

# Empowerment and Development of Self-Leadership of Children and Youths Lile's Story

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## Abstract

These days, children are exposed to a variety of information sources and channels, which create more complex interactions than ever before. It is important, therefore, to develop and reinforce children's self-leadership. The present work is a narrative qualitative study focusing on the story of Lile, a 14-year-old Israeli girl who was assessed as a passive, quiet child, preferring not to stand out or express herself face-to-face or through the numerous media channels where other children in her class are active. The purpose of the study was to document the process of transformation experienced by Lile, from a child who avoided interaction as much as possible into a child seeking interaction. Lile stopped treating herself as stupid and censuring herself for things she did not say or did not do. She understood her difficulty, learned to accept it, learned to process and contain her feelings, not to try to hide them from herself, and learned to express feelings and apprehensions aloud, without fear of herself and of others.

**Keywords:** relationship, the Elements Way, wellbeing, mentors, children, adolescents, leadership, dialog, behavior

## 1. Introduction

These days, children are exposed to a wide variety of information sources and channels, which create more complex interactions than ever before. Therefore, it is important to develop and reinforce the children's self-leadership. The present study is a narrative qualitative study focusing on the story of Lile, a 14-year-old Israeli girl who was defined as a passive, quiet child, preferring not to stand out or express herself face-to-face or through the numerous media channels where other children in her class are active.

### 1.1 Background

These days, children are exposed to a wide selection of sources and channels of information. Many studies have shown that the media plays an increasingly important role in the children's lives (Byron, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2012; Livingstone et al., 2014; Ofcom, 2006; Taylor & Kitter, 2010; Zilka, 2016a, 2016b). Researchers (Atwal et al., 2003; Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Gatfield & Millwood-Hargrave, 2003; Holbert & Stephenson, 2003; Livingstone, 2007, 2008; Millwood-Hargrave, 2007; Millwood-Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006, 2009) have argued that because the media is part of our living environment, its influence in shaping the personality of a child lies in its interaction with other environmental factors, which affect each other in different ways. The media is a part of the natural social environment, which affects the children and does not stand by itself. Eventually, users decide what to use and when, according to their needs. People grow, develop, and shape their personality, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs according to innate tendencies, and as part of a complex environment, which includes direct face-to-face experiences and virtual media (Coleman, 2001; Eisen & Lillard, 2016; Millwood-Hargrave & Livingstone, 2009).

There are children, such as Lile, who choose not to take an active part in face-to-face or virtual media interactions, and one of the consequences is a sense of non-belonging to the social fabric. This is why children like Lile need to be empowered to develop self-leadership.

### 1.2 Developing Self-Leadership

For change to take place in people's lives, they must bring themselves to understand their power in managing their own life. Awareness of their abilities will awaken their powers and strengths. The realization that one can change the course of one's life may increase one's powers of awareness. One's feeling that one can change stems from one's own sense of self-leadership. When people think that somebody else or some other factor is responsible for what is happening to them, they feel that they have no possibility of changing the way their life is going. The qualities of self-leader are awareness of freedom of will, free choice, experience, flow, flexibility, discipline, concentration, patience, and perseverance. The process of transformation leads people to discover their strengths and qualities, their free will and the choices deriving from their abilities and from their will for self-realization. The development of self-leadership is possible when people have self-awareness, knowledge, and skills to define their needs and wishes, to formulate goals, and to achieve them (Zilka, 2017, 2018). Researchers (Blanton, 2018; Bordin, 1979; Campbell & Symonds, 2011; Morrison & Browning, 2018; Papworth et al., 2013) claim that good communication, mutual respect, and a sense of security between the child and the adult may bring about a change in the child's wellbeing and empowerment.

### 1.3 Use of the Elements Way Method by Mentors Working with Children

Scholars have characterized the role of the mentor as that of a holistic guide who is involved in the life of the child and shows concern about it. The mentor must conduct a dialog with the children about their problems, identify their aspirations, and build together with each child a work plan to suit the child's needs and areas of interest. Such plan should take into account the difficulties and the strengths of the child. It is the mentor's role to help the children monitor their progress toward achieving the goal. The work of the mentor is a holistic activity aimed at developing the trainee's personality. The suitable mentor is one who makes possible a mentoring process in which the mentor helps children become aware of their problems, develop awareness of their wishes, motivates them, and creates a work plan that fulfills the children's needs and dreams. The mentor should also help the children cope with their fears, in a process that transforms the children and affects their identity and personality (Daloz, 1987; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; Hamre et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005; Zilka, 2015, 2017, 2018). Mentors must base their activities with the children on several foundations (Daloz, 1987; Kagan, 1982; Winnicott, 1965; Zilka, 2017): trust between the child and the mentor, identification of goals, ongoing dialog, and the creation of a protected space that provides the trainee with a sense of security.

