Online Outreach Paper 8

Maintaining a respectful climate for young children in schools: no trumpet solo – let the orchestra play!

Lessons learned by the Human Dignity programme in nine elementary schools in Israel

Person to Person: Association for the Advancement of Human Dignity, with Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff

Bernard van Leer Foundation

About the author:
Person to Person is a nonprofit organisation, initiated by Alouph Hareven, a recipient of the Knesset Chairperson Prize for advancing the quality of life in Israel. Its aim is to advance the respect of human dignity as a leading value and daily behaviour in organisations, mainly schools. Its work is based on 15 years' experience and is carried out by a team of consultants/facilitators, led by Avi Shahaf and Yoav Peck, partners in the initiative since its beginning.

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Children paint pottery at a project under the umbrella of Musharaka, a collective of Arab early childhood organisations in Israel
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Executive summary

Violence in schools is detrimental to all children and especially so for the youngest; it is hurtful to them in the present and brutalises them for the future. The Human Dignity programme addresses the problem of violence in schools, not through authoritarian sanctions, but through a positive process of cultural change within schools. What determines whether the programme has any lasting influence in the schools where it works? This paper is based on the experiences of nine elementary schools in Israel, that were revisited one year after their Human Dignity programmes came to an end.

Introduction

Violence in schools[1] affects the youngest children most adversely. It exposes them to brutal treatment from older students who are physically stronger, while causing the young children themselves to become brutalised by a school culture of violence that they perpetrate in later years when they move to higher grades.

There are persuasive arguments against the use of authoritarian sanctions to oppose violent behaviour, and advocating approaches that emphasise a shift in school values towards mutual respect and dignity, as being both more humane and more effective. As elsewhere, such arguments have been put forward in the West Asian region (Awartani, Whitman and Gordon 2008), including Israel (Knafo, Daniel and Khoury-Kassabri 2008).

What does such an 'anti-violence programme with a difference' look like on the ground, in the everyday lives of schools? The Human Dignity programme provides a striking example. For this programme, the problem statement is *not* that children in violent schools are unruly animals who need to be brought to heel. Instead, the school is approached as a system, within which all actors – adults, as well as children – must take responsibility for a positive and conducive school climate. Adults are held to be especially responsible, as they are 'in control' and in positions to be role models.

The resources available for generating positive systemic change in the school are the human resources already present within it: the principals, staff and students. The only new element added by the Human Dignity programme is a facilitator who accompanies the school through a three-year process of positive change, which is essentially created by the people within the school.

The process begins with the principal looking anew at school culture and dynamics and his or her role within this, aided by the facilitator. Human dignity levels within the school at the start of the process are assessed with the help of questionnaires completed by staff and students, as well as through discussions. Teams to lead the process of change are convened, and a series of workshops on mutual respect and dignity – both as general values and within the school routine – are held for teachers. Later, teachers are supported in taking key ideas and reworking them along with the students in class, and then developing mechanisms to embed mutual respect in relationships within the classroom and across the school, between individuals and within groups.

How does such a process actually work in real life and real time? In what way does it vary across schools? To what extent does a three-year programme leave lasting effects? What factors affect long term success or failure? This paper addresses these key questions.

[1] For recent references on violence in schools, see Greene 2005; Whitted and Drupper 2005.

In September 2004, the Human Dignity programme was launched in nine schools across Israel, including secular and religious Jewish schools as well as Arab schools, all serving populations with varied socio-economic backgrounds, especially in disadvantaged locations. Some of these schools were known to the Ministry of Education or to the local authorities as extremely violent places, and in certain cases teachers were afraid to enter even the first grade classrooms with 6-year-old children!

The programme's objectives were as follows:

a) To facilitate children (especially young children) and adults within a school to create an environment in which genuinely respectful behaviour and speech towards all others is routine, regardless of status
b) To extend this through parents and others to the community around the school
c) To learn from this process across a range of schools, especially those attended by children in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage.

With these objectives in mind, in July 2007, at the end of the three-year implementation period, programme coordinators carried out an internal assessment of the programme. The evaluation report[2] indicated wide variations between the different schools in the manner in which the programme was carried out, the rate of progress in integrating human dignity into the school as a core value, and the expectations regarding the school's ability to continue the process after the programme's conclusion. The report provided insights into the process and the human dignity climate when the programme ended at each school, relating to three main achievements:

- A positive development in the inter-personal relations among staff, among pupils and between staff and pupils
- A reduction in violence among pupils
- A rise in professional and academic achievements of teachers and students.

The report states that the central challenge during the programme's final year was to ensure the continuity of the process through that year and beyond. As noted: "the true test of the programme's success will be in what happens in the nine schools in the years following our departure". It is precisely this question that was addressed by an evaluation carried out one year after the project ended.

The findings presented in the final report formed the reference point for the 'one year after' evaluation, which compared the situations at the programme's start and conclusion with those encountered during site visits in the course of the evaluation. This aimed to gauge whether the human dignity climate in each school had improved, remained static or deteriorated during the year since the programme had ended in the schools.

The visits were carried out during May and June 2008. Each visit was coordinated in advance and preceded by a communication explaining the purpose and proposed agenda of the visit, and listing the people with whom the evaluators wished to meet. All the visits were held according to the same general format, with some inevitable variations:

a) An **initial interview with the school principal**, which was in some cases also attended by the vice-principal. The evaluators first introduced themselves, re-stated the purpose of their visit and conducted an interview based on the guidelines already identified.

2 Person to Person: the Association for the Advancement of Human Dignity, (2007).'Final Report on the Nine Schools', unpublished end of project report, submitted to the Bernard van Leer Foundation, July 2007.

b) An **interview with members of the teaching staff** including, where possible, teachers who were actively involved in the Human Dignity Programme, as well as teachers who were not involved. The teachers were interviewed as a group; the number interviewed varied between the schools.

c) An **interview with students** who were present at the school during the years when the Human Dignity programme was carried out. In most cases, the principal and teachers organised a group of approximately eight to ten students to meet with the evaluators; in other cases, they met with an entire class.

d) A **summary meeting with the principal**, during which the evaluators described their general impressions from the site visit and asked questions that arose from the visit.

