

School Management Through an Emotional Lens: Fostering Student-Teacher Engagement and Academic Excellence

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Abstract: In addition to the acquisition of knowledge, a school should consider the emotional needs of students and teachers as well as the needs of some students for therapeutic interventions. For effective management of such a complex system, a methodology for providing guidance and response for both student and teacher was needed. Using an intervention program, teachers used action research to proactively and in a transparent manner work to resolve academic, emotional, and therapeutic issues. The effects of this program, based on management models that defined precise tasks and the functioning of the school, is explained. In the Action Research study (Kaniel, 2014), quantitative and qualitative techniques of collecting data were used along with in-depth interviews. Evaluation of the program was accomplished through two different methods of evaluation which looked for congruence between what was intended to happen and what actually happened. When focus was placed on individuals in a systemically and holistically adjusted way, children's functioning as independent learners increased, as did teacher satisfaction. The trust of the community within the school and in the education system grew and there was a significant improvement in the mutual relations between all of those involved as the teachers, parents, and students worked together in an organized fashion.

Key words: school management model, systemic approach, humanistic education, elementary school

JEL codes: A2, A3, A10, I2

1. Introduction

Today and for decades, school organizational management culture is based on providing detailed guidelines and policies based on every source except the individual classroom and teacher. Field personnel — the teaching staff — do their best to fulfill these to the best of their abilities and understanding, but often these conflict with a teacher's strengths or what her experience and intuition tell her the students need. Sometimes they even conflict with each other, leaving teachers in a “no-win” situation. This study proposes a more effective method in which the educational team is a fully responsible and active partner in the process. It uses a systematic approach and operates in a holistic and coordinated manner from the bottom — from the field — up to the administration.

The model, Humanistic Systemic School Management Model (HSSMM), is modular and also draws inspiration from educational models that focus on involvement and emotional communication, critical pedagogy in which the emphasis is on empowering teachers and students in cooperation with parents and superiors.

The HSSMM seeks to redefine the responsibilities and the need to develop clear and accurate determinations

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of classroom needs by combining holism with a systematic view of the educational field. This way there can be a successful and effective combination of diverse management ideas and methods that complement each other, empower teachers to work to the maximum of their individual strengths, and provide targeted education to meet the particular needs and temperaments of individual classes and even students. Simply put, it exchanges the present “one size fits all” model that fails many students and burns out the best teachers with a model that empowers and differentiates both student and teacher needs while avoiding a free-for-all because it is based in a coherent management system.

We used evaluation methods that provided data for consideration of students’ progress and achievement, as well as for teaching and classroom management decisions. Within the action research study we used mixed methods of research. Quantitative questionnaires validated the model to all stakeholders. Quantitative research data was supported by qualitative research using semi-structured interviews for students, parents, and teachers as well as an in-depth interview of each participant of an advisory committee. We attempted to identify the factors that contributed to overall school satisfaction, checking parental involvement and satisfaction, school administration involvement, teacher effectiveness, and children’s achievements. The results of the research was a new school management model, contributing new knowledge in the field of school management and educational leadership that focuses on creating educational opportunities for all students while ensuring sustainable solutions. See Figure 1.