The *Elements Way* (Zilka, 2017) is an educational method designed to enhance openness, development, goal achievement, and transformation. Transformation is defined by Kurt Lewin as a significant change in a person's being (Lewin & Gold, 1999).

The principal aim of the *Elements Way* is to empower the children, fostering their strengths and uniqueness, and building social skills for becoming involved and integrated in society, culture, and the environment. The three central elements of the method are positive communication (speaking the language of love), acceptance, and connecting with one's strengths and one's free will (Daloz, 1987; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; Hamre et al., 2008; Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Pianta et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2002; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005; Zilka, 2014, 2015, 2017).

*Positive communication: speaking the language of love.* The primary meaning of positive communication is holding a meaningful dialog with the child. The dialog must be an existential one, making it clear to the child that the mentor treats the child's problems with complete seriousness, regards these problems as existential, and wants to help the child open up and develop, rather than attempt persuasion, engage in arguments, etc. Discussing problems is not enough, however; the mentor must regard the child's difficulties as essential problems, which the mentor should actively help solve. The mentor must pay attention to the choice of words and the way in which things are being said, to be able to conduct a heart-to-heart dialog (Zilka, 2014, 2017, 2018).

Researchers have argued that life is by nature dialogical. Living means participating in a dialog with others, asking questions, receiving answers, addressing others' questions, and responding to them. Dialog is a condition for understanding, and understanding requires an active process of speaking and listening, which may lead to development, empowerment, breakthrough, and self-change in the person who participates in the dialog (Bakhtin, 1990, 1991; Claassens & Juliana, 2003; Holquist, 1981; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005).

*Acceptance.* Acceptance means acknowledging others and ourselves as they and we are, and using this as a starting point in a process that leads to openness, development, and change. Perceiving people as they are, with their strengths, weaknesses, and difficulties, creates a channel of internal and external communication that can

lead to self-love, openness, and development. Accepting children as they are does not mean that they do not need to change. On the contrary, it means accepting one's innate qualities as a foundation for growth. Some things will have to be rejected, and others must undergo a process of transformation to channel children's strengths in positive directions (Zilka, 2014, 2017, 2018).

*Connecting with strengths.* We each have our inborn strengths. There are those who, for various reasons, lose their awareness of these strengths. They are unaware of them, are not connected with their free will, do not exercise free choice, and therefore are not able to realize their potential. The mentor must detect the child's strengths in various domains and create opportunities to foster and encourage these strengths (Zilka, 2014, 2017, 2018).

#### *1.4 The Elements Way: Designing a Plan of Action*

As noted above, in the *Elements Way*, work is done in accordance with the individual needs of each child. The stages of designing a plan of action with the child's cooperation (Zilka, 2014) are detailed below:

Stage 1: The inquiry. Looking at the signals the child sends, to find "recurring motifs" and patterns of performance that reveal the child's strengths and weaknesses. Dispersal of fog (de-mystification).

Stage 2: The dream. Formulating goals and objectives together with the child, thinking about suitable solutions, learning from success, making decisions.

Stage 3: Planning the milestones and setting up a time table.

Stage 4: Executing the plan of action.

The main challenge that mentors who aspire to play a significant role in the life of a child are facing is to find ways to demonstrate empathy, acceptance, compassion, attention, and love, and to assist the children in revealing their own powers. Mentors must view children as complete human beings who desire to grow and develop into happy adults, connected with themselves and the environment (Dalo, 1987; Judge & Bono, 2000; Norcross, 2002; Popper et al., 2000; Zilka, 2014, 2015, 2018).

This article presents the story of Lile, a 14-year-old girl who was assessed as a passive child. The purpose of the study was to document the process of transformation experienced by Lile, from a child who avoided interaction as much as possible into a child participating in interactions. The method of work was based on a dialog between Lile and her mentor, and followed the stages of the *Elements Way*.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Type of Research*

This is a narrative study that enables researching in depth the difficulties faced by passive children, through the story and the sequence of events in the life of one child. The study is built on the principles of narrative research (Chase, 2005; McAdams et al., 2001; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). All 50 meetings between Lile and her mentor were filmed using a digital video camera. After each meeting, a narrative analysis of the video was performed, documenting the encounter, and an interview was conducted with the mentor to achieve in-depth understanding.