After the school visits were completed, an initial internal report was written for each school. An overall pattern emerged, dividing eight of the nine schools into three categories. The ninth school is an 'out of the box' case, which cannot be compared with the other eight and therefore stands on its own[3].

The three categories are characterised as:

Category A: Schools in which the Human Dignity programme achieved *a continuing commitment to human dignity.* These schools show positive change at the fundamental, organisational level, manifested in all aspects and levels of school life, such as:

- School infrastructure and mechanisms designed to address the issue of human dignity
- Respectful behaviour of, and relationships between, the principal, teaching staff and students
- Reduced levels of verbal and physical violence among students
- Improved methods of dealing with issues related to the school's younger students
- Time allocated to human dignity issues within the school curriculum
- More emphasis on parents' relationships and involvement with the school
- Improved academic achievements
- Attention to the school's external appearance
- Allocation of interior wall space to the human dignity issue.

Above all, these schools embrace a system-wide approach to problem-solving in which human dignity plays a central role, regardless of the identities of those involved in a conflict. At these schools, individuals who were not present during the programme's implementation, even if they have no knowledge that the Human Dignity programme ever took place, are nonetheless aware of the school's commitment to the values and behaviours of human dignity and have adopted them as part of the school's way of life.

Four out of eight schools were included in this category – two secular Jewish and both the Arab schools in the programme.

Category B: Schools in which the Human Dignity programme achieved *individual commitment to human dignity.* In this category, the change achieved by the programme was not extended to the entire organisation but remained limited to individuals who took part in the programme. These individuals attest to having undergone a

[3] In this school, one third of the student population consisted of children with special needs. The Human Dignity programme here took the form of an 'empowerment centre' that provided psychodrama, movement and music therapy, craft and other activities oriented to help children with special needs maximise their potential and integrate successfully with the general school population. Although the method used in this case bears no resemblance to that used in any of the other schools, the end result has been successful, proving that there is more than one way to advance human dignity.

significant personal change as a result of the Human Dignity programme, manifested in their everyday behaviour and in their relations with other people. Although the process that these individuals went through and the altered behaviour that resulted do create a ripple effect, this is not sufficient to catalyse a fundamental change at the organisational level. Commitment to human dignity is manifested only through the individual, altered behaviours of certain programme 'graduates'. It is not manifested through school infrastructure or mechanisms, curricula or external appearance, and individuals who did not take part in the programme itself are unaware of any special organisational commitment to human dignity, its values and behaviours.

Only one school was included in this category, a secular Jewish school.

Category C: Schools that remained *unaffected* by the Human Dignity programme. In these schools, few traces of the Human Dignity programme were encountered at the organisational level. Even the individuals who took part in the human dignity programme have little or no recollection of it. In some respects, it may even be said that certain aspects of human dignity at these schools *deteriorated* as a result of expectations created by the programme, which ultimately remained unfulfilled.

Three Jewish schools were included in this category, a religious school and two secular schools (one of which was a 'democratic school' [4]).

1. Brief narratives: the evaluators' findings in each school

The following eight short narratives begin with four inspiring tales of schools in disadvantaged locations achieving a 'turn around' in school culture through the lasting influence of the Human Dignity programme. A single account follows of a school where the Human Dignity programme achieved limited success at the individual level. Three dismal stories then tell of schools where the programme was not only unsuccessful, but may have further undermined the school climate. Chapter 2 of this paper analyses this tremendous variation in schools' responses to the Human Dignity programme.

A lasting influence

School A

We encountered the friendly, respectful atmosphere of this school as soon as we walked through the door. We found a clean, well-kept and painstakingly decorated school; students and staff obviously took pride in its appearance. Further probing revealed an array of operational institutionalised structures designed to maintain human dignity as a leading value in the school's everyday conduct, such as giving 'stars' to children who excel in respectful behaviour, a personal follow-up programme monitoring each child's behaviour with friends and a Human Dignity Annex attached to each child's report card. All testimonies pointed to significant achievements in the areas of violence reduction, reduced truancy among the children, far less parental criticism of the school and improvements in academic achievements; in fact, this school was recently ranked the highest academically of all the Arab schools in the district, an achievement that some of the teachers attribute directly to the Human Dignity Programme. They believe that the programme changed the school atmosphere, enabling the children to be more attentive and thus making it easier to learn.

[4] 'Democratic schools' in Israel are schools that affirm a democratic approach to education and aim to give students an equal voice in the decision-making processes that concern them.

According to the teachers, the relationship created between the Human Dignity facilitator and the teachers was excellent: "The facilitator was a personal consultant, who did not judge, but was present and available exclusively for us." The teachers talked about the programme with a gleam in their eyes that could not have been feigned, as they spoke of a significant and profound personal process, which actually changed their worldview and behaviour both inside and outside the classroom:

"The Human Dignity programme changed me as a human being, to the extent that I have even changed my behaviour at home, where I also began to think and speak in the language of human dignity. The change in relations with my students is significant. I see each student as an entire universe. This is a different approach to the one we're used to – from a traditional approach to one that emphasises listening and one-on-one attention to each student."

The school principal began his position at the same time as the Human Dignity programme was introduced at the school. He claims that the programme assisted in easing him into the position in the initial phase.

The Human Dignity programme improved communication with the parents. As a result parents participate in school events and assist with 'parent day' (a day where parents take over the teaching and the teachers relax). Additionally the school formed a group consisting of parents who facilitate workshops for other parents on the subject of Human Dignity.

