

*“Every person has an equal right to be different.”*

# **Theoretical and Infrastructural Background of the Holistic Education Model**

**Holistic Well-Being – from Theory to Practice: The 'Ort' Holistic Education Model**

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*“We tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system, and wonder why our deepest problems never seem to get solved” – Peter Senge*

As the above quote indicates, a multi-dimensional holistic perspective is essential for a thorough and comprehensive understanding of a system, and in particular in order to lead it and its components towards optimal functioning. In many systems, including education, there is a tendency to observe phenomena as distinct and separate, and to analyze them as disconnected from the whole. However, such fragmented view does not take into account the complexity of the system and the multiple varied dimensions and factors involved. When we examine the etymology (study of word origins) of the word *health*, we find that the Latin source of the word *health* is *hal*, which means *whole*; capturing this etymological connection, one of the dictionary definitions of *to heal* is *to make whole*. In a similar vein, the Hebrew word *shalem* (i.e., being whole) corresponds with the word *shalom* (peace). Wholeness, thus, involves peace and healing of the divided and fragmented parts of an individual, a system, or society at large. In other words, attaining optimal health and wholeness must be based on holistic approach that takes into account the various aspects in human nature (body-mind-soul; Frankl, 1969) and which works to create a dynamic dialogue between these aspects in an integrative, balanced and multi-dimensional manner. This approach is also anchored in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which refers to the importance of observing human wholeness through the different areas and layers of development in which individuals act and live. According to this theory, all levels and contexts of human development should be taken into account: the *Microsystem* (i.e., the direct interactions in the immediate environment of the child, such as parents, school, or friends); the *Mesosystem* (consists of the interactions between the different parts of a person's microsystem, such as interactions between the parents and the educational staff); the *Exosystem* (i.e., links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role, such as social

institutions that indirectly affect the child: extended family, the media, general community and municipality); the *Macrosystem* (i.e., cultural contexts, ethnicity, general social values, laws and resources); and the *Chronosystem* (i.e., environmental events and transitions over the life course, both on a personal level – such as the birth of a sibling – and sociohistorical circumstances, such as war).

Applying the holistic approach to the educational system is oriented towards the nurturing and cultivating the strengths and development of children as whole human beings through the various levels and contexts in which they interact.

Schools constitute potentially meaningful environments for fostering holistic well-being. For students, the school represents a social framework that can serve both as a risk factor and as a protective factor. Unlike pathogenic approaches focused on factors that cause disease, fixing problems, malfunctioning and the negative aspects of the student, the salutogenic approaches to education focus on the positive aspects of the student and the factors that promote well-being and growth such as strengths and skills and their ramifications on his/her physical and emotional health (Selgiman et al., 2009). The students' daily experiences and interactions with other students and the educational staff in school plays an important role in their mental health. Furthermore, most parents and educators view the promotion of well-being a key and central goal for education as a whole (Cohen, 2006). Empirical studies indicate significant connections between students' well-being and their academic competence (Suldo & Shaffer, 2007) and learning (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998), as well as satisfaction from their school experiences (Suldo, Shaffer & Riley, 2008). When students experience the school as a pleasant and safe environment, they reach greater academic achievements and their sense of success increases (Gross & Capuzzi, 2004).

## The well-being components of the Holistic Education Model

Well-being is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional structure, which includes a range of different characteristics. Cowen (Cowen, 1994) relates to two types of characteristics: *behavioral* (such as eating, sleeping, working, managing interpersonal relationships, and acquiring the skills to carry out tasks that match one's developmental stage); and *psychological* (such as a sense of belongingness, purpose, satisfaction with life, etc.). In accordance with these characteristics, cultivating wellness is defined as "a way of life oriented towards optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community." (Myers, Sweeny & Witmer, 2000; p. 252). In light of this framework, the following sections will address each of the well-being components that comprise the holistic education model.

**Physical health** – Good physical health is considered as a key factor in students' availability for learning and engagement. Beyond medical aspects of students' physical health – such as disabilities, medical care and specific difficulties (such as a need to wear glasses to improve vision at distance or breathing difficulties in sports classes), it is important to stress three essential aspects of students' physical health: sleep, nutrition, and physical activity. *Sleep* plays a critical role in the mental and physical health of individuals throughout their lifespan, in particular during childhood and adolescence. Research has shown that good quality sleep enables the brain to function more efficiently and improves learning skills, problem solving, attention and creativity. Sleep deficiency, on the other hand, has negative effects on functioning, performance and well-being: it impairs cognitive skills and information processing and was found to be associated with higher levels of tension, stress, emotional and physical exhaustion, harm to personal relationships, lack of motivation, poor academic performance, depression, impulsive behavior and mood fluctuations, risk taking and even suicidal tendencies (Dewald et al., 2010; Fallone, Owens & Deane, 2002; Wolfson & Carskadon, 2003).