### *2.2 Sample*

Lile is a 14-year-old girl, the middle child of three siblings; parents are married; the family is financially stable.

Appearance: Comes to school well groomed, with all the necessary equipment.

Academic status: Mediocre in mathematics, mediocre in language-intensive subjects.

Social status: Neither accepted nor rejected socially; does not stand out and is not part of the fabric of the class.

Behavioral status: Lile's teachers had no complaints about her. They related that she was an extremely quiet, unsociable girl, never actively participating in the lessons and class discussions, doing her homework. Her test achievements are about average. She does not attend after-class activities. She attends social events at school with her mother and stays close to her. She never complains, and immediately does everything that is asked of her.

### *2.3 Research Tools*

*Observations.* Fifty observations (non-intervention) of Lile and her mentor were videotaped, each observation lasting about 45 minutes. In the analysis of the content of the observations (the videos), emphasis was placed on the way Lile and her mentor began the conversation, the nature of their interactions, their expressions during their work, ways of coping with difficulties that arose, etc.

*Interviews.* Fifty interviews were conducted with Lile's personal mentor after the content of each observation was analyzed. The interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes.

*Content analysis.* In the content analysis of the data collected from the observations, emphasis was placed on the way Lile and her mentor started the conversation, the nature of their interactions, expressions in their work, ways of coping with difficulties that arose, etc. Content analysis was also performed on the work plan designed by Lile and her mentor; the protocol of the meeting that took place between Lile's parents and school staff; the interviews with Lile's mentor; and Lile's teacher's report on improvement in Lile's wellbeing and her academic achievements.

#### 2.4 Research Process

- 1) The mentor assisted Lile during classes at school and mediated between Lile and what happened in class, explaining the teacher's instructions etc.
- 2) Lile and the mentor had 50 personal meetings over approximately half a year. The meetings were videotaped.
- 3) Lile and her mentor designed a personalized work plan for Lile, a program that was developed in the course of their meetings.
- 4) After each observation, the data collected were analyzed and an interview was conducted with the mentor to understand the data in depth.

*Data processing.* Data processing was conducted according to Bernard and Ryan (2010) and Fletcher-Watson (2013). We conducted content analysis and extracted pronouncements-events-situations. Next, we identified significant recurring anchor codes, grouping several of them into concepts, and sorted the concepts by categories (Galletta, 2013). In a spiral process, the nuclear elements identified at the beginning of the study became increasingly consolidated into a picture that reflected the process (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

### 3. Results

Below the story of Lile is presented in the order of Lile's work with her mentor, in accordance with the stages of the work plan, based on the Elements Way. Stage 1: Inquiry; Stage 2: The dream; Stage 3: Planning the milestones and setting up a time table; Stage 4: Executing the plan of action.

*Stage 1: Inquiry.* Lile defined her problem as being someone who does not know how to refuse. Following are excerpts from the dialogs with Lile:

"Because I don't know how to refuse, I often find myself doing things that I don't want to do, and then I regret doing them... I know that if I say no, people will say I'm stubborn, lazy, and people won't want to get closer to me... Sometimes I'm ashamed to voice my opinions and therefore I prefer to agree with the majority opinion even if it is contrary to mine, and then someone always says, 'What, don't you have an opinion of your own?' 'Can't you think for yourself?' I prefer to go with the majority and not to fight with them or try to present my opinion, and then they will yell at me. It's very hard for me to open up and talk to people. I'm always afraid that I won't say the right things and then they'll laugh at me forever. So people say that I'm bashful and modest. Even if I feel ill at ease with something, I don't say anything, I don't want to burden other people with my stuff, and I also think that other people have enough trouble even without my troubles... When they ask me something I immediately get confused, I can't focus, I feel like I'm going to faint... I feel uncomfortable being looked at, I'm checking if I have a problem with my shirt, my clothes... Sometimes I feel as if I'm being attacked when they look at me."

*Observation exercise 1.* Lile was asked by her mentor to write down, until their next meeting, whenever she felt she was in a situation when she did not say what she wanted to say or said what she felt others wanted her to say, etc. She was asked to write down the date and time, and describe the situation and her feelings. At the next meeting, Lile and her mentor looked at Lile's list and found that in most cases Lile chose not to express herself even though she felt she had something to say. She wrote over and over again, in most cases, that it was better to choose not to respond, and each time she provided a different reason: "If I say something, everyone will look at me and start saying things, and then I'll feel embarrassed. I prefer not to say anything, because if I do, someone may be offended by my words, then I'll have it on my conscience. I didn't want to be part of the confrontation taking place in the class."

