there was a group that would meet for extra lessons, I told myself, 'if she came to me it's a sign she believes that I am capable and I have nothing to lose. So I joined, "and": She really invested her heart and soul. She had a different teaching method than used with the whole class. It gave me a good feeling and I told myself, 'Here youre doing it.' This helped me a lot.

In the course of the investigation held after creating the presentations, the students met with the teachers who where teaching them in preparation for the exams.

At this meeting a change occurred in the students' perception of the teachers. They began to perceive them as caring and invested in their success. In addition, it seems that the exposure of the students to the teachers' motives added additional dimensions to their understanding of the teachers and their activity: The meeting with the teachers was the first time they spoke from their hearts about how they felt in class and how much they wanted us to succeed. For the first time I understood why they did all sorts of things ... During the lesson you don't understand the reason for each thing. In the conversation they explained the logic, why they do certain things and I understood that it was really important to them that we succeed.

DISCUSSION

With respect to studying for the standardized final exams, it seems that the change in the teaching methods, the work in small groups and the advice that the teachers gave their students on how to study for exams contributed to the students' feeling that the teachers were committed to their success. In response, they themselves developed commitment and a sense of personal responsibility for their learning process. In addition, the students experienced their teachers' faith in their ability to succeed and this contributed to greater inner motivation to study and a sense of personal success.

These findings are similar to those of earlier research that has shown that the teacher–student relationship promotes students' motivation to learn. These studies indicate that teachers who devote effort to building relationships of trust with students succeed in causing them to believe in themselves based on their teachers' belief in them. The teachers' development of a warm emotional atmosphere increases the students' sense of self-confidence and may influence their achievements, as well (Daniels and Arapostathis, 2005; Deci *et al*., 1991; 2001).

With respect to application of the learning from success model, the students claimed that this was the first time they had thought about how they learned. The preliminary inquiry enabled each individual to examine and outline the decisions he or she had taken regarding preparing for the exam. At the stage of showing the presentations to the group, the students were exposed to a variety of leaning strategies of their classmates. They often referred to the possibility that they would adopt means of learning that their classmates had presented as effective. Much research has dealt with the development of learning communities, indicating the significance of a sense of community in the school and the relevance of the knowledge created among the

members of such groups (Connell and Wellborn, 1991; Kreber, 2005; Osterman, 2000; Ryan, 1995).

At the stage of showing the presentations, the students expressed their frustrations and difficulties, as well as experiences of success. According to the students, this was something new, as they were not used to such discussions in school. The "regular" discourse generally focused on the claims of the teachers, with less attention to the feelings and emotions of the students. Bruffee (1999) studied the significance of the social-learning interaction among group members, its impact on emotional and social development and the cooperation that develops among the members of the learning community, as well as its response to the personal and emotional needs of those who feel they belong to this community.

At the level of the group, it appears that the activity based on the learning from success model transformed the members of the group into a learning community. The atmosphere in the small group encouraged them to ask questions and accept the help of others, in a different climate to what they experienced in the large class. Researches have shown that teaching intended to promote autonomous study by students contributes to an increase in the inner motivation to learn, self-efficacy and self-esteem of the students (Zvi, 1990; Brooks and Brooks, 1999; Deci *et al.*, 1991; Garrison, 2003; Garrison *et al.*, 1999; Rao and Schunck, 1991). In the present research, the group discussions and consideration of the presentations shared characteristics of learning in a "research group": at this stage they asked questions and expressed ideas about past learning and discussed the possibility of translating these into principles of action that could help them succeed on final exams in the future. Activity of this type enables authentic discussion in which the students react to ideas of their peer.

Brown and Brown (2006) found that the participation of the group members in processes experienced by the group encouraged their sense of giving, as they wanted to meet the expectations of what was a meaningful group for them. It seems that in this research the processes of inquiry, the intimate work of the group members on the presentations and investigation of stories of success promoted a sense of partnership and cooperation among the members, expressed in the many statements that reflected intimacy, trust and closeness among the group members.

During the implementation of the model, both in the work in pairs and in the group sessions, the students had an opportunity to meet their special-subject teachers in an intimate atmosphere. In this encounter, they were able to understand how the teachers worked and the rationale that guided them in preparing students for the final exams. Until then, they had been unaware of how the teachers worked and this new understanding led to a change in their attitude and feelings towards the teachers. It can be assumed that this new perspective will also promote a more positive perception of the teachers by the students and increase their motivation to cooperate.

CONCLUSION

The findings reported here indicate the benefits of building partnerships between teachers and students to promote success on final exams, based on patterns of informal communication between them. Studying in small groups may also help prepare students for exams, in addition to presentation of questions from earlier exams and guidance for effective learning in pairs (for example, where one students asks and the other answers and then the former corrects the answer according to a notebook).

With regard to the use of the learning from success model among the students, we believe that this method must be adapted for work with students in the program for students who have difficulty with studies, taking into account the unique characteristics of these students, who are highly motivated but do not have much experience of success. In light of the personal difficulties they have with learning, it is important to help them become aware of their successes, in general and success in studies, in particular. In group work, the teachers may be aware of the difficulty these students have listening and explain the study material to each of the group members.

Summary: The present research reported on application of the learning from success model with students in a program for students who have difficulty with studies, its meaning for them. The findings suggest that this method promotes the success of the students and enables them to act as a research group. Examination of the activity of the group and analysis of the presentations and events that contributed to the students' success on final exams indicates that the students in the group developed a sense of success, faith in their ability to learn and inner motivation for learning in the future. It seems that processing, analyzing and building knowledge by means of retrospective learning empowered all these among the students.

In the course of the activities based on the learning from success model, the group became meaningful to its members. This is indicated by the many statements that express a sense of belonging to the group, empathy, caring and intimacy among the members. This enabled

them to engage in mutual learning, provided legitimation of asking questions and accepting help from others and created a learning environment and a social climate that encouraged learning. It seems that the group solidarity, the interpersonal learning and the reflective process afforded the individuals in the group an experience of change and growth.

In the transition from the retrospective stage, in which the students learned from the past, to the prospective stage, in which the knowledge accumulated was translated into an action plan for the future, the group members demonstrated strong motivation to share this knowledge with all their classmates and teachers. This can be seen as evidence of the power and the sense of "expertise" that the group members acquired in the course of implementation of the learning from success model.

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