Good nutrition is another key factor contributing to positive development, academic and behavioral performance, and well-being of children and youths (Bryan et al., 2004; Lieberman, 2003). Studies show that poor nutrition can lead to behavioral problems, impairment of cognitive skills, psychosocial mechanisms and motor functions (Pollitt, 1994; Taras, 2005). Physical activity has consistently been positively associated with academic, cognitive, emotional and social performance. Research results indicate that students who are physically active tend to achieve higher grades, have better attendance in school, better cognitive functioning and fewer behavioral problems (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Shephard, 1996; Taras, 2005). Physical activity releases hormones and neurochemicals in the brain, responsible for positive mood and relaxation of the body, and enable improvements in attention, focus, memory, awareness and motivation, along with a decrease in stress and anxiety levels. In addition, physical activity enhances academic functioning, emotional and behavioral regulation, and contributes to improved social skills and self-esteem (Hillman, Erickson & Kramer, 2008; Ratey, 2008; Sibley & Etnier, 2003).

**Welfare and economic status** – Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954) specifies biological and physiological basic needs located at the bottom of the hierarchy (such as food, drink, shelter, air), whose fulfillment is often a predominant condition for the function and implementation of optimal psychological and spiritual needs located a higher levels. Indeed, an abundance of research findings indicates that economic status has a wide influence on the emotional wellness of children (e.g., McLyod, 1998). In terms of the holistic model, this factor addresses to the satisfaction of the students' basic existential needs, such as those related to nutrition, transportation, books, and trips, in a differential manner according to the mapping of the students' needs, in order to create a fundamental infrastructure for other components of well-being to thrive.

**Emotional state** – Emotions have a major contribution to the manner in which students' experience school, to the relationships they develop, to their academic achievements and to their active engagement in learning (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011). The development of emotional skills, the ability to manage frustration, and emotional resilience among children and youth is founded on the emotional self-regulation ability (the ability to experience, manage and express emotions). As a basic mechanism, emotional regulation also reflects on children's general development and especially on their learning abilities. Research indicates that self-regulation has greater effect on future academic achievements than children's level of intelligence (IQ; Blair, 2002). Healthy emotional self-regulation develops in a warm and supportive environment, which responds to the children's needs and provides psychological security and trust. Children develop their coping ability and emotional understanding of themselves and others by observing and learning from significant figures in their educational environment and through accompanying and supporting them, especially in periods of stress and uncertainty (Ross, Powell & Elias, 2002). Positive, empathetic and supportive relationships with the educational staff have a wide influence on the emotional characteristics of students' well-being, such as self-esteem, engagement in active learning, a sense of belonging to the school, and self-efficacy. The educational staff, thus, has a key role in assisting and guiding students in processing their emotions, in the expression of their emotions, and in regulating their emotional responses to a range of daily situations (Ahn, 2005; Panfile & Laible, 2012). Research shows that children and adolescents who do not succeed in developing their ability for emotional self-regulation tend to exhibit more resisting and aggressive behaviors (Calkins et al. 1998; Schatz et. al 2008), to experience more difficulties in developing meaningful relationships with others (Stack et al., 2010) and to develop lower self-efficacy for coping with learning tasks (Denham et al. 2009), compared to those who have succeeded in acquiring emotional skills.

**Behavioral aspect** – The student's daily function in school on the behavioral aspect conveys important insights regarding his/her ability to recruit internal resources to manage and adapt. Behavioral engagement includes the student's participation in a variety of learning activities, both at home (such as preparing homework), and in the classroom and school as a whole (i.e., attendance and arrival on time, participation in lessons and independence) (Green et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2009). Research points to a connection between effort, perseverance and active behavioral involvement of students, and their academic achievements (Wentzel, 1997), whereas a lack of involvement and detachment were found to be related to poor academic performance, students drop-out and absence, alienation and behavioral problems (e.g., Cohen-Navot, Allenbogen-Frankowitz & Reinfeld, 2001; Finn, 1993).