School B

In the heart of an impoverished, underprivileged neighbourhood in Tel-Aviv, this school stands out like a beacon. Despite its dreary surroundings and limited resources, the school has, through hard work and creativity, succeeded in becoming a pleasant, colourful and vibrant place, welcoming all who enter it. The corridor and classroom walls are covered with evidence of the school's continued strong commitment to human dignity, so much so that even the school emblem is inscribed with the words: "Behave respectfully – and achieve results!"

The programme's single most significant achievement here was the school's adoption of a systemic approach to problem solving that enabled it to reach solutions that foster and promote human dignity. Many of these were devised after the Human Dignity programme concluded. Examples include the 'Time Out Room', the 'Homework Room', an exam-scheduling system to prevent students from suffering exam overload, an 'Active Recess', 'Iron Rules' against violence, topic-focused committees (for human dignity, discipline, hygiene, the environment and related journalism), and a joint teacher–parent steering committee.

A third grade homeroom teacher[5] noted:
"There is a significant difference between the way it was before the Human Dignity programme and after. The programme built a common language for teachers and students. It brought a lot of clarity into the school. Once, the rules weren't clear; every teacher acted alone. There was lots of friction and confusion. Today every student knows how he or she has to behave, as well as the consequences of breaking the behavioural code."

A fifth grade student said:
"I have changed. I used to play up in class but thanks to my homeroom teacher, who participated in the Human

[5] The homeroom teacher is directly responsible for a group of students, teaches them many subjects, follows their overall progress individually, and is in regular contact with their parents. During the year, the homeroom teacher is accountable for this group in any interactions that involve contact with the school management.

Dignity programme, I understand that I have to respect the teachers. You have to think twice, to control yourself. If I want to be respected, I also have to know how to respect."

School C

According to the school principal, this school has been through some rough times. When she first took up her position, she found a school to which parents were reluctant to send their children, with low academic achievements and high levels of violence. To her, the Human Dignity programme was 'God sent' and gave her the tools she needed to rebuild the school from its foundations. Today, the school's commitment to human dignity is overwhelming.

All classroom and corridor walls are covered with pictures, children's art creations, texts and symbols, all revolving around the subject of human dignity. According to the principal, the programme transformed the school, which is now considered the most desirable in the town. Children learn to respect others and are also treated with respect. As a result, they develop the ability to think independently, to express their opinions freely and with confidence, and to maximise their intellectual potential, qualities that very much came to the fore during our interview with them. In 2008, the school won the first five places in the national maths competition, an achievement that has generated much pride.

Traumatic violent events that occurred in the town emphasised the importance of carrying the message of human dignity beyond the school walls and out into the community. Rising to this challenge, parents' leadership groups were formed and trained by the school to work with the town's residents. These groups now constitute just one of the many mechanisms initiated by the school, both during the programme's implementation and subsequently, to uphold and maintain dignified and respectful behaviour both within the school and outside. Other examples include the use of video clips of students and teachers talking about a significant human dignity experience to stimulate discussion; periodic surveys carried out to assess human dignity levels at the school, and workshops held to integrate new staff members. The principal described her feelings about the Human Dignity programme:

"It's not a programme. It's something that enters the school and digs into the soul of each one of us. It's something personal. It reaches all the students in the school, through the teachers and facilitators. Today human dignity is always before our eyes. Like anyone, we sometimes behave disrespectfully – but then we begin soul-searching. Usually, there is a clear hierarchy in Arab schools, so if people are hurt, it doesn't matter. But in our school it's not 'business as usual' if something like that happens. We work on it, we talk about feelings, we listen."

School D

Unlike the other schools in this category, this school was not visually striking. The corridors looked neglected and dirty; the walls were almost bare. However, before long we detected a stark contrast between the school's external appearance and its spirit. We later discovered that the school's dishevelled appearance was the result of its imminent move to another location. As we entered the school gates, we were greeted by two fifth-graders with a cheerful "Shalom!" Taken aback by this display of open friendliness towards two complete strangers, uncharacteristic in this part of the country, we wondered whether it was staged for our benefit. It didn't take long for us to realise that this was genuine. Our interviews with the teachers revealed that the Human Dignity programme had had a profound effect on everyone in the school, the fruits of which are being reaped to this day. The transformation began at the management level, creating a ripple effect that reached each and every teacher and student in the school. The teachers explained that once they felt they were being treated as human

beings with feelings, rather than merely as teachers with a job to do, they understood the importance of treating their students the same way:

"The Human Dignity facilitator treated us as people, not just as teachers. It was very powerful…. I felt that the workshops gave me my place as a person. That was something I never received from the school in the past…. I'm grateful for the day that the programme entered the school. It brought a change in the staff which ultimately transformed the entire school."

The transformation began with the way in which teachers were treated by the principal. Following the introduction of the programme, parents who wished to meet with her concerning the behaviour of one of her teachers had to do so in the presence of the teacher in question. A ripple effect began and teachers also started to change the way in which they related to the students. A touching example of this change came from a fifth-grade homeroom teacher. As a result of the programme, she began visiting her students' homes in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face. One of her students had a tendency to fall asleep during class, much to the chagrin of her teachers. After visiting her home, the teacher realised that she was not falling asleep out of boredom or disrespect, but because at home she was expected to do heavy housework and look after her younger siblings, leaving her chronically tired. Since then, instead of getting angry with her, the teacher made sure the student had a place to rest when she needed it. The students have also begun to seek respectful solutions to everyday issues that arise in the classroom. For example, when a new student entered fourth grade, two of his classmates took it upon themselves to help him to become socially integrated into the class. These examples are only a few of the many mechanisms that were introduced at the school in the wake of the Human Dignity programme.

The school continues to hold a weekly ceremony entitled 'A Jolly Good Fellow', where two students, one selected from the lower and one from the higher classes, are publicly acknowledged for an especially good deed that week. Weekly 'show and tell' sessions are carried out for the first two grades with parental participation. Other examples are a 'Buddy' programme between the higher grades and the special education classes, and an e-mailing system through which students can turn to teachers for help in a discreet manner.