Lile managed to reach two conclusions from observing the events she had recorded: (a) that she often preferred not to get involved because she feared others would use what she said against her, and was afraid of confrontation because she felt embarrassed; and (b) she feared that what she said would hurt others, because she

thought that she analyzed situations and noticed things others did not always notice.

*Observation exercise 2.* In a follow-up exercise, Lile was asked to look at people around her, to analyze interactions of others who refused to do things against their will, and to check how those who were refused cooperation reacted, to understand and characterize these interactions. At the next meeting, Lile and her mentor looked at Lile's list and found that in some of the situations that Lile recorded, people coped with those around and negotiated with them. In some situations, people voiced their opinions and handled the reactions to their statement.

Lile struggled, with the mentor's mediation, with the question, whether it was better to conduct meaningful interactions instead of agreeing with anything just to avoid interaction? Lile addressed the complexity of the question and repeatedly presented various scenarios taking place when interacting or avoiding interactions with others. Finally, she concluded that when she avoided interacting with others, she invested considerable energy in analyzing the situation she was in, what she should have said, and different scenarios of what would have happened if...

Lile shared with the mentor the event that took place. In a sports class, the teacher asked the class to split into three groups, two groups to play at passing balls, and a group of two students whose job was to return the balls to the field. The students promptly split into two groups, and only Lile remained "out." The sports teacher asked who else would be willing to join Lile and collect the balls from the field. No one volunteered, then one of the students suggested that each team would provide somebody for 10 minutes to return the balls, each time from another group, and together with Lile they would return the balls to the field. The teacher said that the solution was acceptable to her, but she asked Lile to join one of the groups, and asked each group to delegate a student to pick up the balls. The teacher said that every ten minutes she would remind the group to change the picker. Lile approached the group that had fewer students than the other group. The group members told Lile that she had been selected to be a picker and had to pick up the balls. Ten minutes later, the teacher asked to change the designated player, but the children in Lile's group asked her to remain in this role throughout the game. Lile felt very frustrated, her eyes began to fill with tears. She repeatedly analyzed the situation and concluded that the sports teacher was at fault. It was the teacher who had caused the situation in which she was caught. She proffered such statements as "people don't care about other people, they don't think through what is the right thing to do, they just do and that's it." The mentor listened to Lile, and after Lile calmed down somewhat, she asked her to analyze the sequence of events in the situation she was in. Lile said that the teacher asked them to divide into groups. Immediately the students started organizing and called on their friends to join the group. Lile said, "No one invited me, I just stood and waited, I was offended that no one called me to join. The teacher should have thought ahead of time of a right solution and not ask to split into three groups." Lile stopped talking. Then she said she always chose not to choose, and waited for others to choose her, and if the teacher had said to divide into two groups, one of the groups in the end would have chosen her.

*Exercise 3.* The letter that was not sent. The tutor suggested that Lile write a letter to the sports teacher, but a letter would not be sent. This way, Lile would feel free to write anything that comes to her mind. Lile wrote first about the teacher's oversight, for not properly phrasing the instructions; about the fact that she ignores children who have a hard time, because they are not like everyone else. At one point Lile stopped writing. She read what she wrote, and said, "I always choose not to choose, not to enter into a process of interactions, because I'm afraid of rejection, afraid that children will reject me and say that they don't want me to be in their group. I know that I need to be more involved in my own life, in what's happening to me, and not to let things happen as if without me... It's easier for me to escape into doing nothing, even though I know things will develop not necessarily as I want... I'm angry when I don't accept what I imagined would happen, even though I didn't really get involved with what was going on. I feel that my place is being challenged, that my place is not safe, and that's why things happened not as I wanted... People sometimes make choices that serve only their interests, without taking into account that there are other people who also are entitled, but they don't want to push... It's better to do everything as quietly as possible, without reaching points of friction with anyone... Even with my parents it's hard for me. They are not really aware of my wishes. Sometimes they ignore my wishes and I feel left behind."

*Exercise 4.* Identifying strengths (and weaknesses). Lile and her mentor prepared a table with two columns: one column with the heading "Things I like..." and the second with the heading "Things I don't like..." The mentor explained to Lile that usually, the things we like to do and have the motivation to devote ourselves to are related to our strengths, skills, and abilities. Things we do not like to do are usually difficult for us, and we have doubts about them. Lile managed to write a number of things, after which she and the mentor derived from the list what her strengths and weaknesses were. But Lile still could not point to things very clearly. Therefore the mentor suggested to Lile another exercise.