**Social aspect** – Social relationships constitute an inseparable part of the human life fabric, and represent a central factor in the well-being of children and youth. They serve as a protective factor in healthy development and are vital to the satisfaction of basic needs such as connection, intimacy and belonging (Morrow, 2001). The positive and negative qualities of relationships can independently influence well-being (Lansford et al., 2005): negative interactions (such as bullying, conflicts and aggression) were found to have a significantly greater influence on satisfaction with life, mood, illness, emotional tension and isolation than positive interactions (Finch et al. 1999; Parker & Asher, 1993). Social isolation and negative social interactions lead to low satisfaction with school, poor self-esteem, increased anxiety, and low overall well-being (Konu et al. 2002; Rees et al. 2010). Bullying was specifically found to be related to higher levels of depression in adulthood (Goswami 2012; Olweus 1993). In contrast, satisfying the basic need for connection and belonging promotes healthy growth and development. The cultivation of healthy and supportive interpersonal relationships contributes greatly to motivation, engagement in learning, and academic achievements (Martin & Downson, 2009), as well as to a positive sense of self-esteem and self-value (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

**Academic aspect** – Academic performance is considered a core domain in school and plays a significant role in the positive development of children and youth. Academic achievements require beyond than learning skills and capabilities (DiPerna & Elliott, 2002), but also derived from internal factors such as intrinsic motivation which leads to perseverance, active involvement, and the ongoing investment of cognitive effort and attention (Asor, 2001). These factors are consistent with self-autonomy, curiosity and the ability to meet challenges, which develop through the support of teachers (Flink, Boggiano & Barret, 1990) and experiences of success, that in turn reinforce a sense of self-efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this respect, interest in a given task was found to be positively associated with paying attention to learning (Hiki & Harackiewicz, 2000) and achievements (Krapp, Hiki & Renninger, 1992). Assistance in setting goals that promote learning, in alignment to the student's interests and abilities, promotes a sense of autonomy and control, as well as intrinsic motivation to learn and accomplish, to perseverance, and to positive overall well-being (e.g., Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). In this respect, it is also important to take into account the type of feedback and praise that the students receive during the learning process, and to prefer feedback which emphasizes practice and effort which are related to growth mindset, than one which emphasizes performance, abilities and end-point or results, related to a fixed mindset (e.g., Mueller & Dweck, 1998). A teacher-student dialogue that includes the empathetic and authentic interest in the student's personal strengths and interest, and feedback that encourages learning even in situations of failure and difficulty - enable the student to express his strengths in a supportive and safe environment, thereby serving as an important key to further learning, development and improvement. In other words, the message that the student receives from meaningful figures in the education system directs and guides the manner in which he learns to think of and view him/her self. This bears significant weight in building students' self-confidence and in realizing his/her potential (Dweck et al., 1978; Dweck, 2006).

**Strengths and talents** – The acknowledgement and use of one's personal strengths enable him/her increased optimism, self-confidence and satisfaction with life, successful goals achievement and in general strengthen coping ability provide a sense of direction in life. As part of an in-depth study, Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified a set of 24 character strengths and virtues which define the positive psychological characteristics and traits of humans. As a counter-weight to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), Peterson's and Seligman's book, *Character Strengths and Virtues* (CSV), represents the first meaningful attempt of the research community to provide a universally valid classification system of human strengths and virtues valued throughout history and across cultures and traditions. Much like the DSM of general psychology, the CSV provides a theoretical framework for developing positive psychological practical applications. The 24 character strengths are categorized into a six-virtue categorization: wisdom (creativity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective); courage (bravery, persistence, integrity, vitality); humanity (love, kindness, social intelligence); justice (citizenship, fairness, leadership); temperance (forgiveness and compassion, humility, prudence, self-regulation); and transcendence (beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality).

Many studies emphasize the importance of character strengths to academic achievements, healthy relationships and well-being as long as the identification of strengths is accompanied by active use (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Seligman et al., 2005). For example, it was found that the use of personal strengths for setting meaningful goals led to increased involvement and hope among students (Madden, Green & Grant, 2011). Researchers recommend an implementation of intervention programs designed to identify and use strengths not only as a meaningful resource for well-being but also for the development of coping skills and resilience (Gillham et al., 2011), such as reducing symptoms of depression (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005).

