

HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR HOLISTIC LIFE

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Received : 24 February 2015

Accepted : 10 March 2015

ABSTRACT

Holistic life means 'looking at life in its totality or entirety without fragmenting it into domains such as physical, emotional, social, economic, spiritual or into compartments like personal and professional or into blocks arranged on the basis of age, nationality, religion, race, caste, creed etc. Holistic life also offers possibilities to live meaningfully, purposefully and creatively in the increasingly complex world around us. Indian civilization gave the ideal of Holistic life through the concept of fourfold goals of life, i.e. dharma, artha, kama, moksha. In the west also the idea of holistic life and holistic development has been explored extensively. The underlying purpose of the theory of Multiple Intelligence of Gardiner is the holistic development of an individual and thereby emphasizing the need for holistic education that will enable to live a holistic life. Holistic education empowers learners to examine critically the cultural, moral and political contexts of their lives and leads learners towards actively challenging and changing their socio-cultural milieu to meet human needs. It is oriented towards lifelong learning or 'learning how to learn,' that leads to a journey of self-actualization and self realization through harmonious intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and interconnectedness with other individuals, groups and the world. This paper stresses the need for replacing our current education system which is largely information & knowledge laden and examination & employment oriented with Holistic education that focuses mainly on life skills, attitude formation of students, personal and interpersonal skills, and inculcation of values.

Keywords: *Holistic, Meaningful, Life, Aims, Multiple Intelligents*

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'holistic' is derived from the word 'holism,' which means 'all, entire or total.' Holistic approach means 'looking at something in its totality or entirety. It further implies that a system cannot be explained or understood by understanding its component parts separately because a system as a whole functions differently from any of its component parts. In other words, a system as a whole is unique and not just a sum total of its parts. The interdependence of parts and the mutual processes between these parts is very important for understanding any system or object as a whole.

Perspectives on Holistic Life

It is very essential to consider human life from

such a holistic perspective rather than fragmenting it into different domains such as physical, emotional, social, economic, spiritual and so on. It must not also be compartmentalized into personal and professional or arranged into blocks on the basis of age, nationality, religion, race, caste, creed etc. The Indic civilization has given a holistic view of life through the system of fourfold human goals: 'dharma, artha, kama, moksha.' The pursuit of these four goals in human life is expected to lead to a meaningful and satisfactory human life wherein a human being is able to achieve his/her full development and also lead society towards development. In the west also, many philosophers have given ideas about a holistic or ideal life. One

recent definition of holistic life is given by Seligman, (2011) who equates holistic life with high level of human well-being. He has labeled it as 'flourishing.' According to him, the ultimate goal of life must be 'authentic happiness.' (Seligman, 2002). He has enumerated five components of 'flourishing' that should be considered for a holistic life:

(1) Positive emotion (2) high levels of engagement and flow, (3) positive human relationships, (4) transcendental meaning and purpose and (5) personal accomplishment and achievement. In simple words one may say that a holistic life is a fuller and a richer life wherein one is able to strike a balance among the different domains of life such as family life, Social life, professional life & Spiritual life.

Absence of Holistic Life in The Contemporary Times

Taking into consideration, the above mentioned criteria and many other varied concepts of holistic life, we find individuals in the contemporary world are not living holistic lives. In most of the instances, we find people living imbalanced and meaningless lives. They are unable to strike a balance among various domains by being too much involved in one domain at the cost of other domains or making remarkable progress in one domain of life but making only a moderate progress in some other domain or failing miserably in still other domain of his/her life. By and large, we find people pursuing money, comfortable & affluent life styles, higher positions in their professions and society and so on. In order to achieve all these, they compromise with health, happiness and moral values yet at times, just to realize that they had been deluded. As a result, they get

frustrated, become victims of psycho-somatic disorders and in extreme cases, commit suicides. Why do people lead such imbalanced lives? It is, because they fail in perceiving their lives in totality or entirety hence their physical & mental energy gets channelized disproportionately into one domain, which prevents them from realizing their potentialities to the fullest and from living a fuller richer life leading to happiness and satisfaction. The main reason for this is lack of holistic education, which is directed towards holistic life. Therefore, this paper stresses the need for holistic education and explains what should be the nature of Holistic Education and how it leads to holistic life.