Human dignity also finds expression in the school through informal means. According to the school principal, violence levels have dropped notably and students are more willing to help a peer in need. As she noted: "One can't merely speak of the 'Human Dignity programme' today. Many things changed in the school as a result of the programme and now human dignity is simply an integral part of the school."

Success at the individual level

School E

Our first impression upon entering this school was that, although clean and tidy, as an organisation it did not show evidence of any special commitment to the value of human dignity. This impression deepened upon interviewing the school principal, who stated that the Human Dignity programme did not have a lasting effect on the school. According to her account, the programme's impact was limited, and was confined to the teachers (some more than others) who participated in the workshops and thereby acquired the tools for dealing with disciplinary issues, rendering them 'less helpless' when faced with situations requiring disciplinary action. She admitted the possibility that the process undergone by some of the teachers had also had a temporary effect on the students, but could not be certain that this was the case.

She did however state that the programme raised her staff's awareness of the importance of human dignity in establishing a positive school climate and improving academic achievements. This laid solid foundations for a subsequent programme introduced by the Education Ministry that works on some of the issues addressed by the Human Dignity programme.

The positive effect of the programme on the teachers was confirmed by our interview with them, during which they claimed they had acquired tools – particularly during the workshops focusing on Assertiveness and Channelling Anger – that they still use. They further noted that the Human Dignity facilitator had provided them with confidence and support, and that the teaching staff had emerged from the process much more unified than when they entered it. Although there was general agreement among the teachers that levels of violence have subsided since the programme ended, the feeling was that this had more to do with the changed composition of the classes than with the programme. The only organisational mechanism currently operational at the school for addressing human dignity issues is a programme through which higher classes 'adopt' and help the younger classes. This has had a positive effect on the interaction between the two age groups. All in all, the effect of the Human Dignity programme seems to have been limited to certain staff members, but by no means did it affect the entire school. A fourth grade teacher noted:

"The programme planted seeds within me and improved my abilities as a teacher. I learned how to conduct a real dialogue with my students and to handle anger in a respectful way. However, as a member of the leading team I feel that the programme was not focused enough. It contributed to me personally, but didn't reach the school as a system."

Unsuccessful – and even detrimental?

School F

This school appeared to have remained unaffected by the Human Dignity programme. Nothing in its external appearance, from its dirty and neglected corridors to its bare and unkempt school yard, suggested that such a programme had existed, except for some copies of the Human Dignity Pact (see below), hidden and gathering dust in a secluded corner of each classroom. The principal presented a more encouraging picture than we encountered from our interviews with the teachers and students. He said that the programme had served as a catalyst and a constant reminder on the subject of human dignity, which may have prompted the school to initiate some of the human dignity mechanisms operating within it today. He showed us kiosk vouchers given in return for good deeds, and an activity diary distributed at the beginning of the year to all students, designed to convey the values of the Torah and inter-personal values through games, stories and learning.

The Human Dignity Pact was the highlight of the programme in this school and initially served as a trigger for weekly discussions. However, the pact did not foster continued activity and the weekly discussions were soon abandoned. None of the children interviewed knew what the pact said or what it was intended to achieve. Our interviews with the teachers and students strengthened our impression that, unfortunately, the programme had not left a significant mark on the school. The students expressed dissatisfaction with the ways that their teachers treated them. They spoke of teachers' contemptuous attitudes towards them, quick and sometimes unjust retributions, and collective punishments. They also spoke about verbal and physical violence among students. In fact, it seemed as though our presence provided them with an excuse to 'let off steam', which they utilised to the full.

The teachers claimed that the programme was sporadic, slow and too theoretical, that it did not provide them with enough practical tools and, ultimately, did not influence the school climate. The frustration felt by the

teachers is reflected in the words of a third-grade teacher and social education coordinator who was involved in the programme:

"The process of writing the Human Dignity Pact was excellent. In keeping with the spirit of our religious school, a connection was made between human dignity and the scriptures. There was good team work between the teachers and cooperation with parents and students. The process gave us a good feeling and a lot of satisfaction but what was missing was a plan for future action and how to turn the pact into a system of behavioural codes and rules."

School G

The reality we encountered at this school was disheartening. The school, which caters for a diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged population comprising a large proportion of new immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union, displayed a bare and stark if clean interior, and a dirty, littered exterior, which immediately told of indifference and neglect. The walls showed no trace of the Human Dignity Programme, save a single poster, hung askew and hidden behind a column. The current school principal describes herself as a forceful principal and stated that she sees her role as one of establishing boundaries, which she feels the school severely lacked, and restoring the teachers' authoritative status. She said that the staff she encountered upon entering her position at the school were a down-trodden group of teachers who lacked confidence in their dealings with the students. She believes that the Human Dignity programme may actually have had a detrimental effect on the teachers by over-empowering students and undermining teachers' authority.

Although a minority of teachers claimed that the programme did have a positive effect on relations between teachers and students, the students for their part stated that teachers frequently raise their voices at them and treat them with contempt, and that even the principal is given to publicly reprimanding, yelling and sometimes even physically grabbing hold of students as a means of enforcing discipline. The violent behaviour exhibited by several of the students during our visit went largely unremarked, and sometimes even unnoticed, by the teaching staff. During our interview with them, the students – a selected group from the Student Council – called each other names, interrupted one another in mid-sentence and even shoved each other occasionally.

The Human Dignity initiatives introduced during the programme – weekly award ceremonies, 'compliment boxes' in each classroom and so on – petered out in the course of the year after the former principal's departure, as did the Student Council, which now meets sporadically and without any real enthusiasm. Although the school protocol was re-written during the programme together with the students and discussed during the first weeks of the school year, it was also quickly forgotten. Despite the tremendous effort invested in this school, the Human Dignity programme did not seem to have succeeded in improving the school climate or in creating a commitment – either organisational or personal – to the values of human dignity. Conversely, it may actually have had an unintentionally detrimental effect on the school, by creating expectations followed by disappointment. Possibly, the inherent challenges of the school, coupled with the replacement of the former principal immediately after the programme's conclusion, led to an environment that prevented the programme from flourishing and achieving long-term results. At the close of the interview with the students, a little girl who had remained largely silent throughout the discussion and whose amiable, intelligent demeanour and manner of speaking immediately revealed the potential she might have realised in a more favourable environment, said simply: "I hate this school and I would leave it if I could."