Intentional cultivation of character strengths such as social intelligence was found to be contributive to the prevention or reduction of aggressive and anti-social behaviors in schools (Hudley & Graham, 1995). Intentional and focused cultivation of students' character strengths, thus, may contribute not only to his/her sense of well-being but also to improve the relationships and environment in the classroom: students' increased awareness students to their classmates' strengths will enable to strengthen mutual appreciation (Eades, 2008). Alongside the identification and mapping of students' personal strengths, referring to their abilities and unique talents enables the cultivation of personal expression, empowerment, enhanced self-esteem, success experiences, autonomy and significant positive growth. Talents constitute areas of interest and passion unique to the individual (such as sports, singing, dancing, playing music or chess). Involvement in activities that enable the expression of unique interests and passions is often experienced as autotelic (auto = self; telic = goal); that is, as self-contained, done for its own sake rather than for the sake of some external purpose. This is considered as an optimal experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). "Flow" experiences are characterized by great involvement, engagement, concentration, interest and enjoyment, that were found to lead to meaningful learning and high academic achievements (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Research on resilience (e.g., Masten & Marie-Gabrielle, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1982) emphasized the importance of identifying individuals' personal resources of one's abilities and interests as a driving force for realizing dreams and hopes for the future even in the face of external barriers and challenges. Creating space and discourse that encourage the identification and expression of talents enables self-awareness, learning and development in directions that are meaningful to each student within his/her unique areas of interest, alongside the encouragement to invest ongoing effort and perseverance to develop them through the use of specific corresponding strengths (such as curiosity, love of learning, etc.) to contribute to positive development in other life areas.

**Leisure and availability** – Beyond students' formal time spent in the educational system during the day, they are also involved in leisure activities during the afternoon and evening, reflecting their preferences and lifestyles, such as extracurricular classes, group activities, youth movements, playing on the computer or watching television. Involvement in such leisure activities can be active or passive at varying degrees of physical effort and mental energy. Active activities during leisure hours, such as physical activities, have been found to be positively related to well-being, while passive leisure activities, such as watching television and playing on the computer, have been shown to be negatively related to well-being (Holder, Coleman & Sehn, 2009). Furthermore, involvement in active activities was found to contribute to cognitive and physiological processes that in turn lead to strengthening one's self-esteem, self-confidence and social interactions (Hunter, 2008), while passive leisure activities may lead to social isolation, reduction of physical activities, weight gain and boredom among students (Guruprasad, Banumathe & Sinu, 2012).

Concerning leisure activities, volunteering stands out as an activity that enables a unique opportunity to utilize and express students' talents and commitment to make a personal contribution to society, found to yield a wide range of positive effects on students' well-being, self-efficacy and personal identity (e.g., Adams, 1990). On the one hand, active involvement in volunteer activities enhances the students' capability to give to others and to the community; on the other hand, it enhances the expression of abilities, self-esteem and self-esteem, social interactions, sense of responsibility and success experiences on a personal level (Hadar, 2010; Quinn, 1995). Volunteering also creates opportunities for identifying and applying personal strengths (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010).

**Family status** – The family constitute the child's core circle of belonging and an essential source of healthy development and well-being. Healthy intra-family connections have been found to be protective factors related to mental health, academic achievements, and less behavioral problems (Sun,

2003). Observing a family from the perspective of strengths enables to contribute to reinforced solidarity, support and emotional connections between the individuals comprising the family as a whole. Alongside the identification of familial strengths through the CVS set of character strengths, other conceptualizations developed in this direction may also contribute to the improvement of family connections and, in turn, to the students' well-being. For example, the *Family Strengths model* proposes six clusters of qualities that characterize family's strengths (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985; DeFrain, 1999): appreciation and affection; commitment to investing time and energy for fostering family wellness; positive communication that goes beyond problem-oriented; spending time together; and the management of stress and crisis situations in a constructive and positive manner.

As an overall summary, while each of the well-being domains reviewed significantly and directly contributes to students' healthy functioning and coping, these experiences, domains and factors are inter-related, and when they are combined in a holistic manner, they can optimally promote well-being in a more balanced and complete manner.