*Exercise 5.* Identifying points of strength by learning from success. The mentor explained to Lile the premise that behind success there is knowledge from which one can learn about one's strengths and principles of action. It is possible to reconstruct in details of the activity that led to success, and success in the past increases the chances of success in the future. Lile chose "success" to focus on, and together with the mentor they identified the connection between the cause, the process, and the "success," the result, and the outcomes of success, referring to the changes that followed the success. They identified the positive and negative outcomes of the process. For example, negative products are: the extensive investment of spiritual strengths, giving up other things, harming other people, etc. Lile described the process leading to success and the milestones. The mentor encouraged Lile to use descriptive words rather than judgmental and critical ones. Below is a sample story.

Lile had a childhood friend until about a year ago, when the girl moved and since then Lile has had no close friend. Lile said that although the friend always wanted to decide what games to play, the rules of the game, etc., Lile loved her and therefore agreed to what the girl wanted, although it was not always the way she liked it and sometimes she wanted to play the game with the friend differently. Lile said that in her opinion this was a great success, even if she had always given in to her friend, because it was more important to the friend than to Lile. To Lile nothing seemed very important.

Lile said that from a young age she went to dance lessons with her friend, and she enjoyed it very much, and always received compliments. But after her friend moved, she stopped going to the dance class. She explained that she felt it no longer suited her, especially because of the changes her body was undergoing, and that she felt that the way she was moving during dancing has changed. In the conversations, Lile repeatedly brought up her body image in particular, and her self-image in general. Lile said that in her opinion, the ability to dance is a success, although lately she felt ashamed to dance. In the past she also danced only at the lessons or at home, and although always complimented, she was embarrassed to dance at events and places other than the class and at home.

In the process of clarifying the milestones that led to success, Lile brought up many points. She and her mentor recorded the things that came up, so that they could be organized and used for deeper understanding. The documentation was in bulleted form, in simple sentences, and included a description of Lile's negative feelings and fears.

*Stage 2: The dream; turning the difficulty into a positive achievable goal.* Lile defined the problem as a difficult one, which she has been suffering from ever since she could remember herself: words are stuck in her mouth when she needs to speak. Every time she is addressed and has to answer, "the words don't come out." Therefore, instead of speaking, she gestures with her head the reaction expected of her. Even if the demand is not appropriate or unfair, and even if she wanted to say something else, she must conclude the interaction with two movements of the head: yes or no.

Lile said she could communicate with some kids who were together with her since kindergarten and first grade, she could say what she wanted, and if there was a problem during the game she could object. But usually she avoided talking almost completely, and when she spoke she did so in a whisper, which made her communication with others extremely difficult. After a few conversations with Lile and following a short story that she and the mentor had read, the mentor asked her, "Tell me, Lile, when is it that words get stuck in our mouth?" Lile's first word was "Fear." What affected Lile most was fear. Where did Lile's fear of talking come from? The conversations Lile and the mentor had, the games they played, the drawings Lile drew or completed showed that she was capable of uncommon creative thinking. Children who think somewhat differently at times cause impatience in other people, especially in the children around, who expect "ordinary" answers. The reactions that Lile received over the years were "stupid," "how did you come up with it?" signs of rejection, etc. The mentor suggested another exercise to Lile.

*Exercise 6.* I and words of love and words of fear. The mentor told Lile to take a deep breath and exhale, and again, take three deep breaths, then write down a list of words expressing fear and a second list of words expressing love, words of fear, such as escapes, hides, hurts, divides, avoids, envies, hates, hostile; and words of love, such as gives, cherishes, heals, shares, discovers, opens, helps, supports, empowers, happiness, joy.

Lile entered words in each list. There were more words in the fear list than in the love list. After she observed the words she had written, Lile felt the need to explain what she wrote and why, after which she wrote next to each word where in her life she encounters that word. The mentor gave Lile an example: Happiness—I feel happy when... When I'm happy I behave... Envy—I feel envious when... When I'm envious I behave...

Lile chose the word "fear."

*Exercise 7.* Looking at the word “fear.” The mentor explained the exercise to Lile: “We will do guided imagination together. We close our eyes. We take a deep breath into the abdominal cavity and exhale three times. Now, the mentor said to Lile, think of the word ‘fear.’ What do you feel? How does your body react? Usually the word ‘fear’ creates in our body a sense of contraction, our breathing is stuck for a moment, then it becomes short and heavy. Our bodies respond to the word ‘fear’ by fear. Lile felt that way. The mentor and Lile talked about sensations that Lile felt in her body. Lile said that her greatest fear was of humiliation, that she would be embarrassed, humiliated, because then she felt hurt. The mentor suggested that Lile do another exercise.

