

EDIFICATION THROUGH ‘HOLISM’- PARADIGM SHIFTS IN VALUE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Holistic approach of teaching has become a familiar topic in recent days and in current educational practices. However, there are various opinions from educators about the definition and need for value education. The aim of holism is to engage learners in a lifelong journey and lead them toward self-inquiry. This approach nurtures the overall development of students focusing on physical, emotional, social, creative, spiritual and aesthetic attributes. Therefore, a holistic model for students' success is essential in today's educational systems. This paper tries to map the history of holism and look at paradigm shifts that have happened in value education with regard to experimentation of holistic approach. The paper attempts to interpret the holistic approach of teaching, the vision of holistic approach, features of holistic approach and the implications of such an approach on students, teachers and institutions. This paper also suggests an inquiry for educators, curriculum designers, administrators, teachers and policy-makers interested in developing an edification process through a holistic curriculum for the transformation of the education system.

Keywords: Edification, holism, implications, life-long journey, mapping history, self-inquiry, transformation, value education.

Introduction

Holistic approach of teaching has become a significant topic in recent days and in current educational practices. Research shows that there have been paradigm shifts in value education and that holism has proved to be a better educational model in schools and universities. In order to comprehend the edification process through holism, there are several aspects which require to be researched and experimented in present educational practices.

The need for holistic approach of education emerges from analyzing the current status of education, understanding what holistic education is, tracing a brief history of holistic approach and by noting the major contributors in the field of holistic educational research. Further, educators need to cognize the vision of holistic approach, characteristics of holistic education and recognize the requirement of formulating holistic models to evolve a holistic curriculum for a significant change of the education system in schools and universities.

Current status of Education

The current trends in education in schools and universities give importance to scores and grades rather than encouraging humanitarian values of students. Subjects like Moral Science and Value Education take a second place compared to core subjects. References to historical & mythological tales are restricted to certain subjects only (need based). Competencies and skills of students are honed more than their attitudes. Students are taught how to make money rather than how to make money ethically. Individualized & Compartmentalized approach overpowers holistic approach in education system today. There is a need for holistic education to make reforms in the current educational scenario.

What is Holistic Education?

Although there are few studies conducted in the field of holistic approach of teaching, researchers find it difficult to arrive at exact definitions of holistic education. Holistic education does not exist in a single, consistent form. It is best described as a group of beliefs, feelings, principles and general ideas that share a family resemblance (Forbes 2003: 2). The concept and definitions of holistic education focusses on the education and development of the whole student at affective and cognitive levels. It moves the emphasis of learning in confined classrooms to a continuous learning beyond a structural framework designed by universities.

Holistic education is generally regarded as a philosophy of education centered around

- each person's identity,
- the process of creating meanings,
- establishing a resolution in life through relations with the society and
- to philanthropic values.

This in turn leads to a process of self-inquiry of learners which leads to self-actualization.

Holistic education focuses on the fullest possible 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 (Forbes 2003: 17). The experiences could be individualistic, meaningful and unique to each person who triggers the process of goal setting and working towards their goals. These values are "guidelines for personal behaviour" (Thompson 1993) and it is these personal behaviours that characterize the outcomes of the holistic approach.

History of Holistic Approach

Holistic approach of education is not entirely a new concept of education. It was prevalent in the Gurukula System that existed in India several years ago. Gurus (teachers) gave importance to develop morality and integrity amongst students apart from imparting knowledge and honing specific skills. Gurus imparted ancient scriptures and defined their relevance in students' lives. The Guru-Sishya relationship taught the sishyas to not only become immortal through knowledge (*Vidyaya amritam ashnute Sarvatva purna*) but also to be liberated through knowledge (*Sa vidya ya vimuktaye*). In the Gurukula System, Education was based on the concepts of *sarvatva* and *purna* modes (Holistic Approach).

If one tries to map the history of holistic education and look at paradigm shifts that have happened in higher education with regard to experimentation of holistic approach, we can trace it back to the core ideas of holism which are not entirely new but "timeless and found in the sense of wholeness in humanity's religious impetus". (Forbes 2004).

1960's-1970's

Although there were lot of ideas that originated from these pioneers in the field, the essential ideas of holistic education started to structure only after the cultural paradigm shifts which began in 1960's. The holism movement in the field of psychology developed in 1970s where "an emerging body of literature in science, philosophy and cultural history provided an overarching concept to describe this way of understanding education – a perspective known as *holism*" (Miller 1999).

In the year 1979, various workshops were conducted by the National Holistic Education Conference with The University of California, San Diego where noteworthy forward cues were established. Following that,

the Holistic Education Conference combined with the Mandala Holistic Health Conferences at the University of California hosted conferences based on holistic education for six years in which about three thousand professionals participated every year.

The *Journal of Holistic Education* was started and educators started writing about their observations and thoughts about the teaching of basic three R's: Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. They defined the basic three R's of holistic education as Relationships, Responsibility and Reverence for all life. With this, researchers started probing into the idea of holistic education in detail and started inquiring the philosophy with respect to teaching learning scenarios associated with schools and universities.