### **The Integrative Multi-Dimensional Model: Basic Principles**

The holistic model is multi-layered and multi-dimensional model, which takes into account a variety of factors and levels related to student's performance and functioning, through a combination of body-mind-soul on the one hand and the active involvement of various factors in the educational system on the other. This model thereby represents a significant innovation in the manner in which it refers to the individual student by emphasizing the 'soft' and holistic aspects as part of the routine practices of the school, in a system that is mostly concerned with the 'tough' data such as achievements and measures. In addition, today's educational system focuses more on the development of instrumental-cognitive abilities of calculation, analysis and deduction often on the expense of other more existential and essential

aspects of learning such as self-awareness, reflection and insight (Hart, 2003). The holistic model enables to broaden the view of the aim of education as one that should also promote students' well-being and to address their emotional needs and expression of their strengths and aspirations beyond cognitive ones, in a systematic manner. The following is an overview of the main highlights for the educational activity on which the model is based:

**1. The implementation of holistic language based on positive psychology**

The development of a language that is systematically and professionally implemented, independent of specific person or role, reflects a perspective according to which it is the responsibility of the teacher and the educational system to refer to the whole student and relate to him/her accordingly. This is carried out through the creation of a systematic structure for the comprehensive mapping of parameters that enable an awareness, understanding, identification and cultivation of students' needs in the full range of well-being domains discussed above, for each student (360 degrees view): nutrition, physical activity, sleep, leisure activities, volunteering, emotional aspect, family status, educational aspect, behavioral and social states, and personal and family strengths. The development of such a broad language allows a 'break' for a 'time-in' as part of the educational work for deepening, strengthening and preserving the focus on the positive things innate to the student (e.g., personal character strengths), the family (e.g., identifying family strengths), and the educational staff (e.g., through the use of a language of strengths as part of existing routines in the educational system such as parent-teacher meetings etc.).

**2. Ongoing responsibility and accountability of the student throughout the years in the educational systems**

Creating a wide, integrative and supportive framework that serves as an educational-pedagogical

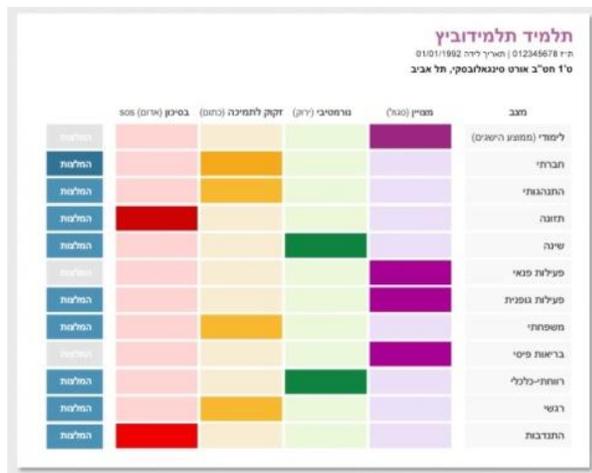
continuum through all stages of education, from first through twelfth grade, whereby creating a language that is common to all schools in the community. Such ongoing accompaniment enables the educational system and staff to adapt to the student as he/she adapts to the system as well.

### 3. Creation of a computerized holistic mapping system

Building a computerized holistic mapping system enables the pooling of human and economic resources in order to generate work plans and intervention programs focused on the individual, the group, the class, the school and the community as a whole – in a differential and unique manner, applicable to the data and needs identified. This allows for a synergistic process of cooperation between the educational system and local authorities.

#### An example: Holistic View of the Student

The following graph also includes the following data: 'the student's voice,' 'the parent's voice,' personal strengths and family strengths



Student Smith

ID 012345678 Birth date: 01/01/1992

State Excellent (purple) Normative (green) Needs Support (orange) At Risk (red) SOS

Recommendations

**State:**

Educational (average achievements)

Social

Behavioral

Nutritional

Sleep

Leisure activities

Physical activities

Family

Physical health

Welfare – economic

Emotional

Volunteering



**Holistic view: Class/Level/School/Municipal**

4. **A space for the acknowledgement of students' and parent's voices to create a continuous meaningful dialogue**

