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Tutoring of young people with disabilities: Experiential learning that prepares tutors for an inclusive professional and civic perspective

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Abstract

CentraleSupélec is a leading French engineering school which addresses disability with a global perspective and strategy. It has set up a mentoring programme for young people with disabilities. Its aims are multiple: to help disabled young people, through tutoring, to promote their access to higher education and their projection towards a professional project linked to their motivations; and to prepare CentraleSupélec students, as tutors, for diversity issues, while developing their adaptability, responsibility and managerial skills more generally.

In addition to fostering the satisfaction and progress of those tutored, the tutors' feedback and progress illustrate how the confrontation with disability changes their personal perspectives and prepares them to take into account this singularity in their professional lives.

1 Introduction

CentraleSupélec is a leading French engineering school which addresses disability with a global perspective and strategy. CentraleSupélec supports people with disabilities, both students and staff. In accordance with our values and the goals of economic and human progress, CentraleSupélec sets up initiatives to support the inclusion and improvement of people's conditions, and the professional integration of people with disabilities.

The Disability Mission is coordinated by the Disability Referee, who is responsible for a global strategy of commitment and action. Its main missions are:

- Facilitate the transition to school for students with disabilities.
- Propose pedagogical devices that can transmit to all pupils an aspiration to advance society on the issue of disability.
- Participate in a culture of equal opportunities and inclusion through awareness-raising activities for both students and staff.
- Promote the consideration of disability as a subject for training and research.

This paper presents a specific initiative: the tutoring of young people with disabilities, its objectives, how it works, what is at stake for the tutors, and the benefits it brings.

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2 Access to education and employment for persons with disabilities

In France, less than 3% of people with disabilities succeed in obtaining a graduate degree or higher diploma. This situation is the result of several factors, which include psychological and cultural obstacles; self-censorship; a privileged orientation towards short professionalizing courses; and others.

