

Holistic Learning—What and How

Dr. Mamta Aggarwal

Abstract

Pedagogues keep on making efforts to improve the curriculum transaction and try to optimise students' achievement. Various Educational committees, the world over, suggest that learning should be holistic. They point out that mere learning the course-contents is grossly inadequate and attempts should be made to make education wholesome and students should be prepared to attain holistic learning so that they become ideal citizens and make their lives more meaningful as individuals and as members of the society. They should be prepared for interconnectedness and wholeness. It fosters connections between subjects, between learners through various forms of community. It generates a balance between content and process, learning and assessment, and analytic and creative thinking. This article includes the different components of holistic learning, viz. home, school, environment, community and society at large. It goes on to find ways and means how the students attain the wholesome learning.

Key Words: Holistic Learning, Holistic Education, interconnectedness, Dynamic Balance, Environment, Community,

Introduction

Whenever the term – ‘Learning’ occurs, it is, usually linked to ‘learning the course-contents’. And it is also a fact that the students, after successfully learning the course contents, do well in their examinations and many of them are able to get good jobs or engage themselves in some profession or business and lead a comfortable occupational life. A few questions arise – Do such persons lead a good family life; are they well fit in the society; do they enjoy good health; do they fulfil the requirement of national prosperity, etc.? The apt answer is – ‘No, only a few’. If a person is not comfortable in any of the segments of society, viz. home, school, community, society at large, work-place environment, etc., he/she will remain incomplete in some or the other aspect of his/her life. This leads us to the concept of Holistic Learning.

Concept of Holistic Learning

The concept of Holistic Learning can be found in the works of some educationists, like John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Vasily Sukhomlinsky. Late in the 20th century and into the twenty-first century, the concept of holism became more popular. In India also, the concept of Holistic Learning is not new. Emphasis used to be laid on this learning since ancient times. If we recall the times when gurukuls used to be considered as an effective source of imparting education, *Gurus* used to take care of students' Holistic Learning. At *Gurukuls*, attempts used to be laid to offer Holistic Learning through an integrated set of learning experiences that addresses the students' essential needs of Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit. The emphasis used

Dr. Mamta Aggarwal, Principal, Ramakrishna Sr. Sec. School, Vikas Puri, India, Delhi

to be on professional, social, religious and spiritual learning. The *Gurukul* system resulted in the all-around development of the students.

The Holistic Learning, in the present era, is not confined to acquiring core curriculum that is transacted in schools, as also in institutes of higher learning. It is a wider concept and includes what a person is expected to learn from home, educational institutes, environment, community, workplace and society at large. All the man-making ingredients, when triggered and enter a person's body, mind and spirit, constitute the 'Holistic Learning'. All this turns a person into a whole man or an all-rounder.

Holistic Learning implies that children will grow in the development of their intellectual, mental, physical, emotional, and social abilities so that they are capable of meeting the demands and challenges of everyday life.

UNESCO (2013) defines Holistic Learning as "an approach that seeks to fully activate all aspects of the learner's personality (intellect, emotions, imagination, body) for a more effective and comprehensive learning."

The concept of Holistic Learning has been analysed comprehensively given through the following definitions given in <http://astralsite.com/1110/HolisticLearning.html>

Holistic Learning is based on the principle of interconnectedness and wholeness. Thus, the student is seen as a whole person with body, mind, emotions and spirit.

Holistic Learning seeks to develop approaches to teaching and learning that foster connections between subjects, between learners through various forms of community.

Holistic Learning seeks a dynamic balance in the learning situation between such elements as content and process, learning and assessment, and analytic and creative thinking.

Holistic Learning is inclusive in terms of including a broad range of students and a variety of learning approaches to meet their diverse learning needs.

Holistic Learning and Holistic Education

Holistic Learning and Holistic Education are, usually, considered synonymous. But a thorough analysis of these concepts reveals how these are similar and how these are different. Holistic Education is a broader term and is curriculum oriented, while Holistic Learning is learner-oriented and lays down what a learner is expected to derive from the wholesome curriculum. The most ideal situation is when a learner should be able to run the entire gamut, consisting of all the learnable material provided by the different institutes, namely home, school, environment, community, etc., but this seldom happens due to the quality of acquired genes, differentiated family-bringing up, environmental effects and so on. So Holistic Education is the full pool of the knowledge available for each individual from different agencies, And Holistic Learning is the optimum drawing out from this pool of knowledge in an integrated manner with the help of home, schools, community, etc.

