

# Deconstructing Hierarchies: A Pedagogical Model with Service User Co-Teachers

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*This article examines the contribution of partnering with service users to the training of health and welfare professionals in Israel. These professions, while professing a shift to the social model of disability, still practise according to a medical model, which functions to strengthen the legitimacy of the professional and sustain the dependency of their clients. In adopting the social model of disability, we present a new pedagogic model in which social work students engage throughout the course with a co-teacher service user to contest these traditional methods and deconstruct accepted hierarchies. This teaching method focuses on the development of a new therapeutic dialogue within the partnerships created in the classroom, which enables the students and co-teachers to participate in the challenging experience of integrating theoretical knowledge with lived knowledge, thereby contributing to the development of a more inclusive knowledge base.*

*Keywords: Co-teaching; Service Users; Social Work; Partnerships; Critical Pedagogy; Social Model of Disability; Disability Studies*

The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds. (Proust)

## Introduction

This article looks at the contribution of service users in the professional education of health and welfare workers in Israel in the area of disability. Within this context, we

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describe a new pedagogy of co-teaching that was developed through an interdisciplinary collaboration between a social work educator, an occupational therapy educator, and a service user with disabilities. Here, we present the specific experience of a social work class co-led by a faculty member together with a service user with disabilities.

We begin with a review of the field of social work with disabled people in Israel, the major paradigms and central values that drive our understanding of disability, and, in turn, our choice of pedagogy. This provides a backcloth for consideration of service-user participation in the education process and discussion of the developments and insights gained from the co-teaching experience.

Historically, there has been a longstanding dialogue between social work practice and social work education. In Israel, social work education has been integrated into the university system since the 1950s and today legislation requires that social workers must hold at least an undergraduate degree in social work from a recognized university or college in order to practise (Spiro, 2001). Social work education and practice, including rehabilitation work, are grounded in an integration of ideologies and models developed in the US and the UK with 'indigenous' local knowledge (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). The prevailing paradigm of rehabilitation social work is based on a medical model of disability that, as Oliver (1996) argues, focuses on the clients' impaired physiological functioning and dependency, labelling them as deserving of societal care. This emphasis on clinical practice and pathology is also reflected in social work education (Gilson and DePoy, 2002).

A new perspective, the social model of disability, emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the US and the UK, together with the struggles of other minority groups on social justice issues. This paradigm recognizes the social components of disability and how social structures oppress and discriminate (Oliver, 1996), so that people are disabled not only by their physical or mental impairments, but also by the structure of a society designed by, and for, non-disabled people.

Alongside increasing recognition of the social model, the new academic discipline of disability studies has emerged, adding important perspectives to the study of disability, with a shift in emphasis from a prevention/treatment/remediation paradigm to a social/cultural/political paradigm (Linton, 1998). While Israel has only recently joined this discourse, it is already apparent that ideas based on the social model and disability studies pose new challenges for the teaching of social work in the area of disability. Two of the major issues in this respect are:

- *The place of disabled people's voices.* The slogan of 'nothing about us without us' captures the demand of disabled people for involvement in all decisions concerning them. As Morris (1991) explains, 'society disables us by its prejudice and by its failure to meet the needs created by disability, but to deny the personal experience of disability is, in the end, to collude in our own oppression' (p. 183).
- *Experiences of oppression and powerlessness.* The relationships of disabled people with health and welfare professionals are often characterized by clients as having a sense of powerlessness, especially in areas of control over resources, legitimization of knowledge, assessments, and determination of needs (French and Swain, 2001).

These and other concepts derived from the social model may be incorporated into the three modalities of individual, group, and community interventions through anti-discriminatory social work practice that addresses the power hierarchies and their effect on client participation (Oliver and Sapey, 2006). Attention to issues of rights, exclusion, discrimination, and power has also contributed to recent considerations of partnership in social work practice (Curran, 1997). In the British social work literature, 'partnership' has become a buzzword, placed squarely within the statutes of social work education, yet it has evoked little consideration in social work practice and education elsewhere, including Israel. This absence needs to be redressed.