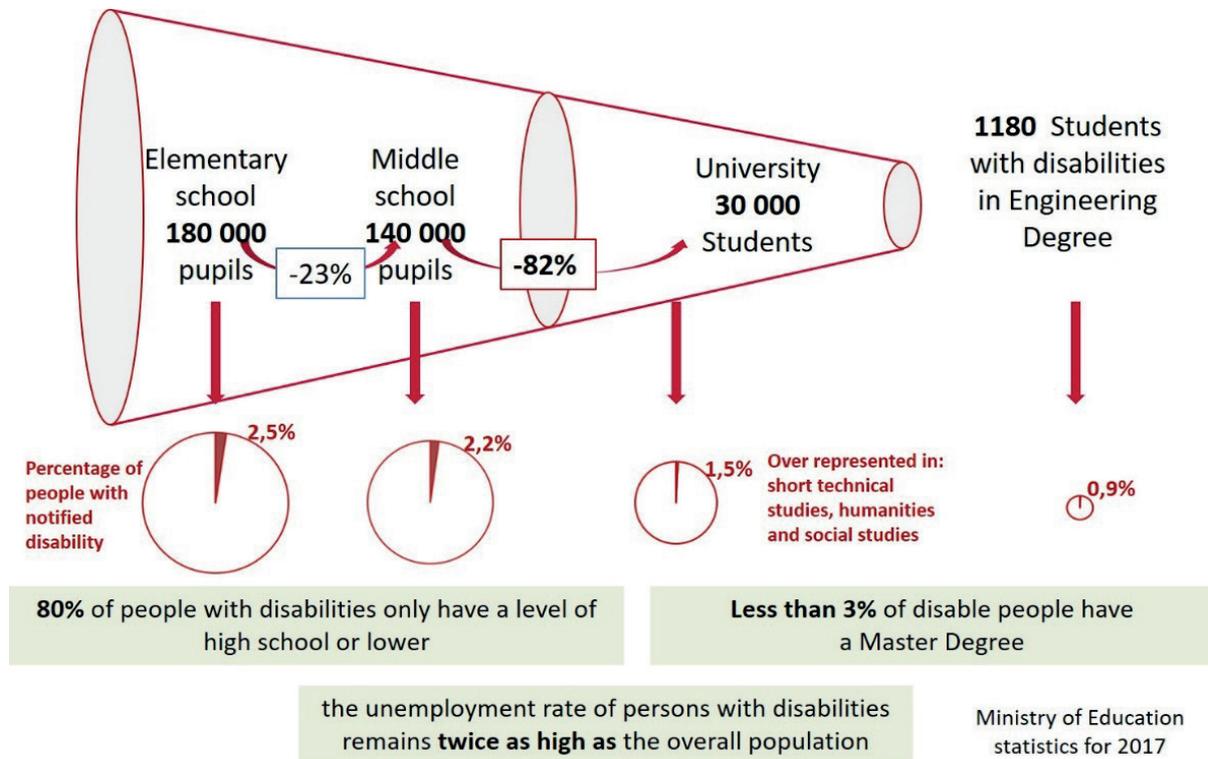


Figure 1: Access to education and employment for people with disabilities

3 Tutoring program

Since 2013, CentraleSupélec has run a tutoring programme for young people with disabilities. Its aims are multiple: to help disabled young people (middle school, high school or university students), through tutoring, to promote their access to higher education and their projection towards a professional project linked to their motivations, and to prepare CentraleSupélec students, as tutors, for diversity issues, while developing their adaptability, responsibility and managerial skills more generally.

The programme runs weekly throughout the school year, in the form of either individual tutoring or group personal development sessions. The tutors are educated regarding disability and trained in coaching (hybrid training and role-playing), and are accompanied (by referees and experts) throughout the school year. In this experiential learning situation the relationship that develops between tutors and young people is essential, as is taking a step back from the experience (Kolb, 1984). In addition to the tutoring sessions with young people with disabilities, the tutors participate in focus group sessions, write a learning diary, produce a report and make a final presentation.

  <p>Group Tutoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of tutors work with a group of young people with disabilities in dedicated classes: Local School Integration Unit • High school, general and professional • Actions focused mainly on personal development + discovery of the sectors and orientation assistance 	  <p>Individual Tutoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tutor supports a voluntary young person with a disability in an ordinary establishment. • High school, professional high school or undergraduate degree • Actions focused mainly on learning assistance and methodological support
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Tutoring = an engaging project allowing for an experiential learning situation: confrontation on the ground, relationship with others and taking a step back.

Figure 2: Two types of tutoring

4 Evolution and formalization of this activity as a learning unit

In 2015 CentraleSupélec began to create a new engineering degree course according to the programme approach and the skills approach. This curriculum has been in use since the 2018-2019 school year. We then undertook to rethink the mentoring programme in order to integrate and develop the targeted skills of the new curriculum. An elective teaching unit, it has been validated in collaboration with the Programme and Education Department. Its learning objectives, training content, tutor monitoring and evaluation are being redefined. Formalization work focuses on taking into account, for evaluation purposes, evidence of the values and transversal skills targeted (Biggs, 1995).

5 What is at stake for the tutors

Preliminary work was presented in (Husson, 2020), focusing on the one hand on the starting points of the tutors and on the other on their feedback from the experience.

5.1 Starting points of the tutors

All students who commit to the programme are volunteers. Their previous exposure to the subject of disability varies greatly: some have never been in contact, to their knowledge, with a person with a disability; others have met a person with a disability during their school years; and others have a close relative with a disability. Most of them are curious about disability, and some show a stronger commitment to the issue and wish to participate in other activities to the benefit of people with disabilities. All the tutors express the same motivation: to help, be useful, and achieve action in solidarity.

5.2 How the tutors experience the curriculum

Tutors are voluntary. They express satisfaction, offer positive testimonies, and describe strong experiences and feelings of personal fulfilment and meaning. They communicate on their tutoring, in their resumes and with their peers. Whenever possible, tutors extend the tutoring for a further year.

Concerning the work required in addition to the tutoring training: at the beginning some tutors are reluctant to write a learning diary, but this mostly changes and they agree that it encourages analysis and taking a step back.

5.3 *Effects and benefits perceived by the tutors*

Excerpts from verbatim statements illustrate how tutors take a step back from the lived experience and skills to be developed.