School H

The school believes in a democratic approach to education, empowering its students and giving them an equal voice in the decision-making processes that concern them. From the outset, this school therefore had the institutions and characteristics that encourage human dignity among and between its administrators, staff and students. These institutions include a 'Parliament', a decision-making mechanism in which students are represented; a 'Human Dignity Committee' charged with maintaining peace and order; and a mentoring programme, through which every student is paired with a teacher of their choice who is then expected to meet with the student at set intervals.

The school principal at the time adopted the Human Dignity programme in order to strengthen these pre-existing mechanisms, as well as to establish new mechanisms and further encourage a climate of respect and human dignity. However, since the replacement of the original principal with whom the programme worked, the school's democratic mechanisms have become weaker rather than stronger; the Parliament meets infrequently, most of the mentors neglect to schedule periodic meetings with their students, and the Human Dignity Committee's authority has been severely restricted by the principal. The Human Dignity Pact, introduced during the programme's implementation, has been emptied of all meaning, with only a single copy hanging in the Parliament room.

The current school principal is not committed to imparting the programme's values to the school. Indeed, his actions concerning the school's democratic mechanisms seem to imply that he has little faith even in the democratic approach inherently advocated by his own school. The teachers conceded that the programme workshops were interesting and relevant, but were of the opinion that the workshops did not connect with the everyday dilemmas they face in the classroom and were therefore of limited practical value. They stated in fact that the programme bred frustration, as it led to expectations that the school climate would improve, which it did not.

Our interview with the students revealed that they had never heard of the Human Dignity programme that took place at their school for three years! The programme does not seem to have had any significant effect on the students, who attest to very respectful behaviour on the part of their teachers and who continue to enjoy the unique character of a democratic school, but who remained unexposed to the concepts of human dignity that the programme aimed to instil in them. Violence levels at the school were and remain average, and academic achievements were also apparently unaffected by the programme.

All in all, it may be said that while the objective situation at this 'democratic school' is tolerable and perhaps even better than at the average Israeli school, this was true from the outset, and the Human Dignity programme, unfortunately, did not contribute to fostering either an organisational or a personal commitment to human dignity within its walls. The teacher responsible for the Parliament, who was involved with the programme, said:

"The teachers believed that the Human Dignity Pact would provide answers to their everyday questions. In reality, this didn't happen…. I can show you that today, unfortunately, most of the pact's clauses are not observed at the school."

2. Why success in some schools, but not in others?

A human dignity culture was maintained at schools that integrated two separate, seemingly contradictory modes of behaviour – on the one hand, they adopted a dignified and respectful norm of

conducting personal relations with students, while on the other hand they upheld a clear and uniformly recognised system of rules and regulations. This relationship is represented in Figure 1.

At the schools where the programme was successful, the rules were created through a *respectful process*: the problem was identified, the relevant parties were included in making the necessary decisions, the new norms were propagated and an ongoing process of assimilation took place throughout the school.

Schools that successfully implemented the programme were found to have no central mechanism for propagating human dignity, but rather a system of many smaller mechanisms to be found at various junctures: between the principal and the teachers, between teachers and students, and among the students themselves. Dozens of mechanisms were created, each being designed to address a specific issue, with one overall goal in common: to find solutions enabling the school to maintain a climate of human dignity.

In order to achieve the programme's long-term goals, therefore, it is not sufficient to work only on a 'trumpet solo' – a single, central mechanism or document such as a pact or a grand event – that is expected to create significant change. Instead, schools should adopt collective thinking and decision-making that matches a diverse range of problems with an equally diverse range of creative solutions. The metaphor of an orchestra, where many instruments play together to create a piece of music, illustrates the use of many creative solutions, blending together to generate positive change.

Examples of such solutions from a single school include a leadership team that gave personal guidance to teachers who were responsible for teaching human dignity in the classroom; a student council that had representatives in the leadership team; an educational programme for human dignity; a parent group dealing with issues of human dignity; a monthly newsletter on human dignity that was distributed in the community; surveys done twice yearly in order to gauge levels of human dignity in the school; an annual conference on