The literature suggests that the term partnership incorporates concepts of equality between social workers and clients, recognizing that each brings areas of strength and expertise and each holds rights and choices (Le Riche and Taylor, 2008). 'Authentic partnership' is viewed as 'understood and mutually enabling, interdependent interaction with shared intentions' (Fowler, 1998, p. 144) and also 'power being shared equally with all partners' (Cadbury, 1993, p. 11). These ideas need to be more fully integrated into social work training for practice with disabled people and begs, furthermore, the creation of alternative teaching methods that will further the partnership work that is demanded of social workers today.

It is also important to note the role of professional terminology in social work, and how language reflects and impacts the historical and political context in which practice occurs (Gibelman, 1999; McLaughlin, 2009). Thus, in Israel, the generally accepted term for those who use health and welfare services remains 'clients'—the legacy of a paternalistic model—whereas in the UK they are referred to as 'service users' (McLaughlin, 2009), which transforms the perception of them from 'objects' to 'producers' (Beresford and Croft, 2008). While recognizing that this term is not clear cut (Beresford and Croft, 2008; McLaughlin, 2009), the term service user is adopted as far as possible in this paper for consistency as well as to highlight the concepts of giving voice to disabled people and of partnership that lie at the core of the social model of disability.

## Literature Review

The interdisciplinary academic field of disability studies follows on the heels of other social action discourses, such as gender studies, which are grounded in the group of approaches known as critical social theory and are 'primarily concerned with the elimination of oppression and the promotion of justice' (Davidson *et al.*, 2006, p. 35). Similar to other such disciplines, disability studies adopts the tradition of critical pedagogy, where education is inextricably linked to the pursuit of greater social justice (Lay and McGuire, 2010). In this tradition, learning is identified as a critical process that requires the development of a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection followed by action (praxis) and then further reflection (Freire, 2007). In the classroom, co-learners engage in a dialogic process of integrating academic content and experience, not as subjects to be taught, but in the 'posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world' (Freire, 2007, p. 79). Thus, this

pedagogy replaces the 'banking model' of education (Freire, 2007), in which students are viewed as passive receptacles of information, with a partnership model in which students and teacher 'become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (p. 80) and co-create bodies of knowledge.

For social work educators, critical pedagogy provides a lens that acknowledges inequity based on power and helps address the historical and current impact of multiple oppressions on the lives of clients (Lay and McGuire, 2010). Use of this lens forces us to seek alternative teaching methods, such as through the inclusion of service users in the classroom.

In social work education in Israel, service users with disabilities sometimes join a single classroom lesson in order to enrich students' learning through personal narratives on topics such as mental health. However, a growing trend of involving service users as regular participants is evident today in several countries, such as Sweden, where older people collaborated with young students in a social policy class (Kjellberg and French, 2011), and in Israel and the US, where mental health service users participated in a structured dialogue in intermittent sessions (Shor and Sykes, 2002; Scheyett and Diehl, 2004). Service-user involvement has long been a feature of social work education in the UK (Beresford *et al.*, 2006), and new regulations requiring their inclusion in the planning and delivery of social work programmes (Levin, 2004; Beresford *et al.*, 2006) has inspired a wealth of literature on the different facets of such involvement (see Molyneux and Irvine, 2004).

The literature also discusses various levels of service-user involvement in the classroom, in admissions interviews, in evaluating teaching modules and students, and as co-researchers, including some reference to service users as trainers or teachers (Waterson and Morris, 2005). Interestingly, scant attention has focused on the power imbalances inherent in the service user/teacher/student relationship. Molyneux and Irvine (2004) argue that to promote deeper involvement of service users in social work education, we first need to address the goals of such participation. They present a continuum (adapted from Goss and Miller, 1995) from the closed model—no involvement of service users—to passive involvement; limited two way communication; listening and responsive; and finally, partnership. The optimum level of partnership enables educators and users to work together to identify issues and problems and requires the involvement of users at all stages of the planning process; joint decision making, review, and changes (e.g. assessing students in clinical areas); user involvement in research and development projects; and the work of users as lecturers (Molyneux and Irvine, 2004, p. 299).

In this paper, we focus on the final aspect of partnership, the work of users as lecturers. The idea and practice of co-teaching (used interchangeably with team-teaching, collaborative teaching, and shared teaching), has been reported in different learning contexts. Adopting the term co-teaching, Crow and Smith (2005) propose that it is a pedagogy that involves two or more teachers planning, teaching, and assessing the same students in the interest of creating a learning community. While it is often used in relation to sequential teaching, where different faculty members, often from different professional backgrounds, each give lectures throughout the course,

here we explore a co-teaching approach that rests on a teaching partnership between a faculty member and a service user, specifically within social work education in the field of disability in Israel.