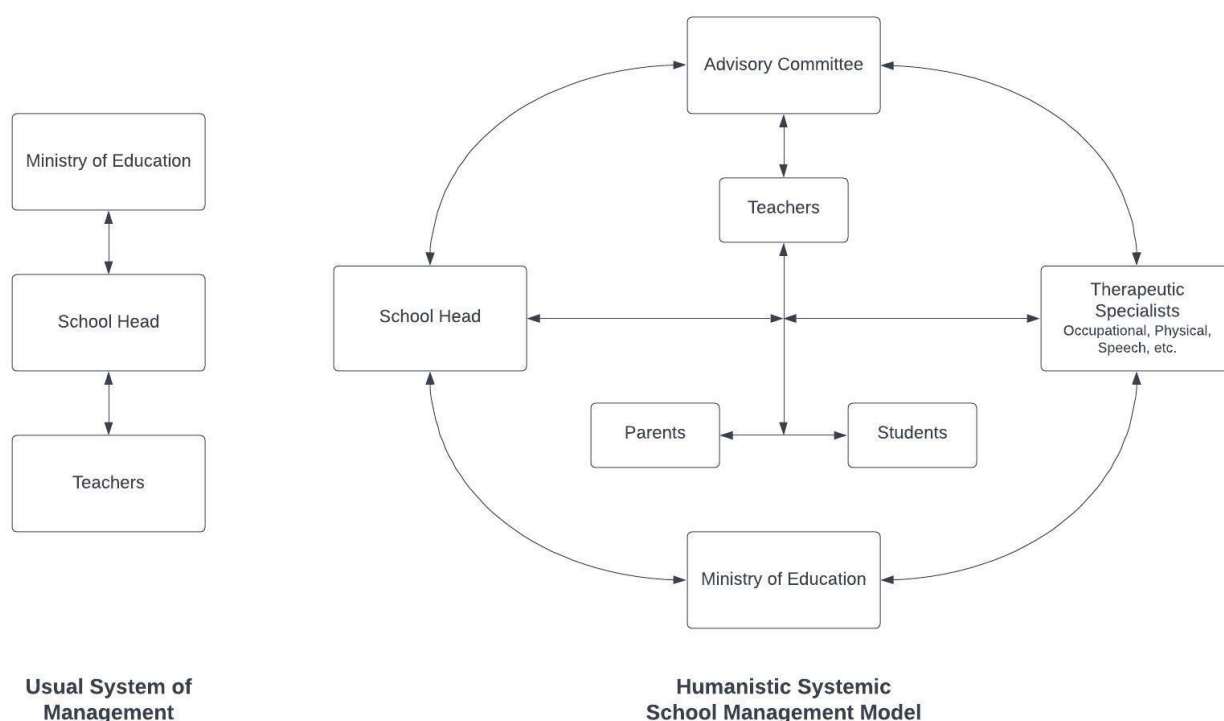


Figure 1 Comparison of Traditional and HSSMM Management

Source: Tsarfati (2023)

1.1 Educational Systems and Change

In the traditional departmental education model that has been the dominant school organization model since the late 19th century, every academic subject is separate from the others. Especially within larger schools, educators may report to different heads who report to a higher-level administration (Rose, 2012). In spite of a great deal of research and many new models, in practice education systems are generally very traditional structures that do not tend to change (OECD, 2016).

The contradiction between the extensive preoccupation with change and the lack of change in practice is due in part to the fact that most of the research deals with aspects that require not only change but also reflections on the nature of the desired change, rather than with practical and systematic aspects involved in implementation of the change such as monitoring the effects of reforms and using different policy tools to implement them. An axiom of ours was that true change in education should focus on improved learning and should benefit all the stakeholders.

Pedagogical reform concerns the study content and methods of both teaching and assessment, while organizational reform concerns aspects such as organizational structure, the salary system, etc. Just as there are pedagogy reforms that adapt and develop over time, so modern management approaches must adapt to the dynamism and the needs that arise from the field. This implementation refers to the systemic approach of the way the school is managed and the operations in it (Eisenberg & Selivansky-Eden, 2019).

In constructing the Humanistic Systemic School Management Model (HSSMM) we have used elements of various management models that researchers like Schechter (2011) have explored, including: (1) constructing an understanding of how to support teachers, empowering them to promote student learning; (2) developing shared aims, identity, and purpose, encouraging effective communication and responsibility for school processes; (3) encouraging collaborative processes promoting better teaching and learning; (4) promoting individual and collective efficacy; (5) situating teacher training in the unique educational context at hand; (6) promoting collective learning by establishing organizational structures, methods, and practices wherein management takes on the role of facilitator of mutual learning; and (7) modeling learning as a shift in perspective, thereby promoting learning in which teachers can assemble, refine and negotiate meanings. Moreover, our model is also inspired by both (8) the Cultural Feminism model, which focuses upon emotional attachment and engagement (Beck, 1994), and (9) Critical Pedagogy, that includes empowering students to become active and engaged citizens who are able to actively improve their own lives, making connections between school and the broader community (Kincheloe, 2008).

