

“Now I Feel That the Parents Are Partners and Not Enemies”: Training Preservice Teachers to Work in Partnership With Parents of Students With Disabilities

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether, following their participation in a relevant course, preservice teachers (i.e., undergraduate students) changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities. This unique course was the first to take place in Israel and incorporated meetings with parents of students with disabilities. A total of 22 fourth-year preservice teachers in the Department of Special Education participated in the course, which incorporated meetings with seven parents of students with disabilities. Changes in the preservice teachers' perceptions regarding partnerships with these parents were examined through reports that were written by the preservice teachers before and after every meeting with the parents and at the end of the course. The findings showed that courses that include preservice teachers and parents of students with disabilities could be very beneficial for teachers' training. The preservice teachers who participated in the course developed an awareness regarding the challenges and experiences that are encountered by these parents; the course also changed their perceptions about the place of the parent within such a partnership and provided participants with applicable insights into the importance of creating an atmosphere and communication channel that promotes partnerships with parents.

Key Words: partnership, parents, special education, children with special needs, students with disabilities, parents' involvement, family engagement

Introduction

The two most significant systems for the child are the familial system and the educational system (including the kindergarten and the school). Both systems play significant roles in the socialization of the child with regard to acquiring values, knowledge, and tools for individualization, which enables the formation of personal identity and self-utilization (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Research literature consistently points to the importance of the connection between the two systems, a connection which promotes the healthy development of the child. Cooperation and optimal communication between the educational system and the parents has an impact on the welfare of the student, on his motivation for learning and his academic progress, as well as on his social and emotional adaptation (Jeynes, 2022; Lusse et al., 2019; Park & Holloway, 2018).

Considering the importance of the connection between the familial and educational systems, the Ministry of Education in Israel has been trying in recent years to reinforce the connection and the partnership between them from the time that the child first enters the education system in preschool. In accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Education in Israel, the members of the educational staff are responsible for establishing methods of dialogue with the parents, for initiating dialogues, and for including parents in decision-making discussions (Ritvo et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education in Israel places the responsibility on the educational staff, even though staff often lack the skills to create and maintain contact with the parents. School and kindergarten teachers who lack knowledge and skills in working with parents will continue to treat parents in a hierarchical, traditional, and non-cooperative way (Murray et al., 2008). This situation could lead the educational staff to show concerns and lack of confidence in their work with parents and to develop negative attitudes towards parental involvement. Lack of preparation for working with parents might be one of the factors for teacher burnout and for the teacher leaving the teaching profession at the beginning of his professional path (Nygaard, 2019).

Partnership Between Educational Staff and Parents of Students With Disabilities

The connection between school and kindergarten teachers and parents of students with disabilities is a unique connection. This connection is long-lasting and intense compared to the connection of school and kindergarten teachers with parents of students without disabilities (Ferguson, 2008). The connection begins often at the preschool age when the child is placed in a special kindergarten and ends at the age of 21. Legislation on special education, which first

came into existence in the state of Israel in 1988, designates a significant place for the parents and defines them as full partners. This legislation requires the involvement of parents from the initial stage of making the decision regarding eligibility for special education services for the child and continues throughout the duration of the child's studies in the educational system. The new amendment to the Special Education Act, Amendment Number 11 (Israeli Knesset, 2018), even gives the parents the right to select the educational setting for their child.

In accordance with the new amendment, school and kindergarten teachers are required to include the parents in all stages of the placement process and educational–therapeutic interventions, to make accessible to the parents all the information about different committees, and to accompany the parents through the process of selecting the type of educational setting for their child. The discussing and decision-making process at the committees regarding the eligibility for special education services, determining the types of support and their scope, creating the personal program, and updating it regularly—all of these must be based on a respectful dialogue with the parents and in full cooperation with them (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2018).

