

The story of a school choir: Including children with autism to create a bridge for contact

By: Nirit Raichel, Yael Eilat

Prof. Nirit Raichel (PhD) senior lecturer in the Department of Education and Community Kinneret College and in the Department of Management of Educational Organizations, M.Ed. Department at Gordon College. Was head of the Department of Community- Education at Oranim College, and has served as Academic-Head of Ohalo College. Prof. Raichel has published dozens of articles in English and Hebrew, book chapters and books including: The story of the Israeli educational system (Magnes; Mofet) and school between sea and desert - Elementary School of Ofira (Sharem-A-Shech) (Mofet).

Yael Eilat, graduate B.Ed in the music teaching program and music therapy and movement program at Levinsky College, Tel Aviv. Graduate M.Ed. with honors, integration program of Special Populations at Gordon College, Haifa. Yael works teaching music and conducting choirs in special education schools.

This study examines the significance of an inclusive choir (comprised of school administration, educational staff, inclusive coordinators, aides, and parents) on children with autism, from the perspective of the participants. Twelve respondents were interviewed: two principals, eight educational staff members from both regular and special education schools, and two parents of special education students. The findings indicated that singing in the inclusive choir created a bridge for communication, space for empowerment, personal growth, and promoting to the norm for the students with autism. The main conclusion is that the choir is a supportive environment for the child, moving him forward socially. The inclusive choir enables expression on an equal footing when singing as well as having a positive effect on the child's verbal and non-verbal communication and behavior.

Keywords: Inclusive choir, Autism, Communication, Singing, Inclusion.

Corresponding authors: Nirit Raichel nirtraichel@gmail.com, Yael Eilat yaeleilat@gmail.com