

Holistic Education

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ABSTRACT : We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet. (Swami Vivekananda Vol-5). Holistic education covers a wide range of philosophical orientations and academic practices. Its focus is on completeness, and it attempts to avoid excluding any significant aspects of the human experience. It is an eclectic and inclusive movement whose main characteristic is the idea that educational experiences foster a less materialistic and a more spiritual worldview along with more dynamic and holistic views of reality. It also proposes that educational experience promote a more balanced development of – and cultivate the relationship among – the different aspects of the individual (intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and Aesthetic), as well as the relationships between the individual and other people, the individual and natural environment, the inner- self of students and external world, emotion and reason, different discipline of knowledge and different structure of knowing. Holistic education is concerned with life experience, not with narrowly defined "fundamental skills".

Keywords : Holistic Education, Freedom, Completeness, Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Krishnamurti writes: *If the unity of life and the oneness of its purpose could be clearly taught to the young in schools, how much brighter would be our hopes for the future!* (Krishnamurti, J.1974).

Holistic education is a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. (Miller, R.1997).

It is based on the philosophy of 'holism'. It involves the integration of multiple layers of meaning and experience through direct engagement with the environment. Holistic education is more concerned with drawing forth the latent capacities and sensitivities of the soul than with stuffing passive young minds with predigested information. It is an education that prepares young people to live purposefully, creatively, and morally in a complex world.

To understand the meaning of holistic education, we need to recognize two principles. Firstly, an education that connects the person to the world must start with the person—not some abstract image of the human being, but with the unique, living, breathing boy or girl, young man or woman (or mature person, for that matter) who is in the teacher’s presence. Each person is a dynamic constellation of experiences, feelings, ideas, dreams, fears, and hopes. Secondly, we must respond to the learner with an open, inquisitive mind and a sensitive understanding of the world he or she is growing into (Miller, R. 2000a).

Some advocates of holistic education claim that views central to it are not new but are, in fact, timeless and found in the sense of wholeness in humanity’s religious impetus and inspiration from great philosophers, both eastern and western. In fact, the principles and practices of holistic education are already used by a number of institutions that are dissatisfied with traditional education, but they may be unaware of any critical theory about holistic education.

A holistic education is usually characterized by several core qualities.

There is concern for the interior life, for the feelings, aspirations, ideas and questions that each student brings to the learning process. Education is no longer viewed as the transmission of information; instead it is a journey inward as well as outward into the world.

Holistic education expresses an ecological consciousness; it recognizes that everything in the world exists in context. This involves a deep respect for the integrity of the biosphere, if not a sense of reverence for nature.

It is a worldview that embraces diversity, both natural and cultural. It shuns ideology, categorization, and fixed answers, and instead appreciates the flowing interrelatedness of all life.

It is an education that recognizes the innate potential of every student for intelligent and creative thinking. It is child-honoring education, because it respects the creative impulses at work within the unfolding child as much as, if not more than, the cultural imperatives that conventional schooling seeks to overlay onto the growing personality.

Thus, holistic education is essentially a democratic education, concerned with both individual freedom and social responsibility. It is education for a culture of peace, for sustainability and ecological literacy, and for the development of humanity’s inherent morality and spirituality.

Premise and purpose of holistic education

The basic premise of holistic education is the belief that our lives have a meaning and purpose greater than the mechanistic laws described by science, and greater than the ‘consensus consciousness’ of any one culture. This transcendent purpose is a creative, self-guiding energy, which we ought not to attempt to suppress. To enable transcendence of society’s prejudices, ideologies, and violence—to educate for peace—we need to reclaim the true meaning of ‘education’ from the soul-numbing system of schooling within which the modern world has imprisoned its children.

The purpose of holistic education is to prepare students to meet the challenges of living as well as academics. It aims to call forth from young people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning. This is done, not through an academic 'curriculum' that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment. Holistic education does not simply instruct young people about what is true and what is false, but enables the learner to inquire: what does this mean? How is this experience, or this fact, or this advertising message related to other things I know? If I act on my understanding, how will that affect other people, or the habitat of other living beings? This encourages young people to care about the world they live in. Other people matter, the natural world matters. Cultural heritage, social responsibility, and ethics matter.

Holistic education hence aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning. To educate young people means helping them bring forth their creativity, their compassion, their curiosity, their moral and aesthetic sensitivity, their critical intellectual skills, their ability to participate in a robust democracy—in a word, their wholeness.