In practice, even many years after the legislation came into effect, partnership between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff is rare and not easy to achieve (Mueller, 2017; Oranga et al., 2022). School and kindergarten teachers often find it difficult to maintain a partnership with the parents. The connection between the parties is loaded with emotions, which may lead to a power struggle and to mutual doubt regarding the ability of each of the parties to optimally handle the child and provide a suitable response to his needs (Kurth et al., 2020). The attempt to establish a partnership often leads to many conflicts. These conflicts are expressed in loaded relationships, judgmental attitudes, lack of trust and mutual respect, difficulties in communication, and lack of attention. This situation might damage the self-esteem of the parents and their ability to stand up in favor of their child (Gershwin, 2020). On the other hand, school and kindergarten teachers might feel that there is no sufficient appreciation by the parents for their investment, and their attitudes towards the involvement of parents might be negative (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

Training Preservice Teachers to Work With Parents

On the one hand, research literature supports the need to train school and kindergarten teachers, even during their initial teacher training, to work with parents in general and with parents of students with disabilities in particular. On the other hand, there is an agreement that this training does not actually

exist, or it is very limited, and it does not provide tools and skills that will assist school and kindergarten teachers in their work with parents (Collier et al., 2015; De Bruïne et al., 2014; Kyzar et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2018).

Some research has found that preservice teachers changed their attitudes and developed more empathy following a few meetings with parents of students with disabilities (Broomhead, 2013; Forin & Hopewell, 2006). However, meetings in which preservice teachers and parents of students with disabilities take part and work together towards a partnership can only be found in a few programs documented in professional literature (e.g., Collier et al., 2015; Graff et al., 2020; Koch, 2020; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018). Collier et al. (2015) reviewed a program called Families as Faculty (FAF) implemented in a course for master's degree students in special education at a university in the USA. The preservice teachers met parents of children with disabilities during the visits they held in their homes. The home visits gave the parents an opportunity to tell their stories and gave the preservice teachers an opportunity to learn from parents in an authentic setting. Also, Graff et al. (2020) presented a qualitative study in which 22 preservice special education teachers experienced, wrote about, and reflected upon their perceptions of families of children with disabilities over a semester-long course built on the FAF model.

Another university program in the USA provides multiple opportunities to interact with parents of students with disabilities; for example, a professor and the parent of a child with a disability co-teach the class. In this co-taught class, parents participate in the class together with in-service and/or preservice teachers (Murray et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018). Koch (2020) also reviewed a program for preservice general teachers at a college in the USA; the data set for this research was reflection papers written as part of a class assignment after the preservice teachers participated in a discussion panel with parents of children with disabilities at an introductory special education course. The preservice general education teachers were asked, after listening to parents' stories and experiences, to consider the perspectives of parents, their role in the special education process, and the importance of their active participation.

In all the above programs, the courses for preservice teachers included meetings with parents of students with disabilities. Following the program, the preservice teachers reported a change in their attitudes towards the parents and reported that they had acquired tools for the creation and management of optimal connections with them. As for the parents, the program enriched knowledge, empowered their sense of belonging and their self-capability, and enabled them to hold close contact with members of the staff and to learn about their professional work. The researchers concluded that involving parents in training programs for preservice teachers empowers both the parents

and the college students, and it might lead to a more effective connection between the parties in educational settings.

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether, following their participation in a relevant course, preservice teachers changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities. The course is the first course in Israel in which parents of students with disabilities were incorporated into a course for preservice teachers in the field of special education. The current article focuses on changes the preservice teachers experienced following the interactions with the parents who took part in the course. The article examines the question of how incorporating meetings with parents of students with disabilities in a course for preservice teachers contributed to a change in preservice teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the partnership between educational staff and parents of students with disabilities.

Method

The research took place at the Giv'at Washington Academic College of Education in Israel. The course "Partnership Between Parents of Students With Disabilities and Educational Staff" is a semester-long course for preservice teachers during their fourth year at the Department of Special Education. The course included 14 meetings; each one lasted an hour and a half. The course included seven parents—six mothers and one father—of students in the age range of 5 to 21 ($M = 9$) with a variety of disabilities: cerebral palsy, learning disability, developmental–emotional–cognitive impairment, and the autistic spectrum. Approximately 70% of the students studied in special education settings: kindergartens or schools. The others studied in special education classes or were incorporated in regular classrooms in general education schools. The parents were recruited via an advertising pamphlet which was published on social media, in educational settings, and in local town support centers. Parents who were interested in the course voluntarily contacted the course organizer and took part in it without receiving any financial reward for their participation.