Only a few accounts of co-teaching in social work education have been reported (see for example, Crow and Smith, 2005; Gollan and O'Leary, 2009). Drawing from this literature, several issues seemed particularly pertinent to the development of such a teaching partnership.

The first is related to the need for social workers to learn how to understand and engage with others. A variety of methods are used to teach about 'other' cultures and population groups, such as 'awareness training' on racism (Gollan and O'Leary, 2009). These often convey one 'knowable truth' that undermines the reflective learning that is central to social work education. We argue here that, in order to promote critical reflection on the integration of theory and lived experience, social work educators need to explore new pedagogical models, such as co-teaching. While disability activism has successfully introduced the voice of disabled people in social work education as one-time trainers, there is only one report in a social policy course in the US of a disabled student/teacher undertaking some of the pedagogical responsibilities (planning, teaching) in an ongoing relationship with the course leader (Bixby and Ortiz, 2005). There appear to be no reports of a full co-teaching partnership between a service user and the course leader in social work itself.

Co-teachers can serve as role models for students in the various components of authentic partnership, including sharing power, sharing decision making, and building a shared knowledge base. The essence of co-teaching is expressed in the interaction of the teachers in the whole process. As Crow and Smith (2005) comment, the shared learning of co-teachers can model the shared learning that is hoped for in the students. Therefore it seems that a major prerequisite of this co-teaching model is the recognition and consequent work on the sharing of power between the two teachers. This requires addressing both administrative and practical aspects (such as the design, teaching, and course assessment), as well as ensuring that it is reflected in the partnership dialogue between the co-teachers in the classroom.

The method of co-teaching has generally been positively accepted and viewed as a pedagogy that offers an opportunity for shared learning not only between teachers, but also between teachers and students. It can encourage the development of a community of learning, or, as Wenger (1998) suggests, a community of practice that operates as a living curriculum for the apprentice. Yet, while this method may introduce alternative dialogues into the classroom and broaden the repertoire of teaching methods and materials (Gollan and O'Leary, 2009), possible limitations include expense, the threat to the teacher of an additional leader, and possible confusion for the students due to conflicting messages from different instructors.

However, following Proust's admonition to 'behold the universe through the eyes of another', the integration of service users as full co-teachers in the classroom appears to offer a valuable opportunity for furthering social work education in the area of disability.

## **The Course**

A year-long course was recently introduced at a leading college in the north of Israel as part of the requirements for obtaining an undergraduate degree in social work that is the recognized qualification for practising social work in Israel. The class meets bi-weekly for four hours in a workshop setting. This year (its second), the course comprises 25 third-year social work students who are assigned to fieldwork in agencies that serve people with disabilities (physical, sensory, cognitive, and emotional). The majority of the students are aged 24–30, and most are women. Several of the students have close family members with disabilities and several others have learning difficulties themselves.

The co-teachers (two of the authors) started their collaborative work together four years ago on an independent project. One of them, Carolyn, is a female faculty member with professional and academic experience in social work who lectures in courses based on the socio-political model of disability in both the education and social work departments. The other co-teacher, Yoav, is a male service user with cerebral palsy who uses a wheelchair and also has severe learning difficulties. He holds a degree in education and sociology and worked as the spokesperson for the leading disability activist organization in Israel. He presently works on independent education and policy development projects.

The primary objective of the course is to promote the development of the students' critical thinking skills regarding their practice with service users with disabilities and their families, through integration of theoretical and lived knowledge. The learning framework enables the students to critically explore both the role of social work in the field of disability as well as the potential opportunities inherent in partnership work with service users in practice.

Two teaching models are employed to further these aims: first, partnership work is modelled through a dialogue that characterizes the co-teaching dyad and through intermittent partnerships with different stakeholders such as service users, family members, and professionals who participate in the class on a one-time basis. The second model is that of critical pedagogy, employed in the planning and development of the course in order to create opportunities for authentic dialogue and to promote partnership work between the co-teachers and the students. Together, these two models have the potential to create learning spaces where some of the power differentials can be challenged, thereby providing opportunities to integrate alternative dialogues into the students' developing professional identities.