There is no contradiction between the systemic and humanistic views. The systemic approach outwardly desires perfection, but in practice there can be no perfection. Holistic education in its entirety is the application of the systemic approach with an over-all view that incorporates humanistic elements overlooked by the systems approach, including the sometimes dramatic lack of perfection. Thus there can be a successful and efficient combination of diverse managerial ideas and methods that complement each other.

1.2 A Deeper Look at the Holistic-Systemic Blend

The connection between holistic education and the systemic approach promotes team spirit and cooperation in the education system (Adiges, 2010). The HSSMM approach brings together all the different parties--students, teachers, therapists (occupational, physical, speech, psycho/social, and any others), administrators, and community — and connects them to promote learning and the achievement of educational goals. These local

information sources are an important part of the system. They provide detailed and complete understanding of aspects of the educational environment that are often overlooked in the traditional management model.

The collaboration ensures an improvement in educational processes, permits freedom and creativity in educational frameworks, expresses effective management of the system, and promotes renewed interpretations and systemic thinking about the goals of education. With all parties working together, the decision-making process is naturally transparent and builds trust.

The flexibility that develops is critically important because modern education faces many and complex challenges, such as technological changes, social changes, and fluctuations in the field of information. Refinement of the connection between holistic education and its systematic delivery allows for a broader understanding of what is happening in the school because participants must participate actively, not merely be mirrors reflecting back what they think is a desired response.

1.3 Implementation of the Systemic-Humanistic Approach to Management

The essential problem within school management is that bureaucratic procedures and interfaces make it difficult to move freely within the system. Schools run on strict schedules of hours, standards, supports, diagnoses, and teacher requirements. Participants understand education-related issues through these frameworks (Chapman, 2002). They have indifferent explanations for understanding educational phenomena (Burton & Bartlett, 2020) and do not have tailor-made solutions to presented problems. Oplatka (2015) shows that a person's position in the system affects the problems he identifies, and he frames the solutions or creates multiple perspective awareness for each problem. All in all, the system fails the many who fall between the cracks.

Academic innovation requires experience and change in pedagogical practices, learning approaches, student evaluations, and professional collaborations. According to Eisner (1992), any important and educationally significant reform requires reference to five study dimensions: the intention, the structural, the educational, the pedagogical, and the assessment. The connections between all the factors are crucial because they constitute a systemic point of view and not just adapted solutions to the presented problems (Ben-Peretz et al., 2011).

According to systemic thinking, systemic change can occur at all levels of the system (Sharan Y. & Sharan S., 2021), and the entire process must be based on autonomy, responsibility, dialogue, trust, involvement, and continuity (Chapman, 2002). The “big picture,” which emphasizes the interrelationship between the components and not the components themselves, makes it possible to find solutions to problems because the connections become clearer and the solutions more accessible (Shaked & Sharan S., 2021).

These educational processes and their implementation led us to develop what we call Targeting in Particular or TIP — in other words, special focus (Figure 2). Chapman (2002) discussed the importance of implementing multidisciplinary humanistic education according to personalized goals and seeing these as a whole. We accomplish this through TIP.