Concept of Holistic Education

According to Miller R. (1997), '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.' He further elaborates on the nature of Holistic education and writes, 'There is an emphasis on the experience and learning beyond the confines of the classroom and the formal educational environment towards education as growth, discovery and a broadening of horizons. 'Defining holistic education on the lines of philosophy of J. Krishnamurthi, Venugopal (2009), states, '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' and 'It is an education that prepares young people to live purposefully, creatively, and morally in a complex world.' Forbes, (2003, 17) writes, 'Holistic education focuses on

the fullest development of the person, encouraging individuals to become the very best or finest that they can be and enabling them to experience all they can from life and reach their goals’

Aims of Holistic Education

Miller (1991:3), describes Holistic education as having the following parameters, which actually clarify its aims.

- It nurtures the broad development of the students and focuses on their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative or intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual potentialities.
- It promotes the importance of relationships at all levels within a learning community in which the educator and student work together in an open and collaborative relationship.
- It encourages a desire to elicit meaning and understanding and to engage with the world.
- The approach empowers learners to examine critically the cultural, moral and political contexts of their lives. It leads learners towards actively challenging and changing cultural values to meet human needs.

According to Patel Nandish (2003) ‘The aim of holistic education must be to prepare students for a fulfilling and productive life in which their skills and attributes are constantly challenged, developed and applied as part of their lifelong learning. It is an educational journey of personal discovery starting from education and then continuing throughout life.’ and ‘A programme of holistic education aims to encompass all aspects of personal learning and growth and emphasizes the development of active

relationships at all levels, whether these are between the subject domains, between individuals and their peer groups and communities or between the individual and the world around them.’

Teaching-Learning in Holistic Education

Holistic learning is less concerned with information or even transmission of knowledge. It is more concerned with building various capacities and developing competence in students which they may be able to use throughout their lives, in various real life contexts, however complex they may be. What are the types of capacities should be developed in students? A lot of research has been done in this area. The most widely accepted approach to identifying a variety of human capacities is Gardner’s (1983, 2006) Theory of Multiple Intelligence wherein he has given Nine types of intelligence. He initially identified seven intelligences. 1. Linguistic (translating letters and words into knowledge and concepts), 2. Logical – Mathematical (converting numbers to quantitative concepts and to think rationally and/or logically) 3. Musical translating written musical symbols in timbre, pitch, and rhythm), 4. Intrapersonal (knowledge of one’s self), 5. Interpersonal (knowledge of others, especially their moods and motivations) 6. Spatial (the ability to mentally rotate an object in space), 7. Bodily-Kinesthetic (the ability to control one’s body and handle objects skillfully). Out of these seven, the initial three intelligences are labeled as Symbol Analytic as they involve making a conversion from a symbol to a higher-level mental code. The latter two of them are considered Personal intelligences

in that they are oriented to the persons. The Spatial and Kinesthetic intelligences are labeled as Object-oriented. Finally, Gardner identified two more intelligences which he labeled as *Naturalist* (an ability to discern differences in one's natural surroundings) and A ninth *Existential* or transpersonal intelligence that involves that ability to search for and connect with universal unknown.

Presently, there is a lot of research is being carried out in the area of 'multiple intelligence,' that includes, 'emotional intelligence,' Social Intelligence, 'conative intelligence (self-regulation skills or how to use personal agency or volition to make choices regarding thoughts, emotions, and behaviors related to goal-directed activities),''moral intelligence,' (ability to perceive what is ethically right or wrong, just or unjust and act accordingly), 'spiritual intelligence' (an urge to connect to the higher self, the ability to connect to the sacred and supernatural world), and 'civic intelligence or Citizenship competence,' (awareness of national and global identity and civic roles in the national and global communities). A realization has come that education must aim at developing the above mentioned 'multiple intelligences' rather than only cognitive intelligence which has been in focus so far.