Teaching with a holistic curriculum

Curriculum emerges from the interactions between teacher, student, and world. This idea—emergent curriculum—is one of the revolutionary concepts to come out of the progressive education movement (Miller, R. 2 2000b). Children need to develop academic capacities, as these are required to make a living in the modern world, but much more is needed. Since holistic education seeks to educate the whole person, there are other key factors that will be essential to a holistic curriculum. First, children need to learn about themselves. Second, children need to learn about relationships. In learning about their relationships with others, there is a focus on 'social literacy' (learning to see social influence) and 'emotional literacy' (one's own self in relation to others). Third, children need to learn about resilience. This entails overcoming difficulties and facing challenges. Fourth, children need to learn about aesthetics, to see the beauty of what is around them and experience a sense of awe in its presence. It doesn't appear that we will learn such things from learning more Mathematics, Literature, or History.

With this curriculum in mind, how can we go about teaching for holistic learning? Since 'holism' understands knowledge as something that is constructed within a person's context, meaningfulness is an important factor in the learning process. People learn better when what is being learned is important to them. Therefore, a topic may begin with what students know or understand already, what has meaning to them, rather than what others feel should be meaningful to them.

Meta-learning is another concept that connects to meaningfulness. In coming to understand how they learn, students are expected to self-regulate their own learning. However, they cannot be expected to do this on their own. Students learn to monitor their own learning through interdependence on others inside and outside the classroom. Thus a sense of a learning community is an integral aspect of holistic education. As relationships and learning about relationships are keys to understanding ourselves, so the aspect of community is vital in the learning process.

The holistic educator is seen less as a person of authority who leads and controls and more as a friend, mentor, facilitator, or experienced companion. The teacher's role is an active one involving the preparation of rich, supportive learning environments for effective facilitation of growth through learning. Teacher direction and supervision are required in order to put the dynamics of freedom to proper use.

Holistic education is a fairly new movement, which began to take form as a recognizable field of study and practice in the mid-1980s in North America (R, Miller 2004).

It emerged as a response to the dominant worldview of mainstream education, often referred to the "mechanistic" or "Cartesian-Newtonian" worldview. Rather than attempting to provide a model of education, holistic education seeks to challenge the fragmented, Reductionist assumptions of mainstream culture and education (R, Miller 2000a, and Schreiner 2005). In other words, holistic education is concerned with "underlying worldviews or paradigms in an attempt to transform the foundations of education (Nakagava 2001). Holistic education frequently claims that it wants to,

- 1) Educate the whole child (all parts of the child),
- 2) Educate the student as a whole (not an assemblage of parts), and
- 3) See the child as part of a whole (society, humanity, the environment, some spiritual whole, etc.) from which it is not meaningful to extract the student.

Holistic education challenges the present approach to education and its obsessive focus on standards and testing. Holistic educators see this approach as reflecting a materialist and consumerist culture that has reduced schooling to the training of individuals to compete and consume in the global marketplace. In fact, the present thrust can be seen as abandoning any attempt to educate the whole human being. It reduces schooling to training for the workplace that can be easily accessed through standardized tests. (J, Miller 2007)

Basic Principles of Holistic Education

The statement, which was entitled, *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective*, went on to define the central principles of Holistic Education (Flake 2000, Nava 2001, Schreiner 2005).

Freedom of Choice

As a general statement about the nature of freedom, Krishnamurti stated in many ways and at many times that "freedom is a state and quality of mind."

This brings us back to the origins of the word 'freedom' with which we started, and its relation to love. Krishnamurti, in talking with young children in one of his schools in 1954 said,

"The love of something for itself is freedom. There is freedom when you paint because you love to paint, not because it gives you fame or give you a position. In the school, when you love to paint that very love is freedom, and that means an astonishing understanding of all the ways of the mind. Also, it is very simple to do something for itself and not for what it brings you either as a punishment or as a reward. Just to love the thing for itself is the beginning of freedom."

Honoring Students as Individuals

Each learner is unique, inherently creative, with individual needs and abilities. This means welcoming personal differences and fostering in each student a sense of tolerance, respect, and appreciation for human diversity.

The Central Role of Experience

Education is a matter of experience and learning is primarily experiential. Learning is an active, multisensory engagement between a individual and the world, a mutual contact which empowers the learner and reveals the rich meaningfulness of the world. Experience is dynamic and ever growing. The goal of education must be to nurture natural, healthy growth through experience, and not to present a limited, fragmented, predigested “curriculum” as the path to knowledge and wisdom.

Holistic Education

The concept of “wholeness” should be at the core of the educational process. Wholeness implies that each academic discipline provides merely a different perspective on the rich, complex, integrated phenomenon of life. Holistic education celebrates and makes constructive use of evolving, alternate views of reality and multiple ways of knowing. It is not only the intellectual and vocational aspects of human development that need guidance and nurturance, but also the physical, social, moral, aesthetic, creative, and — in a nonsectarian sense — spiritual aspects.