The course content focuses on social work ethics, values, and theories relevant to the study of social work with disabled people, and the development of professional practice within the context of health and social service systems, presented within a framework that is guided by the social model of disability and partnership work. The teaching takes a variety of forms, including formal lectures, small group sessions, one-time visits by service users, and creative techniques such as role play, films, and other projective activities designed to promote individual reflection and class dialogue.

During the first semester, the focus is on addressing issues that service users with disabilities may face through their life course. The course material refers specifically to Israel but also reviews the experiences of other Western countries, thereby providing opportunities for expanding the indigenous knowledge base. In addition to teaching content, an effort is made to promote the development of critical thinking skills. Therefore, open discussions and communications between co-teachers and among co-teachers and students, exploration of different roles, and the sharing of expectations about the class setting are all encouraged. Moreover, the participants are urged to 'own' the course through involvement in promoting its aims, inviting people they know, raising examples from their fieldwork and other classes, introducing sources, and discussing and negotiating course requirements. In order to ensure an informed dialogue, assignments include readings based on both the medical and the social models of disability as springboards for discussion.

The second semester continues the format of the first but focuses on professional dilemmas and conflicts through student group presentations, as well as guest speakers. These activities raise issues at individual and social levels regarding service provision, and topics are examined through comparison of the major models of disability and their implications for clients, communities, and policy development.

We now consider the central issues that emerged during the year related to partnership and the respective roles of the social worker and service user, as well as to the partnerships that developed in the classroom between the co-teachers and students and between the students themselves.

### *The Social Worker's Role in Partnership Work*

As a practising social worker, Carolyn brings her experiences in the field, both past and present, as well as reflections on her dialogue with other social work professionals to the class discussions. Trained according to the medical model, her personal journey throughout her professional development provides the students with insights and encourages their introspection.

As co-teachers, our dialogue provides the setting for new and perhaps different reflections on the place of social workers in the client-worker dyad and highlights points of overlap and differences that must be addressed in the process of professional development.

One-time participation by service users and their families as well as social workers from the field of disability often bring new and different perspectives to the ongoing dialogue about the role of social workers in the field as partners in collaborative work with their clients.

An example of a dilemma facing one of the students in the social worker role is that of P, who works in a community home with young adults with learning disabilities. His job includes waking a tenant every morning, even though he is able to set his alarm and wake up independently. The administrative needs of the home require P. to assume a disciplinary role rather than collaborate with the tenant about his morning routine.

### *The Service User's Role in Partnership Work*

In comparison, Yoav, as a service user, brings not only his personal experiences but also those of his friends and colleagues to the class dialogue, highlighting the voice of service users in the client–worker partnership by integrating their lived experiences and aspirations on an equal footing with the knowledge base provided by the social worker. Furthermore, as a disabled person and a disability activist, he raises important philosophical as well as pragmatic insights about the respective contributions of the medical and social models of disability to identifying the service user's role as a partner in professional interventions.

A central theme for Yoav is the notion that both sides need to take responsibility for what takes place within the service user–worker partnership. This entails being accountable for one's actions, as well as recognizing that both partners have choices which are reflected in their actions. Responsibility is modelled through the ongoing and transparent dialogue with Carolyn, which reflects Yoav's role as a full partner—how he takes on the teaching role in the classroom and assumes responsibility for the interactions between the students. Through this modelling, he demonstrates the need for social workers to learn and practise empowerment work with clients so that they can find their voice and take responsibility for their role in the partnership.

Together with their reflections on their partnering experiences in the field, the students also addressed paternalistic attitudes of some field supervisors towards clients with disabilities, which undermine the client's place in the partnership. This led to deeper probing and questions about the disparity between the principles of the social model of disability in class and the reality they witness in the field.

R., a student working in a local welfare agency, presented such an example. When a client requested a transfer from a sheltered workshop to a supported employment location in the community, R.'s field supervisor directed him to override the request, as 'the client is too limited to understand the implications'.

### *The Teaching/Learning Partnership*

The class setting also offers new opportunities for both the co-teachers and the students to critically address the teaching/learning partnership that provides the context for this new course.