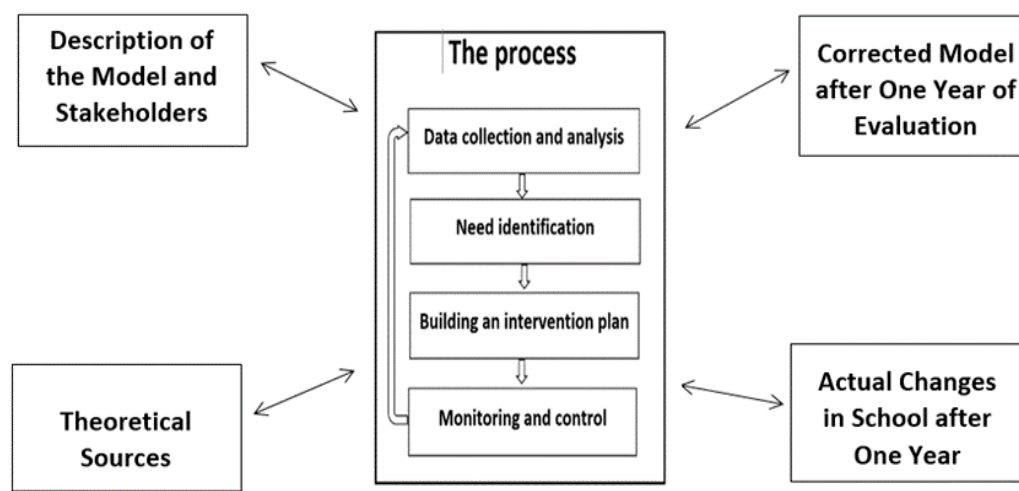


Figure 2 The TIP Model: “Targeting in Particular”

Source: Tsarfati (2020)

1.3.1 Combining the Holistic and Systemic Approaches

The relationship of the holistic approach to each student is reflected in a complete, detailed portrayal of each child, constructed with the help of measurable tools obtained from all the partner teachers who surround the student as well as from an in-depth analysis and discussion by the advisory committee. Parents are recruited to the process because their involvement is also important.

The systemic approach enables precision in details because information moves directly between the officials, according to their professionalism and specialization, and not through several bureaucratic levels. It includes an understanding of the mechanisms of achievement and the development of learning in a targeted manner. It also emphasizes the connections between different aspects of knowledge in the education system. The combination provides each teacher encouragement and support for the needs that arise from the field, and is a suitable answer to the indifference and bureaucracy that exist today.

Critical to the success of the management process is the implementation of the overall humanistic-systemic approach involving input from the many sources. Operation involves recruitment of parents; empowerment and development of teaching teams with an individual-focused team structure; development of multi-system professional units including mapping, diagnosis, guidance, counseling, and treatment; in-depth mapping of the students; social, family, academic, emotional, therapies if needed, and their synchronization. Personal, class, and school data are presented to the advisory committee working with each group which then develops action plans for each level — personal, classroom, and school. It is this breadth of input that creates the in-depth, complete picture needed.

This integration of modalities creates a system in which each child’s personality, strengths, and weaknesses are known and understood. Students are exposed to a variety of educational approaches, topics, and areas of knowledge in different subjects in order for them to identify connections that they want to deepen. Students are able to make informed choices about the areas in which they choose to develop while the educational staff provides precise guidance using all the educational approaches that have developed over time. In this environment the students learn to be responsible and significant partners in their own success. They begin to consider and then develop a personal dream that they would like to fulfill. Development of such goals provides both a basis for

success as well as a sign expressing success of the process.

1.3.2 The Breadth of Input

Parents (or parent substitutes who are responsible for children) have a primary role in children's development, both educational and psycho/social. In our study, the school recruited parents as active partners in the educational process with an emphasis on connecting and strengthening the relationship between the child and the parents. Using the Shoham process, a long-standing practice that allows parents and mentors to be around the student during learning/experience, parents took part in an ongoing and consistent procedure together with their children. Each meeting was recorded and documented. It was then evaluated by the student. This action strengthened and restored the desired and expected status of the parent, developing a common and fruitful dialogue between the teacher and parent following challenges that arose during the meetings.

An advisory committee consisting of three educator teachers, one counselor, one psychologist, and one individual coordinator was an important part of the process. Personal, class, and school data were presented to the committee for consideration. Based on the comments of these specialists, action plans were devised at the personal, classroom, and school levels.

The committee met for a week to discuss classes according to a schedule prepared in advance. In preparation for the meetings, each educator was responsible for collecting data from the professional teachers and other professional parties using a special form to ensure necessary information was provided. Because of the structure and preparation, the meetings provided a professional environment for discourse, for discussion, to receive answers, and to make decisions about the student/study group/class.