New Role of Educators

Many of today’s educators have become caught in the trappings of competitive professionalism: tightly controlled credentials and certification, jargon and special techniques, and a professional aloofness from the spiritual, moral and emotional issues inevitably involved in the process of human growth. Holistic educator hold, rather, that educators ought to be facilitators of learning, which is an organic, natural process and not a product that can be turned out on demand. Teachers require the autonomy to design and implement learning environments that are appropriate to the needs of their particular students.

Educating for Human Development

The primary purpose of education is to nourish the inherent possibilities of human development. Schools must be places that facilitate the whole development of all learners.

Educating for a Participatory Democracy

Education should be based on democratic values and should empower all citizens to participate in meaningful ways in the life of the community and the planet. The building of a truly democratic society means far more than allowing people to vote for their leaders— it means empowering individuals to take an active part in the affairs of their community. A truly democratic society is more than the “rule of the majority” — it is a community in which disparate voices are heard and genuine human concerns are addressed. It is a society open to constructive change when social or cultural change is required.

Educating for Global Citizenship

Each individual is a global citizen. Education therefore, should be an appreciation for the magnificent diversity of human experience. Human experience is vastly wider than any single culture’s values or ways of thinking. In the emerging global community, we are being brought into contact with diverse cultures and worldviews as never before in history.

Holistic educator believes that it is time for education to nurture an appreciation for the magnificent diversity of human experience and for the lost or still uncharted potentials within all human beings.

Educating for Earth Literacy

Education must spring organically from a profound reverence for life in all its forms and nurture a relationship between humans and the natural world.. We must rekindle a relationship between the human and the natural

world that is nurturing, not exploitive. This is at the very core of our vision for the twenty-first century. The planet Earth is a vastly complex, but fundamentally unitary living system, an oasis of life in the dark void of space.

Spirituality and Education

Holistic educator believes that all people are spiritual beings in human form who express their individuality through their talents, abilities, intuition, and intelligence. Just as the individual develops physically, emotionally, and intellectually, each person also develops spiritually. Spiritual experience and development manifest as a deep connection to self and others, a sense of meaning and purpose in daily life, an experience of the wholeness and interdependence of life, a respite from the frenetic activity, pressure and over-stimulation of contemporary life, the fullness of creative experience, and a profound respect for the numinous mystery of life.

In addition to *Education 2000*, which includes most of the principles related to holistic education, there are other definitions of holistic education, which are worth examining as they complement the above illustration. John Miller (2007), for instance, frames holistic education within a “transformation model” of education, arguing that the core motto of holistic education is to seek transformation, that is, to seek the continuing growth of the individual and society.

John Miller synthesizes holistic education as an approach that encompasses three main principles:

- 1) “Connection” – entails integrating school subjects; establishing connections with the community; fostering student’s relationship with the earth; and encouraging students to connect to their souls, their deeper sense of selves.
- 2) “Inclusion” – refers to including students of diverse races and abilities and providing a range of educational approaches to attend the differences in learning styles. And
- 3) “Balance” – means reaching for equilibrium between complementary energies (individual learning and group learning, analytic thinking and intuitive thinking, content and process, and learning and assessment).

Conclusions

It is imperative to note that holistic education is not a specifiable model or ideology, but an attitude or orientation of openness to the living presence of our children/students and to the complex and dynamic world around us.

It is compatible with both global education and environmental education, which are also based on the principles of interdependence and connectedness. Based on this interdependent perspective, holistic education seeks to create a society where we live in harmony with the surrounding environment. It rejects consumerism as the dominant mode of being in modern society. Instead, it seeks an education that is rooted in the fundamental realities of nature and existence. Holistic education seeks to connect the part with the whole. We have tended in education to forget the larger vision of wholeness and connectedness, and holistic education calls on us to restore that vision. Such a vision, of course, is a primary goal of Education for Sustainability.

Overall, we can describe holistic education as containing the following broad characteristics:

- 1) It nurtures the development of the whole person;
- 2) It revolves around relationships;
- 3) It is concerned with life experiences;

- 4) It “recognizes that cultures are created by people and can be changed by people”; and
- 5) It is founded upon a “deep *reverence for life* and for the unknown source of life.”

If the goal of holistic education is connection, then we are ultimately dealing with spirituality, and with the unfathomable meaning of the cosmos. We are trying to help our young people find a place deep within them that resonates with the mystery of creation. And it is only when we, as educators, look deeply within ourselves and strive to embody wholeness in our own lives that we will inspire our students to do the same.

Holistic education opens up crucial dimensions in learning. When learning is seen in a new extended epistemological framework where science and spirituality are compatible, no longer contradictory, science acquires human sensitivity and consciousness becomes fundamental in the integration of the cosmos.

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