The co-teachers, building on their collegial relationship, use this teaching experience to reflect on their respective roles in the teaching partnership, both in the overall design of the course and through the weekly planning and evaluation of each class. In a continuous open and transparent dialogue, they explore their different teaching styles and the contributions of their respective reflections to their individual and partnered insights and learning. They view their co-teaching as an opportunity for growth and development and enjoy the mutual learning that occurs. Even when the partnership was challenged—for example regarding the contributions of the medical model for disabled people, when Yoav highlighted some of the benefits for quality of life and Carolyn was



more focused on the change in the social environment—the co-teachers were able to use each other's perceptions for personal and professional growth.

The students, in comparison, often struggle with this unfamiliar classroom setting. From the start, many were reticent to undertake a partnering role with the teachers and expressed doubts about the possibility of an authentic partnership. They voiced their concerns about supplanting traditional hierarchies with classroom values of collaboration and partnership. This is still expressed in their questions about grading practices; for example there is much discussion about grading assignments, where they look to Carolyn and not Yoav for their final answer. Many need ongoing encouragement from the teachers to bring these and other challenging voices to the class interactions.

## Discussion

One of the fundamental ideas of the social model of disability is acknowledgement of the voice of disabled people regarding all aspects of their lives, and the need for their recognition as equals in working partnerships, especially with health and welfare professionals. Therefore, a co-teaching pedagogy was chosen as the means for modelling partnership work and for providing a voice for disabled people within the classroom setting.

What issues have arisen during the present co-teaching partnership?

First, the students seem to have many doubts about the co-teaching partnership. Is it authentic or does it merely reflect a form of tokenism? Carolyn and Yoav come from different backgrounds: Carolyn holds academic credentials and Yoav has extensive lobbying skills as a disability activist. Furthermore, Yoav has severe learning difficulties, and though he has an undergraduate degree, he cannot read or write. When these differences were acknowledged at the outset of the course, the students were confused about the value of the knowledge that each partner presented in class. What could Yoav contribute? Was his personal voice merely an appendage to the theory? They questioned the hierarchy being played out in front of them, initially recognizing Carolyn as the lead administrator and educator in the classroom: she is permanent faculty, and she is the one giving the grades! It seemed easier for the students to follow the familiar route than meet the challenge of this new approach to learning.

As co-teachers, we wanted to learn about the actual process of partnership development and were aware from the outset of the importance of our preparation and dialogue outside of the classroom to creating a partnership that would serve as a model for our students. Through sharing our personal reflections with one another, we developed a partnership built on our differences and commonalities. Looking for a way to identify the main features of co-teaching that embody authentic partnership and to examine our experiences, we drew on Crow and Smith's (2005) facilitation of joint reflections and recognized the importance of equal power between co-teachers demonstrating shared responsibility as well as accountability, together with involvement in the whole teaching process (planning, delivery, and evaluation).

As co-teachers, we develop the curriculum together, with Carolyn introducing academic content according to the different foci that were planned together. We are both

posted as co-teachers on all syllabus materials, apart from the class website, which is technically limited to one name. We conduct every interaction with the students, including weekly class attendance and student advising, together. Carolyn reads electronic communications, as well as questions and completed written assignments, to Yoav (because of his learning difficulties). All decisions regarding course content and assignments are made jointly. We are transparent about these activities and often we continue our open dialogue in class. Together we write and present material and experiences from the course that reflect our *equal ownership* of the teaching. Although the students appeared sceptical about the authenticity of our partnership at the beginning of the academic year, the modelled partnership helped to diminish their doubts.

However, together with our development of a teaching partnership and its recognition by the students and other class participants, other stakeholders, namely the administration and faculty members, still appear to view our endeavour in a different light. There is no precedent of co-teaching with a service user in the college, and to date outside funding of the course has relieved the college of commitment to Yoav as a co-teacher. Carolyn is viewed as the faculty member responsible for the course and as such is addressed in all matters regarding it.

Our working partnership is built on our ongoing empathic relationship as well as our capacity to share our critical reflections. We discovered that our mutual sensitivity is strengthened through our shared use of humour, but also through our capacity to demonstrate humanness and vulnerability. For the students, this vulnerability brings a unique perspective to the class, for example when Carolyn shared her reservations about social pressures to become a mother, during a lesson on motherhood. We believe that this perspective challenges the often familiar dialogue of the medical model present in other social work courses and serves to promote the concept of partnership that lies at the heart of the professional relationship in the social model of disability.