Each class met twice with the advisory committee. This committee was the replacement for the standard pedagogical meeting with multi-professional committees, providing individual-focused scrutiny not possible in the old system.

Each teacher formulated a way to deal with students' differences and to create conditions for the realization of each student's abilities. This is necessary because each student is unique and special, and learning is a personal, conscious, and informed process that takes place in a social context through interactions with significant adults and peer group members, in and out of the classroom. Thus the curriculum needs to be individual-focused in order to allow each child to realize learning and to reach academic, social, and emotional goals.

All the critical data was collected by the class teacher, who also conducted a discussion about each child in front of the committee. Because of this, each student could be helped to progress from where he or she was.

Teachers developed a deeper knowledge of their students, including the characteristics of different cultures. They also acquired professional knowledge and tools for teaching and working with gifted, average, and struggling students. Evaluation of teacher-student relationships allowed for better prediction of cognitive and school achievements than did evaluation of functioning of the students themselves, as predicted by Hamre and Pianta (2001).

The application of new knowledge gained was integrated into the actual teaching and work processes. This created an enabling and nurturing environment in which students were empowered and their curiosity was developed while their special needs of each were taken into account.

1.3.4 Curriculum

When there is a rich, challenging, and supportive learning environment, a connection is made possible for teachers to process information and deepen their students' growth. A curriculum was adapted to teaching-learning including various aspects including mental, emotional, social-value, sensor-motor, and spatial. At the same time,

the students' progress was monitored and quality feedback was provided for their promotion while each student was given the opportunity to express him- or herself and to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and appreciation.

1.3.5 Responsibility for Student Advancement

In this model, the responsibility for the advancement of all students rests with the complete staff of the educational institution. The teaching staff must recognize the differences that exist between students; a climate and educational concept that supports and promotes a response to diversity is critical. A consistent diagnostic system in the field of learning, support-inclusion, treatment, and updating must be maintained. The ability to include and promote learners is important, as is providing diverse opportunities for teachers including further training, mentoring and accompaniment, and counseling. Teachers need an increase of periodic training hours to increase their toolboxes.

A separate team is necessary to provide support for the educational team and to lead the overall support system. Also needed are increased resources for the institution to promote student learning and growth. Pooling and maximizing resources for optimal utilization while prioritizing other educational initiatives is sometimes necessary. Peer learning and collaboration between the various professional bodies is necessary in relation to the needs of both staff and students.

All of these requirements were met by the HSSMM model.

2. Methods

Before the start of the year, as well as during it, an ecological diagnosis was built in an orderly and systematic way describing the current situation and the desired situation (see Table 1). The collected data, consisting of questionnaires, interviews, trainings and so forth, were carefully measured and selected in a continuous and unceasing process. An analysis and correlation examination was performed on the data to make sure that the direction did indeed point to the desired goal.

Table 1 Schedule of Action Research Activities of Stakeholders

Month Who	May-June	July-August (School Holiday)	September through November	December	Jan-Feb	March through June
Counseling Committee	-Resource discussion -Year summary	-Data collection and analysis -2 days of evaluation	First round: -assignment check -Data processing-optimization -Examination of resource pooling			Second round
	-Professional training -Internal professional meetings					
Teachers	-Testing children	-Input data -Complete forms -2 days of evaluation	First round after data collection	Implementation decisions	of	Second round of meetings after data collection
Involved Parents			First conference	Second conference	-Third conference -Parent questionnaire	
Students	Undergoing tests and examinations	School holiday	-Placement in focus groups -Transition between study groups			
						Climate questionnaire

Source: Tsarfati (2020)

The distribution of resources and the harnessing of all teachers as partners in planning and implementation was critical. Great care was used to strive for and maintain the required balances to encourage cooperation.