Participants

Participants included 22 preservice special education teachers at an age range of 23 to 33 ($M = 25$). The preservice teachers were in their fourth year of studies, which is their first year of working in an educational setting.

Ethical Aspects of the Research

The preservice teachers received an explanation of the study and expressed their willingness and consent to participate in it. Ethical approval was obtained before the study was conducted by the ethics committee of the college.

Process

The preservice teachers arrived as required to each of the 14 meetings in the course. The first three meetings took place without the attendance of the parents. These meetings were opening lessons on the subject of partnership with parents, during which the preservice teachers received an explanation about the course and its unique framework and reviewed subjects which they had learned in the past, such as the following: stages of coping of parents of a child with disabilities; the place of the family of a child with disabilities in the education system; and the legislation on the subject. During the first three meetings, the preservice teachers were required to write a report about their sensations towards working with parents of students with disabilities.

In the fourth meeting, the parents joined the course at the college classroom. The focus on this meeting was acquaintance and coordinating expectations. During the next meetings with the parents, there was a dialogue which focused on the causes for conflicts between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff and suggestions to improve the partnership. These meetings were based on discussing case studies, watching videos showing situations between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff, and conducting simulations.

All seven participating parents arrived at eight meetings. During the meetings with the parents, most of the work took place in class in small groups, which included both parents and preservice teachers. After each meeting with the parents, the preservice teachers were asked to write a reflection about their sensations, thoughts, and insights following the meeting. During those meetings which were not attended by the parents, the preservice teachers learned about the partnership between educational staff and parents of students with disabilities by reading current professional literature on the subject, presenting the different subjects, and discussing them. At the end of the course the preservice teachers submitted a summary paper which described the process they had undergone.

Analyses

Analyzing the data was based on a division into categories in accordance with the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is effective in the study of attitudes, approaches, opinions, and beliefs of participants. Therefore, it is suitable to track and document responses and ways of learning and training staff in special education (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The analysis of the data was performed according to the constant comparison method developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Kolb, 2012). This method

compares the data, matches them to categories, and formulates the categories and their characteristics.

During the work process, all reflections submitted by the preservice teachers after each meeting with the parents and at the end of the course were analyzed, as well as the reports which the preservice teachers filled in prior to the arrival of the parents to the course. Each reflection was analyzed separately in order to identify and code the main themes. Repeated readings of the reflections assisted in determining the categories in each theme. The categories and the analysis of the words of the preservice teachers were transferred, for the purpose of the reliability of the study, to be read by an associate researcher who specializes in analyzing qualitative data. Agreement between researchers is vital for a reliable analysis of the materials and for reducing biases which are the result of the attitude of the researcher (Hill et al., 2005). In situations of disagreement between the two researchers with regards to the attribution of the quotations to the themes, they held discussions, at the end of which an agreed list of categories for each theme was determined.

Findings

In order to examine whether there were changes in the awareness of the preservice teachers regarding partnerships with parents of students with disabilities and their desire to manage and promote this partnership, an analysis of all the reflections they wrote was carried out. In reading the reflections, the statements representing each one of the categories in each theme were located. The findings are presented in accordance with three themes: awareness of parents' difficulties; the perception of the parent as a partner; and insights for working with parents. All the names of the preservice teachers are pseudonyms.

Awareness of Parents' Difficulties

In this theme there are three categories: the experience of raising a child with a disability; parents' difficulties with the staff; and parents' struggle to get their children's lawful rights.

The Experience of Raising a Child With a Disability

Listening to parents' stories may help preservice teachers to have a better understanding of the real-life experiences of living with disabilities. This understanding may develop an appreciation towards the parents and a desire to create a positive atmosphere which will lead to an optimal partnership (Broomhead, 2013; Koch, 2020).

During the course, the preservice teachers were exposed to personal stories of the parents and learned about their experiences. An example for such learning can be found in the words of Ronit: “The course has exposed me to emotional moments, has enabled me to have an understanding of the copings that these parents go through.” Anat wrote about her new vision of the parents and their experiences:

The subject of parents of children with disabilities was for me like a dirty window. I am from one side, trying to see, to understand, to experience, but the window is not clean. And suddenly here I felt that I was seeing through a clean window, that I could truly see the parents.

