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### US, Israeli NGOs cooperate to fight mistaken special ed placements

By JERUSALEM POST STAFF

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Two educational NGOs - one American and one Israeli - signed an agreement in [Jerusalem](#) on Tuesday to join their expertise to reduce the unwarranted placement of non-white children in the US in special education programs.

The US-based National Urban Alliance for Effective Education and the International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential in Jerusalem signed their partnership agreement at the Knesset and plan to begin working with children in 20 US cities as soon as possible.

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Prof. Reuven Feuerstein, founder and co-director of the International Center, joined a US delegation led by National Urban Alliance president Dr. Eric Cooper, to announce the campaign to improve student achievement, especially of non-white children, to include a special concern for under-served and under-performing black males in the US.

"What began as research to identify the most powerful program to reduce the underachievement of African American males has blossomed into a partnership that I truly believe has the ability to transform the urban educational system from one that oftentimes leads children with hopeless futures into a future of promise," Cooper said. "It is unfortunate that misdiagnosis of special education status has been used to place a significant number of children of color into programs that doom them to a life of low expectations and lowest achievement."

He said that "education is a civil right" and noted the historic partnership between African Americans and Jews to work for civil liberties. He also spoke of feeling honored to be at the Knesset, "the house that stands for the ideals of a wonderful country, [Israel](#)."

Feuerstein's cognitive theories on assessing children's learning capabilities will be applied to National Urban Alliance educator programs in urban school districts across the US.

International Center programs are operated on the basis of Feuerstein's Structural Cognitive Modifiability theory that views the human organism as open to change with the right mediation. The center currently treats children and adults with autism, Down's syndrome, learning disabilities, brain injuries and other difficulties.

These theories have also been used throughout Israel to help immigrant children from North Africa and other areas integrate into the mainstream.

Feuerstein has been awarded the Israel Prize for his life's work.

International Centers have recorded impressive results with cases that normally are seen as hopeless in 20 countries, including [South Africa](#), Brazil, China, India, Britain and France.

Dr. Yvette Jackson, CEO of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, who said

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Feuerstein had long been her mentor, will responsible for the implementation of the program in 20 US cities.

In the past, "Teachers have tended to focus on students' weaknesses rather than their strengths. And then they can't build on the strengths, or even see them," she said.

"The work of this partnership will be important all over, in Israel, in America. And this is the best place to make this shidduch," Feuerstein said.

MK Michael Melchior, chairman of the Knesset Education Committee, said at the signing ceremony, "I am happy to bless this matchmaking."

Rabbi Rafi Feuerstein (Reuven Feuerstein's son,) co-director of the International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential, said, "I hope from this partnership will come many other points of hope, optimism - and modifiability."

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