2.1 Setting

The research was carried in an elementary school that included students from the age of 6 (first grade) to the age of 11 (6th grade). Each level had two classes for a total of 12 classes in the whole school. This amounted to about 240 students total. Each class had an educator who was the head of the class, the elementary teacher. There were 28 additional professional teachers. The social composition of classes was heterogeneous. One class was defined as a special education class for students with special needs.

Every year tests and mapping were conducted for all students towards the end of the year. These were used to create proactive action plans to be carried out through the advisory committee. The only exceptions were the two groups of children who moved up from kindergarten to first grade. These students were mapped towards the end of the first quarter. These assessments were used as information for consideration in making decisions related to achievements (Kusmaryono et al., 2019).

2.1.1 Research Population

The research year began in May of the school year before the majority of the research. It was carried out in grades 1-6 with children between the ages of 7 and 12, for a cohort of 240 children who were all students at the school. There were also 200 parents, or at least one parent for each student (some students were siblings). Twelve educators were involved as well as an advisory committee consisting of three teacher-educators, one counselor, one psychologist, and one coordinator.

2.1.2 Quantitative Research

The quantitative research aimed to determine how the implementation of the model affected the students' learning and understanding (see Figure 3).

For the students, this involved checking their achievements in May and June. Additionally, each student had a learning and motivation questionnaire that looked at his or her sense of connection with the teacher and with the school.

In March and April there was an evaluation of the questionnaires, which included questions with open-ended answers.

Teachers had a motivation questionnaire completed by August 15. Parents had two satisfaction questionnaires, one in September and one in June. Both parental and teacher questionnaires included open questions.

2.1.3 Qualitative Research

The advisory committee was given in-depth interviews about the process that influenced their career path in the education system, about implementing this new approach, about their motivation, and if and how it changed the way they saw and experienced their careers. Also investigated was their willingness to implement innovative pedagogy.

