
AUTISM GEORGIA TRAINING 5-8 MAY 2014



REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

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PREFACE

This report is written for the organizations who initiated this training. I have tried to give an overview of goals, findings, experiences and possible recommendations.

The report is only based on experiences and exchange during this particular week so possible incompletenesses can occur due to lack of all needed information.

I sincerely hope collaboration and exchange will continue because the training of professionals can play an important role in education and community to raise more awareness for children with special needs. In this case the focus will be at autism and the possibilities for people with autism, their families and involved professionals.

I noticed a lot of potential in all three areas and think also the use of modern techniques makes a variety in communication which make exchange more accessible. To provide these means would and could open up far more opportunities and contribute to inclusion.

For now I hope Children of Georgia, The Tilburg Byzantine Choir, The Ministry of Education, and Fontys University of Applied sciences can find ways to strengthen and reinforce each other so the education for children with special needs in general, can improve and will reinforce inclusive and integrated education, work and living for children, adolescents and adults with Autism and their families in Georgia.

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011 there is a collaboration between Children of Georgia and the Charity Fund of the Tilburg Byzantine Choir from the Netherlands. One of the goals is to exchange knowledge, both practical and theoretical about Autism and special needs children. The NGO Children of Georgia already works with professionals who are trained in for example ABA (Applied Behavior analysis) and have their own degrees and working methods.

It was set as one of the goals to look for more in-depth as practical knowledge and tools as well. We are aware of the differences in culture, possible approaches and means, but the strength of this collaboration is accepting and realizing the differences and diversity, which made us look at the possibilities. By interweaving all the aspects the professionals can move forward and get a more broaden perspective at autism and at the same time some participants obtained the skill to overview the different layers in this process. Obtaining knowledge about autism isn't enough, one should also be able to make the transfer to all kind of situations. It is part of Professional development which is important or all involved professionals.

To realize this particular training, we focused in our preparation at one area: visual support and visual strategies in classroom, training and work sessions.

It is the base for autism in daily practice and it always has the purpose to work towards independency, adulthood and in that way to integration and inclusion as far as possible in the individual case of a person with autism.

The set goals for this week were:

Provide knowledge about autism and show the approach,

The sub-topic visual support and visual strategy in real-life situations like education, therapy, home-training,

The focus on the realistic situation in classrooms, home -situations and therapy /support of children with Autism.

Make a start with theoretical underpinning of: sensory processing, communication cognitive styles, classroom management and professional reflection.

In the training sessions which were prepared with a basis set of slides we listened carefully to the information given and we observed during our school-visits . For us it was possible to adjust during the training so we could work at the knowledge-level of

participants and also with questions that were current and necessary to continue work at that particular time. So I think besides knowledge autism a trainer needs more overall skill to observe, connect and train professionals.

Facts:

Participants involved in this training:
Children of Georgia
Public School nr. 60
Public school nr. 166
SOCO alliance for rare diseases
Early intervention
Neurodevelopment Center
First step Georgia
Autism Center
St. George center
Member of multidisciplinary team of Ministry of Education and Science
Total of participants reached over the week:
17

Visits:	who:
School nr. 60	COG members, SOCO, Nino, Ton, Saskia, Ilonka
School nr. 166	Nino, Ton, Saskia, Ilonka
Ministry of education	Ton, Nino, Jaba
Dutch embassy	Ton, Saskia, Jaba, Ilonka

Trainers and staff	who:
Ton Lebbink	TBK Holland
Saskia Sliepenbeek Msen	Autism-specialist, trainer & coach, Steunpunt Autism Eindhoven, involved in education video-making, consultant lifespan

TOPICS AND PROGRAM

Overview of given topics

Based upon the visit of 2013 and the exchange between Ton Lebbink, Jaba Nachkebia and Nino Mikaia the focus was on visual support and strategies. The more participants we could involve, the more transfer and practical training we could give.

Topics	Level group	Individual level *
visual strategy	1, 2	3,4
visual support	1, 2	3,4
communication levels	1	2,3
levels of help	1,2, 3	2,3
every day living skill	1	2
adjustment environment	1,2, 3	4
adjustment tasks	1,2, 3	3,4
time schedules	2	3,4
classroom management	1	3
cognition	1	2
sensory issues	1	2,3
counsel/coaching skills	-	3,4,5
overview situation	-	4,5
consultation, case	3	4,5
creativity	2	2,3

I scaled at these levels (regarding pupils with autism) according to Msen (Master special educational need program) and practitioner (autism course) level:

1. minimum basic skills to practical work
2. general basic skills practical work
3. start of theoretical underpinning/ recognition towards practical