Major Contributors

There are several major contributors when we try to analyse the roots of holistic education. They are philosophers and academicians like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, Friedrich Fröbel, Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Francis Parker, Paulo Freire, George Dennison Kieran Egan, Howard Gardner, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Carl Jung, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Francisco Ferrer, Henry Thoreau, Paul Goodman, Johann Pestalozzi, Ivan Illich, John Dewey and John Caldwell Holt .

Vision of Holistic Approach

The vision of holistic education is to hone the attributes and skills of students in a productive and fulfilling manner so that they become lifelong learners. The vision is not only to strengthen the competencies and skills of students but also to teach the right attitudes to students. In the process, students engage themselves in the process of self-inquiry and self-discovery which help them to challenge, analyse and develop as better people in the society with high personal and societal values. Learning becomes a process where they are able to construct meanings from life experiences and are able to groom themselves and nurture themselves holistically.

The predominant focus of educational institutions should be to create both knowledge-based educational systems and holistic-based educational systems through their curricula. Educators, curriculum designers, administrators, teachers and policy-makers should accordingly develop a holistic curriculum for the transformation of the education system in schools and universities.

Characteristics of Holistic Education

A holistic development approach in higher education aims to encompass the overall features of personal learning and accentuates the development of relationships at different levels between individuals, between peer groups, between communities and in the society. Miller (1991: 3) has proposed that education may be described as holistic when it exemplifies the following characteristics.

- Holistic education nurtures the broad development of the students and focuses on their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative or intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual potentials.
- 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.
- There is an emphasis on life experience and learning beyond the confines of the classroom and the formal educational environment towards education as growth, discovery and a broadening of horizons. It encourages a desire to elicit meaning and understanding and to engage with the world.

The approach endows learners to study critically the moral, cultural, political and societal contexts of their lives. The learners actively challenge and change the cultural beliefs and values to meet individual needs.

Holistic education leads students into new zones of thinking, to widen their critical thinking skills and improve an appreciation of the realm around them, and to apprehend the significance that relationships have contained by these considerations. Notably, holistic approach in teaching higher education has the ability to empower students to ponder differently and to reflect creatively on their own values. Indubitably, this system of approach motivates students to progress into informed, well-educated, and contributing members of the society. This vision is contained within holistic education and offers teachers a framework they can operate. This approach also seeks to improve students actively beyond academic excellence.

A Holistic model

A holistic model for students' success will revolve around four dimensions of universities based on

- ▶ Institutional leadership,
- ▶ Curriculum changes,
- ▶ Teachers' training and
- ▶ Student learning.

Each of these dimensions must be included in a holistic approach of teaching in higher education since they act as vital factors influencing students' success in universities. Institutional leadership begins with the governing board and their cabinets. The extent to which the management devises works and communicates about the necessity of having such a system is the key factor in helping students benefit out of the holistic educational approach. Every educational institution should make necessary amendments in their curriculum so that it is inclusive by nature and the syllabi devised should cover areas of holistic education. This can be offered as separate subjects or also intertwined along with the syllabus that institutions prepare for their students. The latter approach gains momentum since it becomes a blended, experiential learning for students.

The model must significantly include teachers' orientation towards incorporating holistic approach in educating their students. Appropriate training of the modules is required for the teachers to practice a holistic way of teaching students at university level. The focus of this approach is complete only when students' learning is fostered in such a manner where they learn not only for scoring marks or for gaining academic achievements but when they are able to connect their learnings beyond classrooms. Such behaviours reflect a range of capabilities, skills and competencies that the students will begin to develop as they emerge from a formal programme of holistic education (Hare 2006).

The UNESCO Report- Four pillars of Education

The UNESCO Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty first Century brings closer the realization of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (UNESCO 1996: 14).

- 'Learning to know' means combining an adequately extensive knowledge with the opportunity to work intensely in certain or more subjects. We must also develop learning to learn from which one benefits by unlearning and relearning.
- 'Learning to do' means not only acquiring and learning but also honing the occupational skills. We should be able to perform tasks effectively and should also be able to work in teams. It means learning to do in the milieu of several work experiences.
- 'Learning to live together' means increasing an understanding of other people and be able to appreciate each other. It involves working in pluralistic and diverse groups effectively with mutual understanding.
- 'Learning to be' means to improve one's personality, to take ownership of one's own self and to act with greater independence thereby empowering the unleashing of all potentials.

Only a holistic development approach can foster learning to know, do, live together and to be. Learning to know and learning to do creates **apara vidya** (material knowledge). Learning to live together & learning to be creates **para vidya** (higher knowledge). Holistic education creates para vidya which is higher knowledge among students. This approach nurtures the overall development of students focusing on physical, emotional, social, creative, spiritual and aesthetic attributes.

Conclusion

It is said that the entire fate of a nation depends on the education we provide the youth. Therefore, whatever we see today in the society is directly linked to the kind of education we give to the youth today. It is time to reflect on whether we are training the present youth to be money- minded people, power- greedy politicians or a system that encourages youth to be noble men of character. It is absolutely necessary to practice holistic approach in current education scenario for a better edification process and for better youth in the society.

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