During the meetings with the parents, the preservice teachers were exposed to the characteristics of the experience of parenting a child with a disability in general and to the personal unique experiences of the parents who participated in the meetings in particular.

Parents’ Difficulties With the Staff

One of the most difficult tasks of parents of students with disabilities is working with educational staff members (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Research literature reports that many parents of students with disabilities feel that educational staff members do not understand the unique experience which is involved in raising a child with a disability and express frustration due to lack of appreciation and lack of respect that they experience due to the conduct of the members of the staff (Griffin, 2014; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

The preservice teachers were exposed to the difficulties of the parents with the staff during the course; an example of this is expressed in the words of Michal:

I understood that being parents of a child with disabilities requires various daily copings with education staff. The education staff and the parents do not always agree regarding the child’s needs, and oftentimes this causes frustration for the parent.

Similarly, Yael wrote: “I have listened to parents who have been talking a lot about the bad attitude by school and kindergarten teachers towards them, about the feeling that many times the educational staff does not understand them and does not want to listen to them.” The words of the preservice teachers show that the meetings with the parents during the course helped them to develop awareness of the intensity of the difficulties experienced by parents of students with disabilities with staff members in educational settings and of the emotions the parents may carry over to their relationships with the schools and their children’s teachers.

Parents' Struggle to Get Their Children's Lawful Rights

Many parents of students with disabilities often need to advocate, to fight, and even to exert power in order to receive what they want for their child (Goldman et al., 2020; Griffin, 2014). The struggle of the parents over the rights of their children was greatly discussed in the course and also came up in the reflections following the meetings, for example, in what Sarah wrote: "I was sorry to hear that there are a lot of problems with the rights of the children. There are students who do not receive what is due to them in the setting, and their parents must fight for the rights of their children; the parents must cope with the education system on a daily basis so that their child is provided with the best." Hannah related to the power of the parents in the struggle for the rights of their children: "the strongest insight from all of the meetings with the parents was that the parents of children in special education must be 'lions' and request from the system their children's rights."

The preservice teachers were exposed to the struggle of the parents for the rights of their children. The meetings with the parents allowed the preservice teachers to see the parents in a different way: parents who are "assertive" or "lions" care for the rights of their child and are often required to fight so that their child receives a response for his needs in the educational setting in which he studies.

The Perception of the Parent as a Partner

In this theme there are two categories: the parents as knowledgeable or experts, and the parents' desire for partnership.

The Parents as Knowledgeable or Experts

The parents serve as an important source of knowledge regarding the child, his skills, his difficulties, and his needs, information which could contribute to the creation of an educational therapeutic program which is adapted to the child (Adams et al., 2016). Educational staff members are not always aware of the knowledge of the parents and believe that the knowledge is only in their possession. Oftentimes parents feel that the staff members are not interested in including them or in hearing their opinion with regards to the methods they use to work with their child and may even feel that educational staff members disrespect their knowledge (Kurth et al., 2020; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). The subject of knowledge and expertise of the parent with regards to his child was greatly discussed during the meetings with the parents. Dana referred to this topic in her words:

One of the mothers said that parents know their child the best. She has experienced crises; she has been fighting for him her entire life. She understands better than any professional about her child's needs.

Tamar wrote:

I have personally changed my line of thought; the parents know what is best for their child, after all, they are the ones who know him the best, his character, his strengths, and his weaknesses. Therefore, it is always worthy of incorporating and consulting with the parents and to know what they think is best for their child. The staff can learn from the knowledge of the parents.

The words of the preservice teachers reflect the change in their approach towards the expertise of the parent following the meetings with the parents during the course. It seems that the preservice teachers were exposed to the knowledge that parents have, and therefore the sense of importance of enlisting the parent as a significant and vital source in working with the child in the educational setting had increased.