*Exercise 8.* When we feel hurt. As the mentor explained to Lile, when others succeed, by speech or action, to make us feel vulnerable or ashamed, and make us question our value as a human being, the right way to deal with it is to clarify things to ourselves. Let us take a moment for ourselves, without reacting, and look at the “injured part.” Let us look at what caused shame and anger to emerge in us. We will identify our feelings, look at them, admit their existence, accept them, we not fight them or repel them. We will allow them be, and slowly dissolve. We will then choose whether and how to develop interactions with the other, with clarity of thought and awareness of ourselves and of the other. Sometimes clarity makes it possible to achieve a meaningful interaction with the other, not from a place of vulnerability, but rather from a clean place. The mentor said to Lile: “Try to be in the place of acceptance of your vulnerability without judgment, condemnation, or reaction, and only accept the emotion and feeling of vulnerability. After a while you will feel a change, and once you accept vulnerability as part of you, the strength to enter a process of change and development will arise in you. Lile observed what had arisen in her, kept silent for a moment, but after a long conversation with her mentor, decided that she wanted to engage in interactions and not remain where she was, that is, refusing to attempt interaction, and feeling hurt and frightened.

Lile’s work program emphasized self-confidence, with the goal of conducting meaningful interactions with herself and with others, while accepting herself as someone who thinks in a “unique and special” way. Lile’s dream was to conduct meaningful interactions with herself and with whoever she chooses in her surroundings. She insisted on adding the words “with whoever I choose to conduct interactions,” and stated that there were some people with whom she had no interest interacting, because they were insulting, bad, rude, aggressive, saying painful things right away.

*Stage 3: Setting up milestones for the program.* Lile was very excited when she made up her mind that she wanted to build a plan of action. The program was as follows: Lile and three other girls from her class would dance at an event organized by Lile’s classmates for students of the school. Lile’s teacher was pleased and accepted Lile’s and her mentor’s offer.

Lile had to choose three girls. She chose a short clip with a song and a dance. She intended to show her classmates the clip, and they would train until they achieve a perfect performance, and then present the dance in a ceremony to students of the school. Lile named three students from her class. She practiced at home to prepare for practicing with the girls she chose to dance with. At the next meeting with her mentor, Lile told her that she did not want to continue with the program she had planned, because she felt very scared. She told her mentor that she was troubled by the thought that she would have to dance in front of all the students, and that she was troubled by the thought that she should now lead the dance practice for the event. Lile and the mentor repeated exercises 7 and 8. At their next session, the mentor suggested a new exercise to Lile.

*Exercise 9.* Movement dialog “finger touches finger.” The tutor asked Lile to touch with her index finger the tutor’s index finger and dance together to the music, in coordination, while maintaining a similar rhythm, eye contact, and coordinated movement. If they dance with abrupt movements, the fingers will separate, if a break occurs, they will reconnect. The mentor put on pleasant music that suited Lile’s mood that Lile would be able to connect to (the right rhythm and style). Lile enjoyed the dance very much, she said she felt more relaxed than before she started dancing, and that she felt less anxiety. The mentor offered Lile another exercise.

*Exercise 10.* Dance in dialog. The mentor suggested that Lile dance in a dialog, so that there would be a connection between the movements of the two, and that there would be communication through the body, with gentle movements, listening to sounds, voices, laughter, facial expressions, but without words. The mentor encouraged Lile to make sounds. Lile felt relieved.

Lily chose another song, more suitable for the theme of the event, and decided that the dance would be a free dance in a dialog, without any predefined movements, and during the dance the girls would exchange a partner whenever the chorus of the song was played.

*Stage 4: Execution of the action plan.* Lile was nervous and told the mentor that she did not want to perform a dance with other students at all, and she did not want to dance before the school children, and even blamed the

tutor for pushing her to do something she did not want to do. The mentor calmed Lile down and told her that she did not have to do anything she did not want to do. Lile's resistance weakened, and after a few minutes she calmed down. She told the mentor that she was really scared by this entire experience, but at the same time felt sorry and did not want to cancel the plan they conceived together. The mentor asked Lile what she proposed to do. After suggesting many options, Lile said that she preferred that the mentor prepared the girls for the event rather than Lile, but Lile would be one of the dancers. Lile said she would feel more comfortable if more girls were dancing on stage, not only four, and therefore she would choose five other girls rather than three. The mentor volunteered to be the choreographer, and Lile would be one of the dancers. Lile chose five students. The mentor invited the students and gave them the dates and times of the rehearsals. All the girls were happy. When the rehearsals started, the girls expressed admiration for Lile's dancing, and even asked her to teach them to move with such ease as she did during the dance. Lile was very glad. During the rehearsals, Lile spoke with the students and the mentor, suggested changes to the dance, combining moves and dancing together, not only in pairs, and more. On the day of the event, Lile was very excited, and even told the mentor that she had a stomach ache, and that she was afraid of dancing in front of all the students. The mentor suggested that Lile look at the student with whom she was dancing and not at the audience. Lile and the girls went up and performed the dance at the event; they received many cheers. Everyone admired Lile's dancing.