Creating a school-based routine for regular and structured discussion meetings that provide an opportunity for on-going meaningful dialogue between the student, the teacher and his/her parents in order to foster healthy functioning. Such dialogue focuses on the needs of the child and emphasizes autonomy and responsibility, rather than a reactive-oriented discussion focused on the problems that have arisen (“putting out fires”). Such school regular routine also provides a new structure for pedagogical meetings between the teachers in the school, which contributes to balance the mapping of the students between their academic achievements and the creation of optimal conditions for learning, by attending to other influencing factors (for example: a student who is not eating well, lacks sleep or has lost his/her motivation will suffer from poorer educational performance regardless of his/her abilities). The voices of the students are raised as part of the pedagogical meetings, where the full educational staff is present and can gain a deeper understanding of each student's needs. This gives each teacher the opportunity to relate to the student in a manner which comprehensively relates to the full range of fields of study and domains of healthy functioning. Furthermore, the parents' voices are also presented at these meetings, creating a deep and continuous partnership between the parents and the educational staff, in accordance with the Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasizes the importance of partnership and interrelation between the different systems that accompany the student's life.

5. **No 'transparent students'**

Extending the educational system's view from focusing on the students who have difficulties to all of the students comprising the school, allows immediacy, accessibility and appropriate

responsiveness to each and every student in the school. This prevents the situation of 'transparent children,' which the system tends to miss or neglect. In this manner, all voices can be heard (those of the children, the staff and the parents) in relation to a variety of factors and aspects. The expression of these voices in turn empowers the students, strengthens the connection between the school and home systems, and establishes a sense of belonging to and wellness in the school. Indeed, studies in this field indicate that listening and responding to the voices of the students leads to a significant improvement in the students' learning, involvement in school life, and strengthening teacher-student relationships (Cook-Sather, 2006; Nevo, 2010).

**“All the teachers want to know what is happening with me”: Initial findings from the implementation assessment of the holistic education model**

The holistic model integrates the development of a language that focuses on fostering and promoting well-being from a range of aspects, through the adoption of a spiral perspective that is developmental, proactive and systematic. Its purpose is to establish an educational, pedagogical and organizational continuum, combined with systematic evaluation to cultivate well-being, optimal functioning and improvement in achieving the vision and educational goals in a given city or town. Today, the model is being used by 41 principals and schools, 10,929 students from first through twelfth grade, 491 teachers and counselors, and 92 facilitators and instructors in a variety of intervention programs developed in accordance to the mapping. In the assessment study of the model (see Gilat and Sagi, 2016), carried out after two years of operation, the perspectives of the students, teachers and counselors were explored to gain an in-depth understanding of the effects of the model in the schools.

Data was collected from 172 students, 102 teachers, 28 principals, 3 counselors, and seven policy-makers who fill senior roles in the educational system in the districts in which the model

operates. The data collected from the students indicates a unique contribution of the model in a number of central areas. The students who are taking part in the holistic education model report that their general feeling (school atmosphere) is better relative to a national representative sample of students in parallel age groups. The findings of the study indicate that the students, to a high degree, attribute the positive school atmosphere to the connection with their teachers and to the supportive and empowering attitudes the educational staff expresses towards them. In addition, along with an improvement in academic achievements, the analysis of the data shows that the students demonstrate a wide use of the language of strengths in general and of their own personal character strengths in particular, in a manner that shows high self-awareness in identifying and using the strengths. The teachers and the principals interviewed report on a high level of satisfaction from the model and improvement in the teacher-student dialogue. Specifically, the teachers have pointed out that the model has brought about a richer and deeper familiarity with the students (for example: “That is the essential idea of observing the child as a whole,” “Thanks to the program, we know the students better,” “One of the best parts of the program is the exposure to the personal voice of the student, in which you discover his/her needs, weaknesses and his/her attitudes towards the school and the teachers”), along with a change in perception and dialogue, which allows the identification of students’ points of strength and to use these strengths to empower them (for example, “We use the language of strengths in our pedagogical meetings and for creating intervention programs; in dialogues with the parents, we raise the child’s strengths. This gives the students and the parents a lot of strength and motivation”).

The principals report that they can clearly identify a meaningful change in the students, resulting from the implementation of the model, including a better school atmosphere and greater awareness of the importance of expressing their strengths, communication constructively through the use of the model's core concepts (for example: “Each teacher has found the time to sit with each student and to talk

in-depth with him/her, and this has already done something,” “A teacher who teaches one of the subjects and suddenly, when he hears a student’s dream, he remembers it and later, when he comes to class and remembers that dream, it immediately encourages him as a teacher to work with that child, even though he is not the students' homeroom teacher, because he gets to know him better and really want him to realize his dream”). In addition, a major change was identified in pedagogical meetings, in which the model has resulted in the active involvement of all the teachers and a broadening of the discussion to “emphasize strengths and to hear the voice of the student, with his/her needs and hopes.”