The Parents' Desire for Partnership

The research literature found that parents of students with disabilities usually want to be involved in the education of their child, to hold a partnership with educational staff members, and to influence. When the staff members meet the parents and the parents feel that the education personnel are open to listening to their suggestions and respecting them, their sensation of capability is reinforced and their desire to be involved in the education of their child increases (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). At the beginning of the course, the preservice teachers misevaluated the strong desire of the parents in such a partnership, while during the course they changed their perceptions on this matter. An example of this change appears in the words of Hodaya prior to the course and after it; prior to the course, she said: "Many parents refuse to cooperate; they do not show an interest; sometimes I feel that the parents are a disruptive factor in working with the child." At the end of the course, Hodaya changed her attitude: "I have understood from the first meeting that all the parents want is to be included, to be accepted, and they have a strong desire to be respected and to have their opinion respected; it was evident that the parents are yearning for a partnership." The preservice teachers who initially saw the parents as indifferent, as not interested, and even as a disruptive factor for the work of the staff in the educational setting, have succeeded during the course to change their attitudes and have seen the parents as interested in a partnership.

Insights for Working With Parents

In this theme there are two categories: disappearing fears and increasing confidence in working with parents, and the importance of creating a positive atmosphere based on optimal communication with parents.

Disappearing Fears and Increasing Confidence in Working With Parents

The partnership with parents of students with disabilities requires educational staff to have empathy, acceptance, and support. However, studies have found that teachers working in special education show more negative attitudes towards the involvement of parents compared to teachers in regular education (Agam Ben-Artzi & Greenbank, 2023; Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012).

In the words of the preservice teachers, prior to the meetings with the parents, it was possible to identify sensations of insecurity and concerns and even negative attitudes: “I feel that working with parents is the most difficult and most scary thing” (Sarit); “I feel not experienced enough and lacking confidence to speak with the parents” (Liat); “I heard many negative stories about parents, and the word ‘parents’ has received a negative and threatening meaning” (Orly).

During the course, following the meetings with the parents, it was possible to notice statements which reflected a change in the emotions of the preservice teachers and in their attitudes towards the partnership with the parents. For example, Liat, who at the beginning expressed concern and insecurity about working with parents, reported following the meetings with the parents a better sense of capability for working with them:

The tools I received have reduced a little of the concern that I had in working with parents. I think that the concern was mostly due to [the] lack of knowledge and lack of experience I had. Today I feel more confident; I feel I have the ability to start working with parents.

Even Sarit, who initially presented working with parents as a difficult and scary task, changed her attitude:

In the past I would judge the parents and would be afraid of coping with them. During the course I understood that parents have a lot to cope with, I understood that I must respect, I am not always right; now I feel that the parents are my partners and not my enemies, from one meeting to the next with the parents I have become more empathetic towards them.

The Importance of Creating a Positive Atmosphere Based on Optimal Communication With Parents

One of the main sources for the conflict between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff members is related to communication. In many studies (e.g., Adams et al., 2016; Azad et al., 2021; Braley, 2012) it was found that many parents report communication that is not up front and not continuous with the educational staff members, and even many cases of lack of

communication, which leads to the parents avoiding arriving at the educational setting for meetings about their child, for example, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

The subject of communication was much discussed during meetings with the parents in the course. The preservice teachers stated their insights with regards to the importance of creating communication with the parents and managing it. An example can be seen in the words of Hani:

During the work with the children, my dialogue with the parents is very short and oftentimes nonexistent; the meetings in the course have opened an opportunity and have also reflected the side of the parents and how we are supposed to act in order to create good and meaningful communication with them. I am now certain that it is important to hold ongoing communication with the parents, and I am hopeful that I will succeed in holding this kind of communication.

Orly added:

Open communication makes it possible to bring up topics for discussion and to find solutions together. A parent must feel that he is also part of what goes on with his child. A nice atmosphere must be created with the parent.

The preservice teachers also referred to components of optimal communication with the parents. The various components were expressed in the words of several preservice teachers. Romi referred to sensitivity, understanding, openness, and trust:

There is no doubt that now I will conduct myself with the parents with more sensitivity and understanding. I will be more open to hearing them, their opinions, and their insights; I will do everything in order to create trust with the parents and to keep it.

Miri referred to the ability to pay attention, understanding, and empathy:

The parents require a lot of attention, someone to just be there for them, someone who understands them. Until now I have not understood the enormous power I have as a teacher, to be there for them, to contribute to them and not just to their children, to come from a place of humility and a positive outlook.