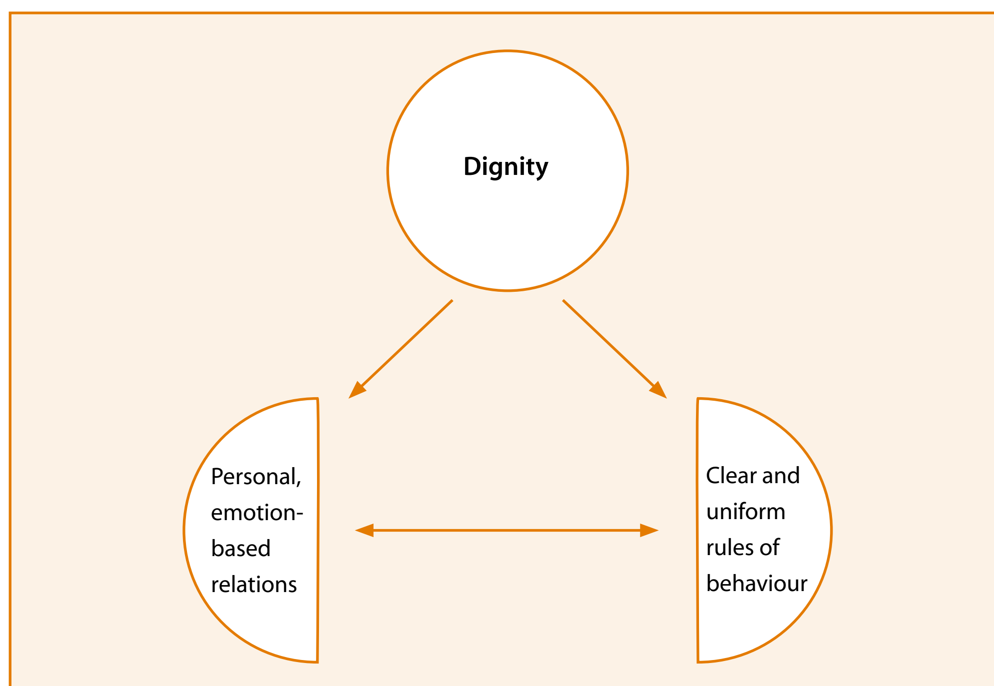

Figure 1. The importance of two modes of behaviour in maintaining a culture of human dignity

human dignity; an annual report on the human dignity situation in the school; a significant amount of the board space at school devoted to issues of human dignity; weekly meetings of homeroom teachers in order to discuss human dignity; and workshops for specialised teachers on the topic of human dignity.

An example of 'trumpet solo' solutions is the creation of the Human Dignity Pact at the 'democratic' School H, described above. The Human Dignity Pact was one of the main outcomes of the programme in the school. The Pact now hangs in the room where the school Parliament meets but its existence is not widely known. The students are unaware of it and do not remember the last time a discussion was convened regarding its significance. The teachers admit that – apart from a small mention of the Pact at the beginning of the year – no one related to it. The middle school coordinator requested that the Pact should not be used, as she did not believe in it and would not distribute it to the students. The new principal did not know about the Pact until a month after taking up his position, when he was asked to distribute it to all the students. Only then did he ask what it was.

The teachers at this school claim that the Pact deals with an utopian reality and does not provide the tools or process required to transform the document into everyday behaviour in the school. The Pact is based on 13 declarations that were put together by students, teachers and parents, but does not provide a platform for the day-to-day incorporation of human dignity within the school framework.

In a Jewish religious school, the writing of the Human Dignity Pact was a positive experience and the highlight of the programme, but afterwards there was no way of transforming the pact from a piece of paper into changes in actual behaviour at the school.

The Human Dignity Pact is an impressive mechanism, enabling the inclusion of all programme partners in its preparation, and the creation of a moving ceremonial event for its signing. The pact's content can be adapted to the spirit of the school, and the pact generally succeeds in mobilising lots of energy and many partners among teachers, students and parents. The problem we identified at schools that initiated such pacts was the effect on the continuation of the process. The pact is not worded as a set of clear rules, but rather as a kind of 'constitution': a declaration of general values. In order to translate the somewhat abstract pact into everyday behavioural mechanisms, discussions need to be renewed with the leadership team. The time and effort required to create and launch the pact, combined with the stately nature of the signing ceremony, tends to create a sense of anti-climax and general fatigue in its wake, which is extremely detrimental to the continuation of the process. Thus, the schools' energies are exhausted, leaving none for the continuation of the process, which is far more crucial to the programme's long-term success.

3. Predicting success or failure

The discussion now proceeds to identify the factors that suggest whether a Human Dignity programme will have lasting results in a school or not.

Compatibility between the programme, the principal and the school

The analysis of findings suggests that the programme's chances of success greatly depend on its compatibility with the school principal, and the extent to which they see the programme as an opportunity for positive change, both for the school and for themselves. Compatibility depends largely on timing and the suitability of the programme's content to the school's needs, as perceived by the principal. In the authors' opinion, the extent

to which principals are willing to devote time and effort to the programme depends on how much they regard it as an opportunity to advance themselves and the entire school.

At one school, for example, the principal saw the programme as an opportunity to characterise their school as being unique. Several years after entering her position as principal, she was still looking for a way to make the school stand out from the other schools in the village. The Human Dignity programme provided her with the means to do this, enabling her to change the school for the better and also to earn respect and acknowledgement for herself and her achievements as an individual.

In another school, the principal took up her position together with the programme. She arrived as an experienced principal, following a crisis with her younger predecessor. She saw in the programme an opportunity to enter her new position with a distinctive approach and to revive her teaching staff by reducing the tension and conflict that afflicted the teachers' room in the wake of the crisis.

In the other two schools where the programme was successful, the principals had taken on the project because they saw in it an opportunity for meaningful change, both within the schools and within themselves. One was a new principal seeking guidance, who felt that this could be provided by the programme, while the other principal saw the programme as an opportunity to change her centralist management style to one that was more inclusive and accommodating.

Dissatisfaction with the status quo

The testimonies we encountered at schools in which the programme was successful revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction with the situation before the commencement of the programme. At some schools, for example, violence among students had reached an intolerable level, even amongst the youngest children. The success of the programme in the two Arab schools can clearly be related to their dissatisfaction with the society around them.

Conversely, the 'democratic school', where the programme was not assimilated successfully, felt no sense of urgency and the programme was received as just another programme trying to make the school a better place – they had taken on other programmes before, so why not try this one as well?

In the Jewish religious school, the principal saw the programme as a bonus, something nice to have. He was not aware of the teachers' needs, their problems with discipline in the classroom and the manner in which the school was being run.

A systemic approach

The importance of the systemic approach – one of the Human Dignity programme's guiding principles – was emphasised and validated by the successful schools. The systemic approach reflects one of the programme's basic premises, which states that lasting organisational change can only be achieved if all parts of the system are affected. Accordingly, the programme must address all those involved in school life, including the principal, teachers and other staff, parents and students. The soundness of this assumption was evident in our discussions with principals and teachers.

At one successful school, for example, the systemic approach was presented as the basis for the programme's success. The solutions reached by the school took all members of the school community into consideration.