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4. intermediate skills and more theoretical underpinning
 5. advanced skills starting point to overview and make link theory, practical, and way to support both child and professional

* I observed during the week and noticed advanced skills by some of participants, this is probably the , human capital' that can be used to expand

Program

Program of the week	
Day	Topic
Monday morning	visual support
Monday afternoon	visual support and strategy
Tuesday morning	schoolvisit nr. 166
Tuesday afternoon	practical assignment schedules, task, environment
Wednesday morning	schoolvisit nr. 60
Wednesday afternoon	communication, levels of help and understanding
Thursday morning	every day living skills and evaluation reflection
Thursday afternoon	visit Sandra Roelofs, future plans, sharing good practice

PROCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants and the trainers were very quickly adapted to each other. The level we brought was basics and the aim was that participants could recognize the cases and also their own practice. By starting like this, the input and cooperation of the group was good and active. I noticed that just sharing the basis of visual support gave them tools to work and experiment with. Because of the differences in knowledge we had to balance a bit but that is off course also like inclusive education. We gave tailor-made examples to the individual participants.

The starting point was to implement all kinds of visual strategies, we divided this to the main three areas:

- environment
- time
- activities

We saw good examples of this at school nr. 60. This was recognizable in both individual as classroom sessions. There was visual support at different levels. For all children in a group, the use of visual support can contribute to more independent work and behavior. Besides that it is a way teachers and assistants can better divide their attention and take care of their management in classroom-tasks. In both schools they could benefit more by using visual strategies. For example by working in individual sessions, integration class and own class. Efficiency can be improved for all involved adults and children.

If a child can work using his work schedule, the teacher can spend time to prepare the next assignment, make notes/ observation or help another child. In individual sessions new skills can be taught and after that it is necessary to practice this new skill to other situations (transfer, transition). These phases must not be forgotten in the learning-process of especially people with autism. The transition skills are necessary through lifespan.

In school 166 there is a very motivated group of professionals, they can benefit too and have a strong teacher with good potential to be a trainer. In this class attention to basics of visual support and strategies can be rolled out and the professionals can learn to make adjustments which are tailor-made for the specific pupil.

Also in school 60 I think some pupils could be more challenged in a cognitive way so they can use their classroom time more efficient.

By starting integration classes and work towards more inclusive class work, I think it is necessary to work in a team and work at several levels at the same time. Training on the job and a system in which you work according the 'train-the -trainer' principle can be a

good method.

It is also important to collaborate closely with parents so transition of skills can be accomplished.

The use of informal assessment can provide lots of information so the teachers and assistants have hands-on information and can adjust immediately by using colors, numbers etc. as visual support. For the higher intelligent children we saw also wt-rotten schedules and activities can be made and used in both class and integration class.

In classes more differentiated tasks could be given for all children, if you implement that one should know more about eg. the way you can improve and organise that.

In my opinion you need different kind of professionals which can share knowledge. It is necessary to have knowledge about autism and how you can translate this to daily practice. More skilled and trained professionals are needed to set the tailor made programs and set up individual learning plans. So you can differentiate at this level too. In-depth knowledge and training at topics like cognitive style, sensory issues and communication are needed.

These professionals can be trained and they can train their colleagues. You need professionals with a broaden view who are capable to translate theory to actions and also to policy in own organization, region and government. In the team of COG, I noticed that these qualities are present and I would encourage the use of this.

The role of COG could be to provide train-the-trainer programs in general and set up training-on-the-job courses. Also the use of video can help to learn to do more informal assessment which can help to improve skills and in most of the cases reduce stress and behavioral issues. It could be a task to protect and expand the body of knowledge of Autism but also of the good practices and sharing both knowledge and best practices. The multi-disciplinary teams are very good and I suggest people visit each other workplaces too.

I am not sure there is a system of coaching and supporting of professionals, it would be advisable. This means for all kind of professionals involved in the provision for people with Autism.

I think the concentration of Autism knowledge in Tbilisi can play a figure role to the other parts of Georgia in which you take the difference into account. In my opinion visual strategy and support is accessible and feasible in all circumstances.

It is worth thinking about a Autism Knowledge center which can do the supervision over the different organizations and be responsible to expand knowledge and good practice. I also think there is a need for parents to unite and build their own network.

Sharing of knowledge and tools and methods and experiences is important. I suggest that also social media like Facebook , Dropbox and perhaps program like Skype can play an important accessible role.