At a meeting between the mentor and Lile after the event, the mentor suggested that Lile do a new exercise.

*Exercise 11.* Picking the fruit. The mentor used the words "fruit picking" rather than end or completion. The mentor said to Lile: "Let's draw a line, and write 'Start' at one end and 'Fruit picking' at the other. In the center of the axis we will write 'Process.' Let's look at the program and its implementation (the dance at the event) and ask ourselves: What is the fruit? What did I get from the process I experienced? What did I learn from this experience? What do I want to do differently next time? Developing different scenarios from those we chose earlier will help us reach a place of forgiveness and release." The first thing Lile said was that she felt less frightened now in class than she had been in the past. She said that she felt a certain sense of belonging when in class, and even felt a desire to respond in the class group on the social network. Lile told her mentor that she felt more confident now, and she felt a strong desire to continue making plans, like the dancing at the event, to be more involved in the life of her class.

#### **4. Discussion**

This article presented the story of Lile, who was assessed as a passive, quiet girl, preferring not to stand out or express herself either face-to-face or through the many media channels in which her classmates participate. The purpose of the study was to document the process of transformation experienced by Lile, from a child who had excluded herself from interactions as much as possible into a child seeking interaction.

The wonderful thing that happened to Lile was that she stopped viewing herself as inane, constantly judging herself for things she did not say and things she did not do. Lile learned to process her feelings and sensations, to understand her difficulties, and to accept herself. Lile said that "her head was no longer as anxious as it used to be." Concerns such as "what will happen," "what will they say" have given way to thinking and planning interactions with those around her. She learned to accept, process, and contain her emotions, rather than trying to hide them from herself, and learned to express feelings and fears out loud, without being afraid of herself and of others. The purpose of the long dialogs between the tutor and Lile, and of developing a work plan together with her was to make Lile reveal herself to herself and to others without fear and shame, to bring her to a state where she chooses, through observation, attention, and awareness, the things she wants to introduce into her life and those that she wants to keep away, and to trust herself that she has the ability to realize her personal potential.

Lile learned to take deep breaths and exhale slowly. Deep breathing relaxes the body, whereas in the past, Lile used to take short, heavy breaths that caused her body to tense and contract. Lile practiced deep breathing into the abdominal cavity and deep exhalations to soothe the body, and took deep breaths into her chest every time she had to interact with her surroundings. Deep breaths into the chest and deep exhalations provide energy for action and may inspire a person to engage in interaction. By consciously observing her own conduct and that of others, Lile slowly developed an awareness of her abilities, of the choices she faced, and of her free will, which revealed itself and she allowed it to gain expression.

Lile learned to pay attention, listen to the words spoken in conversation, and respond accordingly. She understood that she tended to miss parts of sentences from the conversations she has had with people, as if she were trying to protect herself from information overflow. She noticed that she was not always listening to what was being said, to details and nuances, so that her responses were at times "different," not only because of her unique way of thinking, but also because she could not summon up the strength to listen in full. She learned to



listen to people, to concentrate, and to focus on the conversation.

*Locating points of strength.* Some children do not quite like the “identifying points of strength” exercise (exercises 4-5), and they call it “boring.” But this exercise is like finding the treasure that has been hidden from us, and once we find it, it becomes visible, clear, and obvious. One can learn from “boring things” and grow from there to reach a better place. The boring process may expose the factors that have led to success in the past: the choices of activities, people, and opportunities the child made. The process may help create various perspectives for dealing with obstacles, delays, etc. First, we need to describe, together with the children, their areas of strength. We emphasize the strengths so that they can become a leverage for change. Children locate their strengths, and we add those we have identified. We do it honestly and sincerely. We do not say things that are not true. Even when we point out the strengths in the children, which we consider real, the children at times doubt the truthfulness or importance of what we have told them. We must explain to the children why we think certain strengths they refers to as “obvious” are in reality unique to them. When children doubt their functioning, we must bring them “specific proof” to support our claim. We should also treat the weak points as what they are, and not ascribe to much weight to them. Children should “enumerate” their difficulties, and we must address each problem that they mentions. We must explain to them, in full cooperation with them and in clear words, the areas in which they can improve. We must identify, together with the children, the various and different ways of dealing with the difficulties. Self-knowledge may inspire courage to experiment and act. Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses are likely to lead to focus and efficiency, and consequently to growth and development. In the process of clarifying the milestones that have led to success, many issues will be raised. It is therefore recommended to record these, so that they may be organized and used for deepening understanding. The records should be in bulleted form, in simple sentences, and include a description of the child’s feelings and fears (Zilka, 2014, 2017, 2018).