Thus, in addition to the guiding principles of a general school protocol that binds everyone at the school, a 'local' protocol was created between teacher and students in each class. Facilitators who accompanied the process in successful schools confirm that it was important for the facilitator to learn and clearly understand the school's background and the manner in which it operates; only then is it possible to gain trust and generate systemic processes.

The importance of working with parents was emphasised by many schools. One teacher noted that: "with the really difficult kids, if the parents are on board you can make a change, but if they're against you, there's nothing you can do. And in many cases, parents just don't want to believe that there's a problem with their kid."

However, it was apparent from our discussions that parents are a particularly difficult population to reach and from whom to obtain a commitment. While the other members of a school community physically attend school each day and are a 'captive audience', this is not the case when it comes to parents, and in many cases the programme's work with parents was felt by the school to be insufficient.

The school principal's leadership and management style

At the schools in which the programme was successful, we identified similarities in the principal's leadership and management styles:

- The principals were identified as being natural leaders with the ability to influence those around them.
- Before the programme, these principals had a centralist and moderately combative management style.
- Alongside their centralist and combative approach, these principals were willing to question their personal behaviour, take responsibility for their actions and change past habits.
- Change occurred in schools where the principals began to radiate, through their behaviour, their commitment to human dignity. After this happened, the change began to gain momentum and allowed for the recruitment of teachers into the programme.
- The principals were committed to the programme as a continuing long-term process.

Cooperation between the facilitator and the principal is critical to the success of the process, and lack of cooperation, in the authors' opinion, strongly predicts the programme's failure. Lack of cooperation can be manifested directly, through a breach between the facilitator and the principal, or indirectly, for example when meetings are repeatedly postponed or cancelled and the Human Dignity programme sinks low on the school's list of priorities whenever something unexpected comes up. Indirect non-cooperation is more difficult to handle, as the reasons for the principal's passivity in moving the process forward are more obscure and therefore harder to address.

No principal, no matter how strong, can lead a process of change on their own. In most successful schools, the vice principal played a central part in leading the process forward. Concurrently with building the leadership team, therefore, emphasis must be placed on involving the vice principal. At one school the problematic relations between the principal and vice principal – who replaced the principal during the first year of the programme – was, in our opinion, one factor that prevented the programme from succeeding.

Coalitions for leading change

The recruitment of a leadership team is crucial in any programme and was identified as strongly predicting success, but the facilitators in the various schools emphasised the need to work with a 'second leadership

circle' in addition to the primary leadership team. The 'second circle' is, in this instance, the homeroom teachers who come into daily and direct contact with the students. In successful schools, we received many reports of homeroom teachers leading processes, mainly through classroom initiatives that were not dictated by the school management but were still integrated into the school's human dignity trend. Again, this signifies the 'orchestra approach' where many solutions and activities come into play to bring about a major change.

In one successful school, for example, we met a homeroom teacher who shares her e-mail address on the blackboard and encourages her students to write to her about their problems, responding to each one personally. At schools where the programme was unsuccessful, we discovered that the homeroom teachers were not connected enough and did not feel that they had acquired tools to use in the classroom through the programme.

Quality of relations between facilitator, principal and teachers

One of the most prominent characteristics we found at the successful schools was the positive quality of the relations established between the facilitator, the principal and the teachers. Good 'chemistry' between the facilitator, the principal and the teachers was thus found to be predictive of the programme's success. The facilitator must obtain the trust of the principal and the staff, and only then can they proceed to lead them through this complex and demanding programme. The time and effort required to do this varies, both between schools and between facilitators. It took a year and a half for a facilitator to build trust within one successful school, but once this was achieved the programme's potential proved to be enormous.

Another facet of the relationship between the facilitator and the school staff is the extent to which the facilitator was able to meet the needs arising from the field, especially those articulated by the teaching staff. For example, the facilitator at one successful school turned the programme's workshops into a course accredited by the Ministry of Education, thereby allowing the teachers to choose whether or not they would participate. In cases where the programme did not succeed, we discovered that the facilitators were often insufficiently attentive to the needs arising from the field, especially with regard to the relevance of the workshops during the school year.

From the facilitators, we learned that in schools where the programme did not succeed, they felt they were expected to 'spoon-feed' the schools with ready-made solutions to their problems. Their attempts to make the schools take responsibility and engage in creative processes to produce their own solutions were met with resistance. Thus, the facilitators at these schools faced a dilemma of whether to acquiesce to this expectation and provide solutions in cases where the school appeared to be unable or unwilling to create its own, or to continue working with the school on developing internal processes, despite the school's resistance. When unrealistic expectations were unmet, the facilitator was seen as being inefficient, irrelevant or insensitive to the schools' needs. Conversely, in schools where the programme succeeded, most of the solutions and ideas for the various mechanisms to promote human dignity were created by the teachers and the school leadership team. The facilitators provided assistance and guidance for thinking and discussion, but the actual content was offered by the participants. This also facilitated the continuation of the programme, because the ideas kept coming in after the facilitators had left their positions.

Frequent and visible change

Visible change was a catalyst for the programme's success. At all the schools in which it succeeded, as soon as the teachers saw that things were changing they began to believe in the programme. This happened in

one school when the homeroom teachers jointly requested that the principal allow them to synchronise their free hours in order to hold additional staff meetings during the school day, something that had not happened previously. This provides an example of a situation where the theory and process taught during the workshops meshed with practice in the school. The respectful relationship that was created between the school principal and the teachers – whereby the principal became more responsive to the needs of the teachers by allowing time together to hold staff meetings – demonstrated that change was taking place.

In another successful school, the principal began to invite the relevant teachers to meetings with parents who complained about a teacher's conduct, again a moment when change became visible.

For the programme to move forward, however, it is not enough that teachers and students see change and improvement: they must also attribute this to the programme. At one successful school, for example, the changes were presented as part of the Human Dignity programme and publicised in a regular column of the school's in-house journal.