Figure 3: Testimonials about this experience



Figure 4: Testimonials on changes in the way we look at disability and young people

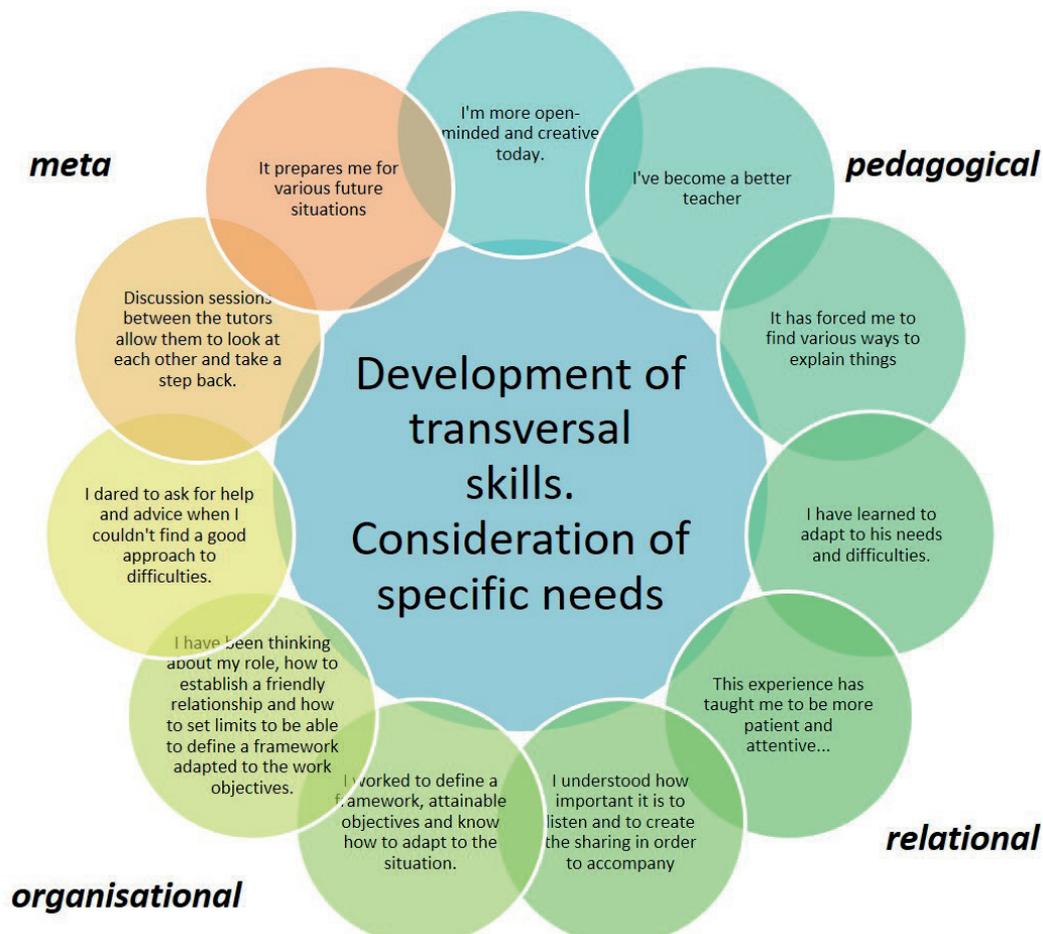


Figure 5: Testimonials about developed skills

6 Conclusions

Tutoring is an activity that CentraleSupélec implements to promote the integration and improvement of people's living conditions, as well as the professional integration of disabled people. This concrete and central activity is a success and is useful to both the young people being helped and the students helping them. Each year, the families of young disabled people, associations and university partners renew their desire for the programme to continue, and wish it could be extended, which is a testimony to the fact that they perceive the benefits. As to the 70 students who have already been involved in the programme as tutors, they also state their satisfaction. In addition to the satisfaction and progress of the tutored, the tutors' feedback illustrates how the confrontation with disability changes their personal perspectives and prepares them to take into account this singularity in their professional lives.

The programme also contributes to promoting an inclusive society beyond the tutors involved. After formalization and evaluation of the skills developed for the tutor, the next step we are planning is to evaluate the impact of the programme using the Kirkpatrick model (Kirkpatrick, 1959).

Acknowledgements

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