In his advocacy for the development of wisdom as a primary goal of one's life, Sternberg (2004) said something quite similar: Wisdom is the use of one's intelligence and experience as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (1) intrapersonal, (2) interpersonal, and (3) extrapersonal interests' and

'to achieve a balance among (1) adaptation to existing environments, (2) shaping of existing environments, and (3) selection of new environments.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2003, 2007), one of the leaders in the development of social-emotional learning (SEL), identified five teachable competencies that they believe provide a foundation for effective personal development:

1. Self-awareness: knowing what one is feeling and thinking; having a realistic assessment of one's own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
2. Social awareness: understanding what others are feeling and thinking; appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups.
3. Self-management: handling one's emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with task achievement; setting and accomplishing goals; persevering in the face of setbacks and frustrations;
4. Relationship skills: establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on clear communication, cooperation, resistance to inappropriate social pressure, negotiating solutions to conflict, and seeking help when needed and
5. Responsible decision making: making choices based on an accurate consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, respecting others, and taking responsibility for one's decisions.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

A teacher is no longer required to be a mere subject expert. He has to move out of his comfort zone of subject specialization and enter in uncertain territory of real multiple, conflicting and complex ideas of the real world and try to make active and positive interventions in students' lives, utilizing his/her own life experiences and wisdom s/he has acquired from these real life experiences. He is supposed to fulfill the developmental needs of the students. Teacher's role is that of a guide, a facilitator and a mentor. About the relationship of teacher and student, one may say that Teachers as facilitators are also required to create an inclusive classroom and school environment which can catalyze students' inquisitive and creative engagement with the world around them. They are committed to develop individuals, who are healthy, confident and self-motivated and capable of applying their knowledge in their actual life situations and the real world.

Holistic education is based on the view that teaching is a social activity hence it consists of the roles played by the learner and the teacher. The holistic learner is assumed to want to achieve the highest aspect of awareness of knowledge and appreciate the value that it adds to his or her life. The holistic teacher is assumed to want to develop learner as a critical, confident, independent learner and provide the holistic learner with critical faculties that enable action in real situation. The learning and teaching that take place in the holistic approach is defined as the social process of allowing critical learners with critical faculties that enable action in

real situations. The learning and teaching that takes place in the holistic approach is defined as the social process of allowing critical learners to claim ownership of the knowledge domain, its epistemology, and to make knowledge refutations or claims based on that it enables action in real situations.

Profile of A Student Who Has Received Holistic Education

- Demonstrates an in-depth understanding of his/her specialized academic discipline and its interrelationships with other academic disciplines and is also able to perceive it in the entirety of human knowledge.
- Effectively uses the information resources that are made available to him/her in the acquisition of further knowledge and its application.
- Demonstrates effective written and oral communication skills
- Demonstrates a reflective approach and an attitude of continuous improvement.
- Demonstrates awareness and concern for global issues and their impact on human life at his/her local and global level.
- Demonstrates ability for rational decision making and accepts ownership if the decisions do not yield desired results.
- Demonstrates flexibility and a creative approach to problem solving
- Demonstrates ability to build up and maintain healthy human relationships through interpersonal skills
- Demonstrates awareness and preparedness for responsible democratic citizenship.

When analyzed on the lines of holistic education, one finds that our current education is largely information and to some extent knowledge oriented. Despite the current fad of ‘skill development’ what is aimed at is just a narrow set of subject specific skills, mainly relevant for students studying professional & vocational courses. Skills are generally thought of as manual and performance oriented behaviors. There is also over-emphasis on soft skills but ‘thinking skills,’ ‘social skills,’ and life skills are neglected or included only as tokens. Education is also considered mainly from employment point of view therefore students opt for technical & vocational disciplines, with a view to getting employment. Moreover, our education system is examination oriented therefore students & their parents are obsessed with higher grades rather than the real development of students’ capacities or potentialities.

There is an over-emphasis on specializations in our Higher Education system. A student, after completion of secondary education, has to decide about his special field of study. From then onwards, his/her pursuit of knowledge narrows down to a limited number of academic disciplines. As s/he advances in higher education, the pursuit further narrows down to only one or two disciplines. Gradually, they become out of touch with other disciplines. This reduces a student into becoming a myopic, exactly opposite to holistic education.

CONCLUSION

Holistic Education is the need of the hour. It is a departure from our hitherto system of knowledge

transmission. It is oriented towards ‘lifelong learning’ or ‘learning how to learn,’ and focuses mainly on life skills, attitude formation of students, personal and interpersonal skills, inculcation of values needed to live a purposeful and meaningful life in today’s complex world. It leads to a journey of self-actualization and self realization through harmonious interpersonal and interpersonal relationships and interconnectedness with other individuals, groups and the world. It brings us closer the realization of “learning to be” and “learning to live together” that have been identified in the Delors report (UNESCO 1996).

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