In schools where the programme did not succeed, the teachers testified that it had been slow and intermittent, factors that contributed to their feelings of alienation from the programme and its leaders. The programme should provide energy for change; when this does not occur it leads to feelings of stagnation.

Relevance of workshops to everyday school life

In successful schools, the facilitator knew how to connect the workshops to the everyday reality of the school, and to derive concrete tools for working with students in the classrooms from the issues that arose in the workshops. One of the strongest complaints we heard from schools in which the programme was unsuccessful concerned the facilitators' failure to make this crucial connection, thereby rendering the workshops irrelevant to the teachers' everyday work in the classroom.

In all the schools, regardless of whether or not the programme was successful, it was found that the second year of the programme was the most crucial. The key factor is the translation of the theoretical insights gained from the workshops during the first year into concrete methods producing tangible, visible change during the second year, especially among the teachers. This year must see a movement from words to action, and in this year the principals' strength is put to the test, as is their ability to transform declarations into reality: Do they make changes in the decision-making process? Do they stop insulting their teachers in public (or at least, do they apologise afterwards)? Do they really give priority to the issue of human dignity as an everyday behavioural norm?

At schools in which the programme did not succeed, the second year was perceived as a waste of time and was accompanied by various crises followed by attempts to revive the programme (by changing the facilitator or by producing a Human Dignity Pact). In these schools, we found that the teachers had lost faith in the programme after seeing no connection between the issues raised in the workshops and the realities they face on an everyday basis in the classroom. The vice principal at one school went as far as to call the workshops 'futile', claiming that they were completely irrelevant to the challenges faced by the teachers with their students: they were two separate worlds. The relevance of the workshops to everyday school life clearly predicts success; where workshops are irrelevant or insufficient, failure is a predictable outcome.

Emphasis on early childhood

The evaluation was held a year after the programme's conclusion. School pupils in grades four to six at the time of the evaluation had been in the earliest grades when the programme was carried out. At one successful school, students in the higher grades revealed that they believe the children in the lower classes feel safer coming to school than they used to at the same age. According to them, this is because the teachers are more skilled at preventing violence inflicted by older children on their younger peers. They confessed that older kids still pick on younger ones, but claimed that the teachers were more responsive to this problem than in the past.

In many ways, young children are the most vulnerable population at any school. Their smaller physical size, their lack of strength and their inexperience compared with their older peers often render them victims of teasing, bullying and verbal or physical violence. This violence is instigated by older and bigger children, who – unable to vent their frustrations on teachers or 'someone their own size' – find in the younger ones an easy outlet for their aggression.

Young children can also act as agents of change, absorbing new modes of thought and behaviour and taking these with them as they move into the middle and then the higher grades, helping to alter the school culture towards respect based on human dignity. During the interview with the older children in a successful school, they said that when they had been in the lower grades, kids from the higher grades used to be: "more selfish, talk nastily, curse us and make fun of us". Today, they claimed, the situation is much better.

Our evaluation revealed that most of the schools where the programme was successful displayed an awareness of the special attention required to ensure that younger children were treated with respect by all members of the school community, as well as to make certain that they learn to treat others with respect. For example, two measures that were taken by one successful school include a 'Buddy' programme instigated between older and younger classes, through which sixth graders were paired with young 'buddies' from grade one, in order to provide mentorship and support throughout the school year; and a 'Jolly Good Fellow' weekly ceremony when a medal is awarded to students who have acted with special kindness that week, ensuring that nominees for the award are selected from both the higher and lower grades.

Schools in which the Human Dignity programme was successful tend to recognise the issue of younger children as requiring special attention, and to include procedures that specifically address the needs of young children among the mechanisms created by the school to promote human dignity. Thus in schools where the Human Dignity programme was successful, young children entered a safe and supportive environment and an empowering atmosphere that enhanced learning and interaction with fellow students and staff. This process was encouraged by developing behavioural frameworks that actively involved young children and enabled their voices to be heard.

4. Conclusions and insights for the future

The evaluation's main conclusion is that a special emphasis must be placed on two principles, simultaneously, in order to advance the value of human dignity at a school: **personal, emotion-based relationships** combined with **a clear and uniform set of behavioural rules.** Emphasis on only one of these factors is unlikely to generate significant long-term change.

Another important conclusion derived from the study is that schools should forego the attempt to create a single, central mechanism to promote human dignity, but instead channel their energies into developing a **wide**

variety of smaller methods that together bring about the desired transformation. In other words, instead of some grand trumpet blast proclaiming human dignity and respect, the entire school community has to perform as a mutually responsive and sensitive orchestra.

Finally, we found that the younger children within a school benefit most from the positive change, thriving in an environment that is safe and that allows for good quality interaction, as well as increased and high quality scholastic learning[6]. In turn, they then play a key role within the 'orchestra', by continuing the melodies of respect and the techniques that support this, when they move to higher school grades and provide guiding notes to young children who enter the school in following years.

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[6] See research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Centre for Educational Research and Innovation on "holistic approaches which recognise the close interdependence of physical and intellectual well-being, and the close interplay of the emotional and the cognitive aspects in facilitating the learning process by making the best of the brain's plasticity … we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, we fail to appreciate a critical force in students' learning". (Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007).

About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equality of opportunity and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by partners in the field. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Our strategy of working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We currently support about 140 major projects. We focus our grantmaking on 21 countries in which we have built up experience over the years. These include both developing and industrialised countries and represent a geographical range that encompasses Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

We work in three issue areas:

- Through "Strengthening the Care Environment" we aim to build the capacity of vulnerable parents, families and communities to care for their children.
- Through "Successful Transitions" we aim to help young children make the transition from their home environment to daycare, preschool and school.
- Through "Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity" we aim to promote equal opportunities and skills that will help children to live in diverse societies.

Also central to our work is the ongoing effort to document and analyse the projects we support, with the twin aims of learning lessons for our future grantmaking activities and generating knowledge we can share. Through our evidence-based advocacy and publications, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice both in the countries where we operate and beyond.

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