Recognizing the need for congruency between content and process in social work education, we must examine not only the integration of the social model into the course content but also how its main tenets are reflected in our teaching. To do so, we use Saleebey and Scanlon's (2006) identification of the basic components of critical pedagogy.

- *Socialization towards critical thinking and conceptually driven critical analysis.* Critical thinking requires that our students challenge their assumptions about the world, including disability, and recognize that there may be other truths that need to be explored. This type of thinking relates not only to external conditions but also to the learner's moral beliefs and ideologies (Goldstein, 2001, cited in Saleebey and Scanlon, 2006). This questioning posture appears to be novel to our students; together with trying to view their own and their clients' situations through the lens of the social model of disability, they seem surprised each time anew when their 'truths' are confronted, and, reverting to Freire's banking model of learning, ask which truth is right?
- *Dialogic learning.* The teaching and learning of this course is grounded in reflective dialogue—dialogue between the two co-teachers, between the teachers and students, among the students themselves, and between the class and one-time participants. As

teachers we encourage the students (and ourselves) to question formal knowledge through the lens of both the medical model and the social model and explore how they both may impact upon work with disabled people. The nature of dialogic learning rests on reducing the power differentials between teacher and learner and acknowledging the place of ambiguity and disagreement. However, through reflection on our roles as co-teachers we became aware of the impact of our own dialogues in the classroom, both deeply grounded in the social model and thereby giving little room for other voices to emerge. While believing that we were modelling acceptance of different voices, we may in fact be stifling their legitimacy and thereby imposing our own form of domination. Furthermore, the students challenge Yoav's voice as representative of disabled people, claiming that he is successful and strong and therefore his narrative reflects only strength and not fragility. Additionally, because he is physically disabled and with learning impairments students question his ability to give voice to survivors or people with sensory impairments. Although this point has been acknowledged and addressed throughout the course, the students appear reluctant to draw on Yoav's experiences and are preoccupied with the differences rather than the commonalities between his experiences and those of their clients.

- *Social action as education.* Ideally, the place of praxis—reflection leading to action and then back to reflection—is central to the learning process. The setting provides the conditions for critically reviewing the practice of the participating teachers and students. Through integration of field practice experience, the classroom becomes a place of dialogue and reflection for all. Yet more is demanded of the participants: as a critical discourse, disability studies provides the lens for not only practice with individuals and families but also for promoting social justice. For example, two students working in the same agency developed a workshop to introduce parents of children with learning disabilities to the social model of disability and a rights discourse, and another student accompanied a family in their fight with their local authority for the right to choose where their son with severe disabilities would live. These and other actions outside of the classroom are the product of class reflection and also a source of reflection for further action, thereby realizing praxis.

The course is structured to integrate the social model of disability into social work education regarding work with people with disabilities. Using a disability studies perspective that focuses on the multiple barriers facing disabled people today in Western societies, including Israel, this co-teaching educational framework provides the students with the opportunity to explore and experience different perspectives, thereby broadening their professional perspectives and contributing to the development of their professional identities.

### **Conclusions and Thoughts for the Future**

Partnership is central to both social work practice and disability studies. Exploration of the dynamics inherent in the classroom partnerships described here highlights the gaps that exist between the classroom and the field, as well as the missing voices in the dialogue.

Accordingly, it seems important to include the voices of the field supervisors in the classroom experience and develop partnership dialogues with them, even if their participation is not on a regular basis. This process is already underway. Partnership with the college and its administration are also being transformed as the course (with its co-teachers) is being recognized as part of the permanent social work curriculum.

Work is also in progress to include additional participants in the classroom dialogue—disabled people, family members, and practitioners (other than supervisors) from social work and associated fields. This would, in effect, create a learning community, one that Wenger (1998) refers to as a community of practice, where people share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

In Israel today, social work education in the area of disability largely reflects work in the field, sharing its tendency towards direct practice with individuals and families guided by a medical model of disability. While disability equality legislation introduced an alternative discourse grounded in human rights in 1998, social work practice and education have yet to catch up. Disability studies and the associated critical discourse can contribute to this process.

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