

## **Paper: Beneath the Surface**

Miri Golan

[www.origami.co.il](http://www.origami.co.il)

*The writer is a professional origami artist, who has taught at Broshim Special School, Tel Aviv, since 1992, where she has a special origami classroom. Broshim is a school for students with emotional and behavioural problems, withdrawn temporarily from mainstream education.*

\* \*

Paper uses me in my work as an essential and important tool. Through using paper, I lead a student to the point where he is emotionally mature and self-aware. That's why for 20 years, I have regarded paper as my working partner – without it, my work would not be possible.

I would like to parallel the potential of paper with the potential of the student.

Beginning to work with a student is similar to beginning to work with paper. When I look at the paper I don't know what folding I'll do, despite my long experience and the feeling that I know the medium well. It's the same when a student enters my room. Despite my experience I have no idea how to work with him or what result we will come to.

The paper, mostly square, cut accurately, of the right size and flexibility, is suited to my purpose. This is a given fact. A student comes to my room full of his experiences from the past or from the day. This is also a given fact. I need to work with them together.

When I look at the paper on my table, it's blank. Every fold reduces the area of the paper, but it acquires more layers. When a student comes to my room, we first fold without talking. Every fold releases more emotion and pressure, until he is able to relax. Then we start to talk and expose more layers of feeling.

In the process of the folding, the paper changes shape. Every time, it appears to be something else, such as a kite or a rabbit ...but it is not. Eventually it will turn to what we lead it to become. A student folds and releases his emotions, telling what he is going through in his eyes. I raise other points with him, which enables him to slowly turn his anger and confusion to options and possibilities, from which he can grow.

The paper is used as an important surface for learning. In the process of folding, we discover different angles and polygons. A student, who often has trouble coping with traditional classroom teaching, can check the geometry in the paper, learning to calculate angles and to identify polygons. This

knowledge he will expose later in his regular geometry class, which can strengthen his self-image and ability to learn.

The paper contains unlimited possibilities for development. When we look at the paper we see its limitations. We think we know the paper, but our opinion comes from an illusion created from our own limitation. In a similar way, many people who see a student's anger, violence and difficulties, see his limitations. We think we know the student, but our opinion comes from the illusion of our limitation.

Paper is ubiquitous and non-threatening. I am the therapist-teacher, there for a moment, connecting the paper and the student together. One day, at a difficult time in the student's life, when he is mature and I am gone, he will connect again with paper and again, he will take strength from it, searching for its unlimited possibilities.

*(Translation by Boaz Shuval)*

---