For example:

- different trainers from abroad, consultation-like meetings via Skype
- create a Facebook group to share knowledge, research and experiences participants, parents

Here you can see the outcome of the use of internet sources only after this short training:

Internet source	Amount of participants
Dropbox	12
Facebook	16
Linkedin	3
Email respons	16

Facebook clearly gives also the opportunity to exchange in a visual way. It is an active tool. Dropbox, now there are written materials in it like a databank /library, time will tell if people will use it.

There are several more internet-tools and means which can be used to exchange and also train professionals.

It is important not only to concentrate on early intervention but also already anticipate at the fact this current known group of children with Autism will become adolescents and adults. So the provisions must prepare for study-skills, working-skills, everyday-living skills etc. In fact provision must be throughout lifespan and the start in education can contribute to more inclusive thinking and living.

More „practical” research to map the current situation in schools, services and also

home-situations. Research could be organized by ministry or university or other organizations.

Possible Follow up:

Facilitate exchange program (possible collaboration with Ministry of education), in Autumn a visit is planned. How many people can join in?

How can we make sure of a good follow up with a team of professionals so the investment is consolidated? You have to take the sustainability into account both in investment for the children as for the professional development of the professionals (human capital).

Training for eg.: teachers - psychologists - therapists : build a construct so they are trained in autism, special need, learn to integrate in daily practice, learn to expand their knowledge , so they are trained to train their colleagues and this could be investment in own people. If there were no boundaries at all you would do this quarterly.

Feedback-moment both online as live sessions: for example another training week in which theoretical and practical are linked.

Working towards certificated program there could be set up a program in which assignment are involved, a digital follow up by trainers of the Netherlands, this could be a cooperate program and research to possible budgets is an option.

There are far more options that could be suggested. This is just a start and I hope this leads to more discussion over what is needed , wanted and possible for children with autism and professionals.

At the last day of the training we made an inventory of this. It will be added to this report. It gives an impression of what the current participants do want to learn, have and share (attachement I).

This report could refer to the inclusive action plan of the Ministry of Education and Science, it would be interesting to see how eg. COG can make this link.

What is the plan according to professional development for teachers, for people of NGO's

and government? In which way our knowledge and experience can be combined to share and improve the professional development?

Jaba Nachkebia visited with us the Dutch Embassy, we would recommend that he will take initiative to them and Fontys University as well to look for collaboration.

I would advise to make promotional materials to reach parents and society (awareness). In what way can we work together in writing a leaflet or translate books? (perhaps with AutiMaatschap and Van Balkom Communicatie The Netherlands). I

The visit in Autumn could be used to narrow down some future goals and also to visit several schools and provision. I would recommend also in that week some venues like we did last week just to consolidate that way of working. I think it must be a continuation so you can go on building. It is developing step by step and not overwhelm with too much impressions.

Fontys University provides a certificate so the professionals can build up their portfolio according to autism training (professional development).

Budgets:

- Nuffic is Dutch system but requires a lot of paperwork and it is not sure you will receive, COG could try in collaboration with Dutch people to do the application.
- Charity Funding
- Interesting would be to see how the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (and perhaps also other ministries) can stimulate and activate specialist training which can be more interweaved in the current system. Like eg. a train the trainer program.
- European possibilities?
- More options can be discussed.

Acknowledgements

It was an inspiring week and I have enjoyed working with the Dutch and Georgian professionals/ colleagues. I hope the collaboration between Children of Georgia and the Dutch professionals can be continued in a way it is aimed to the future and development of both children with autism as professionals.

Thanks Ton Lebbink and Saskia Sliepenbeek to take me with you on this journey. Thank you Jaba Nachkebia to trust your people to us, and the conversation and hospitality thank you Nino Mikaia for taking care of us and the in-depth talks we had about autism and the provisions.

Thanks to all the participants and parents who opened up to us and shared their concerns, questions, needs, succes and dreams with us.

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Ilonka

attachement 1:

Inventory of needs and wishes of the participants of the training

Knowledge:
training on the job
workshops
coaching/ support
exchange with foreign professionals
conferences or study abroad
ABA training Berlin
Pre-education

Topics:
Sensory development and sensory issues
Communication
Social development and emotional development
Sexual development
Challenging behavior
Educational skills
Transition during various stages in life (kindergarten, work, life)
Collaboration with parents
Communication skills for professionals towards eg. parents
Different kind of communication systems like eg. PECS
Development of play
Managing adjustments
Stereotype behavior

Materials:

Time timers

Sensory toys and sensory materials to make a room

Georgian apps and games for IPAD

Adapted writing tools

Adapted books in Georgian

Instruments for assessment

Assessment for sensory interests

Test for school readiness

Adapted desks

Pictures for pecs

Pictogrammen

Computer programs

Visual materials like video and internet links

Special pens

Special materials for reading and writing