*Fear.* In conversations with Lile, she felt scared, afraid of expressing herself, of being shamed, and of being embarrassed. Fear usually arises as a result of a process that begins with the perception of reality, physiological arousal (physical sensations), and interpretation and labeling of reality. One can interpret one’s perception of reality in different ways. Again and again we see how people who have shared an experience interpret it differently. The interpretation we give to our perception is subjective, it creates “our reality.” At times, we find strength to cleanse ourselves of burden and pain, to see reality clearly, and to leap forward toward openness and development. But at other times we are weighed down by restrictive interpretations, and we cannot see things properly, but only through our fears. Significant adults in the lives of children should help them develop self-leadership, help them reach a state where they understand that they are in control of their life, their being. Self-leadership, selfhood are the source of freedom that one so badly needs in one’s process of growth. When one realizes that one is in control of one’s life and is responsible for it, fear makes room for action, through thinking and sensitivity to one’s own feelings and sensations (Zilka, 2014, 2018). What characterizes self-leaders? Self-leaders fancy a dream for themselves and build stages to realize this dream. Their dream is what motivates them to realize it. The actions they perform in the present are part of the process of realizing the dream. The focus and effort that a person invests in the process of realizing the dream, the dedication and willingness to fulfill the dream, are likely to bring about transformation. The process itself is important, because the very process and awareness of the process and of the changes helps achieve transformation and the realization of the dream. The success of the person stems from the success of the process. Success is the product of effective efforts invested for achieving a worthy goal (Daloiz, 1987; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; Hamre et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005; Zilka, 2014, 2015, 2017).

*Negotiation.* Avoiding negotiation with the child is usually the result of a lack of desire to invest effort in creating a plan and monitoring its implementation; a lack of motivation to deal with the child emotionally; fear of being exposed to the child’s difficulties and being emotionally involved with the child. At times sensitive people “shut themselves” to observing those around them, so as not to feel the pain of the other. The adult should give children the feeling that they are in a protected place, that the adult has their best interest at heart. The adult should encourage children to enter into a dialogic process, to clarify their feelings. The adult must support the children, respond to their signals, help them regulate their emotions, and project commitment, responsibility, and support (Blanton, 2018; Bordin, 1979; Campbell & Symonds, 2011; Morrison & Browning, 2018; Papworth et al., 2013; Zilka, 2014). To make things clear for ourselves, we must ask ourselves questions such as: What is the profile of the children with whom we tend to conduct a dialogue? What is the profile of the children with whom we tend to avoid dialogue? What characterizes these children? What provokes our anger?

For example, when children has difficulty conversing with others, do not initiate conversations, prefer to ignore the attempts of others to talk to them, do not respond to humor, do not ask for help when they encounters

problems, prefer to remain silent and not to voice their wishes or needs, etc., we can plan together with them situations for them to respond differently. First, we do it in “sandbox,” together, to give children a feeling of being protected. We identify situations in their daily life and allow them to react differently from the way they have been doing it in the past. Next, slowly, we expand the circle of participants in the scenario, add children or adults, and deal with more complex situations.

In sum, Lile and children with similar characteristics need a significant person to help them deal with their fear of interacting with others, someone wise enough to listen to them and help them understand where their fears stem from, what is the source of their being a “spectator” in their own life, as opposed to embracing self-leadership. It is not enough to say about this type of children “that’s how he or she is.” We must help children find their strengths, connect with their strengths, and assume leadership over their lives. They must learn to present themselves and their abilities to the world, and learn to share with others whatever they can offer the world. They must learn to ask for help and understand that there is always someone who will join forces with them. We must help children initiate a process by which they can become aware of their traits rather than try to fight them. We must encourage children to accept themselves, and we must motivate them to change their behavior, and encourage them to take action and deal with their pressing issues rather than avoid them. Together, we can come up with a variety of ideas on how to achieve the goals that the children dream about. We must encourage them to act courageously to achieve what they want and need, in interaction with those around them.

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