From the viewpoint of the policy-makers, the changes that have occurred as a result of implementing the model can be expressed at three levels of the education system:

- The individual student level: creating the conditions for each student to be acknowledged and attended in the classroom and school spheres.
- The community level: the influence of the program was reported to expand beyond the limits of the schools, expressed in a change of the organizational culture at the community level and in the adoption of a new language, representing the holistic well-being perspective.
  - The school level: reported changes were manifested in the positioning of the school as a source for improving well-being and not only as a knowledge provider, by implementing a discourse within the school which integrates aspects such as strengths and students' voice, and through responding to the needs emerging from the mapping process via intervention programs developed and operated by the school. The intervention programs that were developed as a result of the mapping process were mentioned by various participants in the evaluation study as one of the greatest benefits gained as a result from the holistic model, reflecting an intentional response to students’ needs in various areas and aspects. These programs have been adapted to the needs of the students in a unique manner rather than "one-size" "off-the-shelf" programs that require

the adaptation of the students to them. The following is a sample of intervention programs that were developed and implemented in schools according to the holistic education model in order to respond to the needs identified through the mapping:

<b>Intervention Programs</b>	<b>How the needs from the mapping were addressed</b>
singing, dancing, playing soccer, art therapy	cultivation of character strengths, leisure activities, emotional empowerment
discussion circles	conversation skills, development of empathy and trust
coaching workshops	encouraging motivation, empowerment
activities in nature	cultivation of character strengths, leadership development, leisure activities
drama and acting	emotional empowerment, strengthening self-confidence
nutrition and health	strengthening awareness of a healthy lifestyle
leadership workshops	cultivation of character strengths, emotional expression, empowerment
marching drums	emotional empowerment, strengthening self-

	confidence, cultivation of character strengths
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### **Summary and recommendations for future development and expansion of the model**

The holistic model comprehensively addresses central aspects of the development of well-being among children and youth. In light of the success that the model has gained thus far and the enthusiastic responses reported in the assessment study from all the participants, it is important to continue the implementation and expansion of the model to additional schools. Other recommendations relate to the importance of continued systematic assessment of the model and its long term influences at the student level, increasing parents' involvement, and developing personal mapping of the staff personnel themselves in order to strengthen their engagement and self-awareness of their own strengths (see Gilat & Sagi, 2016). In addition, future directions for further development of the model may take into account both developmental and content aspects. On the developmental level, in light of the numerous research evidence indicating that individuals' early period of life constitute a critical stage for intervention and development of well-being and resilience of future risk factors (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Camilli et al. 2010), it appears valuable that the model and the broad and integrative view it provides would be implemented from early developmental stages (i.e., K-12) to enable an optimal and meaningful educational continuum. At the content level, in line with the life skills and capabilities required from 21st century graduates (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013), it is recommended to expand the holistic model to include additional aspects such as education for creativity and critical thinking, mindfulness, meaning and spirituality (Mayseless, 2014; Russo-Netzer, 2013, 2016). Facilitating a silent space for contemplation and reflection enables a break from external noise and stimuli, and allows for self-discovery, a "constructive moratorium" in Erikson's terms. The significance of reflection, self-

exploration, and awareness is highlighted in light of ample evidence associating such skills with better concentration, comprehension, empathy, creativity, emotional regulation, social competence, coherence, and meaning (e.g., Hart, 2003; Kessler, 2000). In summary, the holistic model reflects a structural framework which is theory-based and integrative, designed to facilitate language and routines for the cultivation of well-being in a systematic and ongoing manner that can be adapted to a range of populations, sectors and systems. Through structuring such holistic and dynamic framework that is responsive to the changing needs of the students throughout the broad spectrum of developmental areas, this model represents a living expression of one of Maimonides' key phrases: "The purpose of our world is the creation of the appropriate conditions for the development of the whole person."

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## **From holistic mapping to intervention programs – the stages of the process**

- \* Introduction to the holistic approach and factors of well-being
  - \* Staff training, individual and group training, parental involvement
1. Data-based holistic mapping
  2. Definition of needs
  3. Creation of unique and adapted intervention programs (pooling of resources)
  4. Implementation of the intervention programs
  5. Evaluation of the program goals and their attainment