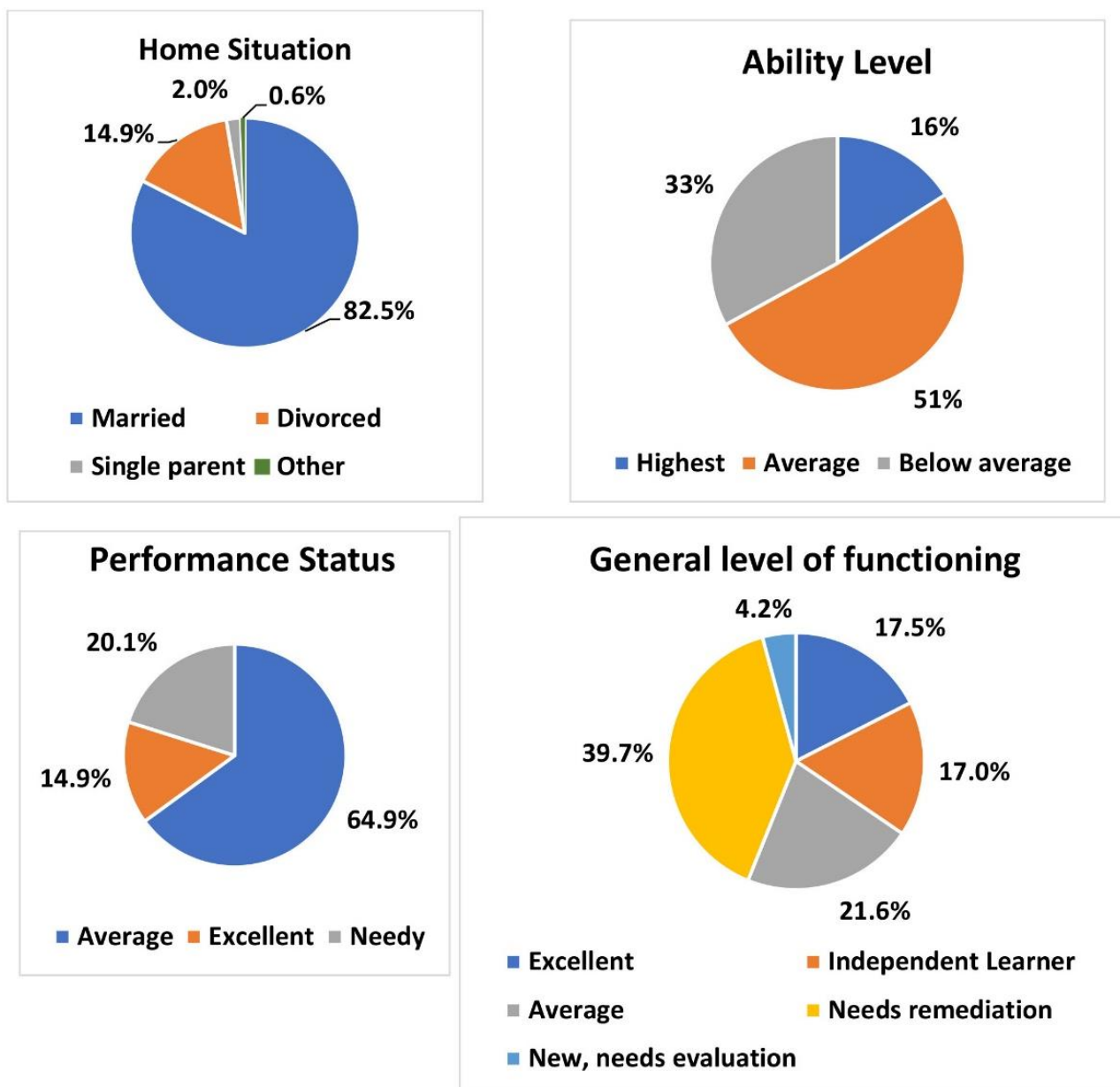


Figure 3 Systemic Overview of Students' Educational and Emotional Data

Source: Tsarfati (2023)

3. Results

In order to study this management model, the educational team was recruited. Each member had a significant role along with the right to choose to focus on their area of strength in order to implement the educational model and contribute as an important contributor to the process.

This intervention model of school management was implemented in the school when the partners understood that education leads to progress through a combination of psychology and pedagogy. As long as a teacher has significant data and an overview of both each student and each class, the teacher will be able to be more precise in his or her work. By implementing this school management model, the teachers were able to develop their

individual intellects and at the same time their social/emotional abilities.

The process was regulated in stages in a modular manner using means of action based on databases for the implementation during the study year as well as for future implementation in more educational environments (Whitehead, 2009). Miller (1998) shows that teacher leadership and administrative leadership work collaboratively to create more democratic and participatory school organizations. For this reason, the diagnoses were made through a consulting group, the school's advisory committee, and can be adapted following the values-based educational agenda in each school.

The teacher questionnaires provided a snapshot of the comfort teachers had in their roles and in their school. Some questions required responding to a scale of one (worst) to five (best). To the question, "To what extent do I have the necessary tools at school to succeed and to express my abilities?", 35 percent selected 5, 65 percent chose 4, and none rated their abilities below that. When asked, "To what extent do I feel comfortable in the teachers' room?" answers were spread more widely, with 55 percent answering 5, 36 percent answering 4, 1 percent answering 3, and 1 percent answering 2.

Answering an open question about the teacher's room, one teacher wrote, "The teacher's room has a good and pleasant climate for talking with co-workers. There is caring, understanding, help, and listening to the needs of others, acceptance, and help." A second teacher responded, "In the teachers' room there is a lot of happy giving and encouragement, and of course a lot of investment of each and every one of us in our roles. We could improve, for example by celebrating birthdays for teachers born in the same month and adding more atmosphere of belonging to the teachers' room."

At the close of the research study, 56.7 of the parents reported significant improvement in their child's performance; 23.3% reported slight improvement; 11.7% reported no significant improvement, and 8.3% either did not respond or only responded to the open-response part of the question.