Maya emphasized the need of accuracy and clarification and lack of judgment: "I understood that I must take one more minute of thought before having a dialogue with the parent, to pick out my words better, do not judge them, and do not be sharp in decisions." It is therefore evident from the words

of the preservice teachers that they developed an awareness regarding the importance of holding an inclusive communication with the parents as the basis for an atmosphere which encourages cooperation and joint work.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether preservice teachers changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities following their participation in a relevant course. The course is new and the first known course in Israel to incorporate meetings with parents of students with disabilities. In light of the reports in research literature regarding the need to train school and kindergarten teachers for working with parents and in light of the lack of training which is actually performed (Collier et al., 2015; De Bruïne et al., 2014; Kyzar et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2018), it was decided to create a course with the purpose of preparing preservice teachers for a partnership with parents of students with disabilities.

The findings of the current research indicate the contribution of the course for the preservice teachers. The preservice teachers who took part in the course reported heightened empathy and more positive attitudes towards the parents, and it was evident that their awareness of the need to create a positive atmosphere with the parents increased. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies which also reported about courses which incorporated meetings with parents of students with disabilities (Collier et al., 2015; Graff et al., 2020; Koch, 2020; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018).

In the current study the preservice teachers changed their attitudes towards working with parents following the meetings with them, they felt safer to work with them, and came to see them as interested in the partnership. Murray et al. (2008) stated that preservice teachers who acquired confidence during the training and felt more confident in working with parents planned to encourage activities for the promotion of the partnership in their own educational settings in the future. According to Murray and colleagues, it is not sufficient to develop awareness among preservice teachers regarding the importance of partnership with parents. Preservice teachers must see parents as potential partners and not be afraid to initiate communication to promote the partnership.

The meetings with the parents and the exposure to their experiences with their child assisted the preservice teachers in acquiring tools for optimal communication with the parents, for holding a significant dialogue, and for promoting a positive atmosphere. The preservice teachers reported new insights with regards to the importance of creating communication with the parents and managing it. These insights might promote positive relationships

between the parents and the staff members in the educational setting. Relationships established on security, on trust, and on empathy lead to a positive atmosphere, to mutual communication, and to an optimal partnership (Lusse et al., 2019).

Limitations and Recommendations

The first limitation relates to the findings that are based on reports and reflections written by the preservice teachers. It is possible that there is a component of social pleasing in their words, since they knew that the instructor of the course is reading what they are writing. Therefore, it is recommended in the future to add to the reports and the reflections a questionnaire which the preservice teachers will answer anonymously. Another limitation is related to the duration of the course. The course took place over 14 lessons, once a week, and the parents joined eight sessions. It is recommended to examine the effectiveness of a longer course and to also perform a follow-up study on the perceptions of parents and teachers several months after the course has ended and again one year afterwards. In the current study there were 22 preservice teachers; it is recommended to include a larger sample.

It is further recommended to expand the principle of incorporating the meetings with parents of students with disabilities in courses of regular education for preschool ages, primary school, and high school ages. Training preservice teachers in regular education is very important considering the amendment of the Special Education Act and the promotion of inclusion in the education system in Israel (Israeli Knesset, 2018), following which the number of students with disabilities in regular settings will continue to grow. School and kindergarten teachers in these settings who have students with disabilities incorporated in their classrooms also need to acquire tools for working with their students' parents in a collaborative manner.

The current study has focused on the changes which have occurred in the sensations and the attitudes of preservice teachers who have taken part in the course following the interactions with the parents who have taken part in the course. In the future, it is advisable to examine the changes in the sensations and attitudes of the parents who participate in this type of course, as well.

To summarize, the uniqueness of the current study is the result of the fact that it is based on the first course in Israel which was established in order to train preservice teachers in special education to work in a collaborative manner with parents of students with disabilities. The course was found to contribute greatly to supporting preservice teachers in formulating the approach and the attitudes which are required in order to create a positive atmosphere and an optimal partnership. Therefore, the importance of including such a course as part of

the student training is great. However, support is required not only during the training, but also during the first years in working in the educational setting. For that reason, it is important to create programs for novice school and kindergarten teachers so they can receive support in their work with parents of students with disabilities. These programs should encourage educational staff members to initiate activities with parents and to promote partnership with them.

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