The question, "What does your child's educator/classroom teacher know about your child, considering both his academic situation and outside interests?" had six possibilities ranging from "little" to "very much." Slightly more than 48% of parents selected the highest response, 24.2% the second-highest, 21% the third-highest, 3.2% slightly below the midpoint, and 3% the very lowest, with none selecting the second-lowest choice. Parent comments on the open response questions averaged a high satisfaction level with teachers.

Regarding student responses as far as emotional connection was concerned, 54.2% of students rated their teachers highest on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest) in response to the statement, "Most of the teachers give me the feeling that I can do well in school." 40.6% of students agreed with the next statement, "sometimes yes and sometimes no," 4.2% said "generally no" and 3.1% responded "I never got this feeling from a teacher."

In response to the pedagogic element, students replied to the statement, "Most of the teachers clearly explain to me the material they teach." The 38.5% agreed with the highest level, while 50% said "sometimes yes and sometimes no." 14.6% responded "in general no," and 2.1% responded "I never had this feeling from a teacher."

4. Discussion

This paper presents a new humanistic management model for schools focusing on the function of the model and its contribution to the school. The development process of the teaching staff was presented through continuous action research (Whitehead, 2009).

This was a reflective self-study, and its purpose was to help improve the work in a rational and controlled

process. The study introduced a shared reflective autobiographical narrative (Zeichner, 2001) to help understand personal and social situations through action research. The work was carried out with the possibility of analysis and presentation in a circular way, without a break. Sharing this research enables reflection and helps build a systemic-pedagogical theory that can be used to help solve educational problems (Whitehead, 2009) and implement the educational milestones.

In general, the relationship between holistic education and the systemic approach focuses on a central understanding of the educational system as a central system with coordination, work sharing, and common understanding among the various components within the system. This is a reality that guarantees the improvement of educational and learning processes and results in an improved educational environment.

The entire system can be made more effective for the planning and implementation of educational processes when there is a central understanding of the educational system. Increasing proper cooperation between the various components in the system and systemic thinking on both the effects of the actions and on the broad educational goals is possible with the humanistic/systemic management approach described here.

This model involves the promotion of the development of teams as well as influencing the individual components of the education system, most notably teachers and students. The students improve and develop when the teachers and administrators develop and renew themselves. Therefore, central importance is given to the training and professional development of the staff in the education system.

5. Conclusion

In this article we present an effective new school management model, the Humanistic Systemic School Management Model. We have seen that this model leads to happier and more successful teachers and students. The very fact that the teachers, who work in the field and are the human capital of the school, are involved in all the details, in the processes, and are partners in the action research allows the system approach to be fully assimilated.

Broad recent knowledge in education management documents the benefits of using a holistic systemic approach. The goal of this study was to develop, apply and evaluate a method to teach administrators how to implement a holistic systemic management approach in the education system, in order to provide an integrated and fruitful learning experience for students. This was done in a practical, step-by-step modular fashion while integrating managerial practices. As a first step, it was critical for administrators to understand the basic principles of the holistic systemic approach in education.

In order to accomplish this managerial goal, it was necessary to also focus on professional development of the educational staff. Thus important ideas and activities were introduced that examined different ways of measuring student progress in an effective and creative way. Main aspects of the holistic systemic approach in education enabled the understanding of the central principle of seeing the student as a whole, thinking outside the box, recognizing and addressing diverse learning ability, and the ability to influence proactive learning processes. This had to be taught and encouraged. Additionally, administrators were encouraged to be creative and to integrate the holistic systemic approach into all processes and decisions in the education system.

The results of the research show how the suggested model, based on the Systemic Approach and with the addition of the humanistic holistic approach, when applied to education, establishes a new modular school management model. The interactions among teachers, parents, and students is a critical part of this model as they

provide a guide for the direction of the school, including identifying both strengths and weaknesses.

This new knowledge in the field of school management and educational entrepreneurship can be used to create entrepreneurial opportunities as well as opportunities within school systems for individuals and populations while ensuring sustainable solutions. It permits high precision and professionalism in managing the various components of the school to improve student achievement and satisfaction, teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, and the development of a warm, supportive, and positive school climate.

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