Holistic Education comprises of the desirable competencies to be nurtured by different agencies. These agencies play their role towards learners' achievements in the areas of cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, physical and intellectual needs in an integrated manner. These agencies, under Holistic Education, set the targets of learning competencies at the highest level and the learners, under Holistic Learning, are expected

to learn optimally according to their aptitudes, interests, intelligence, physical and mental competence, etc. A target, under Holistic Education for example, has been set that the learners should be able to exercise age-related courtesies, be interactive with environment, grasp curriculum content, attain post-school relevant knowledge, life skills, societal expectations and entrepreneurial skills and out of this broad pool of knowledge, they, under Holistic Learning, should be able to draw out the varied knowledge according to their respective mental and physical energies. The teachers and other stakeholders, while facilitating learning, should attach importance to the learners' interests and aptitudes. Thus, Holistic Education encompasses wide spectrum of expectations from the aforesaid agencies. Miller (1992) rightly says that "Holistic Education is not to be defined as a particular method or technique; it must be seen as a paradigm, a set of basic assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways."

Sources and Process of Generating Holistic Learning

As has been stated in the preceding description that the major sources of generating Holistic Learning are home, school, environment, community and society, it is pertinent to identify the main components of Holistic Learning to be provided by each agency and the process to be followed in updating the learners with the required knowledge.

Home-related Learning

Home provides a big chunk of Holistic Learning. In fact, whatever is learnt at home becomes the basis of learning by a wholesome person. A wholesome person is expected to be well-versed in his/her cognitive, intellectual, social, aesthetic, physical, moral and occupational pursuits. The foundation of all these is laid at home.

Parents' first duty is to look after the physical growth of the child in the right perspective. A healthy and safe home environment is essential for promoting and protecting health and development during childhood. Children should be provided age-related balanced diet and it should be ensured that their hygienic, rest and play activities are properly looked after. Bronfenbrenner (2001) rightly says that "Children need stable, supportive social environments and access to resources within the home to enhance cognitive, emotional, and physical development." A proper health is the prerequisite for attaining other home-related areas of learning. The foundation of the right mode of treating and conversing among the family members, friends and relatives is laid at home. The age-appropriate identification and operation of home-gadgets also take place at home. Parents should develop children's habits of cleanliness, proper upkeep of different household products, salutation manners, etc. They should take their wards on visits to places like zoo, historical places, museums, planetariums, beauty & natural spots, etc. As the belief is that children's intelligence mainly grows up to the age of 14, all the aforesaid activities put a spur to it.

While infusing the home-related learning in children, parents should treat them as friends; only then children's natural nurturing will take place. Parents' dictatorial attitude will make them introverts with suppressed personalities. Forced learning may take place by such children, but they are not able to develop their emotional domain and they are not able to blossom as innovative thinkers. The quality of husband-wife relationship, interactive language used by them and the performance of other household duties have also a direct bearing on their wards.

School- related Learning

If proper nurturing has taken place at home, children's task of learning at school gets facilitated. The various national and state-level educational councils and boards of education provide the curricula for the different school classes. The educationists of the modern era make an attempt to develop the wholesome curricula for the schools. The curricula up to the 10th class, usually, consist of core subjects. The subjects at the senior school level are more focused and are studied, keeping the future options in mind, like pursuing of higher academic or professional or vocational courses.

Besides cognitive development, modern schools are supposed to take care of students' life skills, psychomotor skills, emotional competencies, social belongingness, physical well-being and looking forward to being useful members of the society.

For cognitive development, in different domains, teachers are expected to complete the curriculum transaction by employing the content-based strategies, like constructive and problem-solving strategies for learning the topics which can be based on students' previous knowledge, discussion method for the contents having pros and cons and so on. As the curriculum transaction proceeds, teachers should use the formative evaluation techniques suitably. In order to make the curriculum transaction effective, teachers should be competent enough to use the classroom management techniques effectively. Teachers should ensure that the components of various domains, viz, cognitive, affective and psychomotor should be taken due care of during the course of the curriculum transaction.

The life skills, nurtured at home, are further sharpened and multiplied and polished at school. Teachers play an important role in moulding and further strengthening students' life skills. The World Health Organization has defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO list the ten core life skill strategies and techniques as: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Schools provide lots of opportunities for developing students' life skills when they attend their regular classes, during the morning assembly and when they participate in different co-curricular activities.

In order to make the school teaching wholesome, students are exposed to the entrepreneurial skills right from the middle classes in general and its depth increases in senior school classes. National Education Policy of 2020 (NEP) of India lays emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills. It recommends that vocational education should be integrated with educational offerings in all institutions by choosing focus areas based on skills gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities will develop entrepreneurial competencies besides capacities and will go a long way to make vocational education a part of the larger vision of Holistic Education.

Teachers should keep on observing how the students are learning in the classrooms, labs, library, ground and elsewhere in the school compound. They should be well-versed about their students' interests, aptitudes, cognitive grasping and other life skills. The knowledge of all these will enable the teachers to prepare the students well for their future ambitions.

Value education is also an important component of Holistic Education. Teachers should imbibe values in students by presenting their own value-loaded model as it has rightly been said that values are caught, not taught.

Focusing on school-role towards students' holistic learning, NEP 2020 has suggested that curriculum content may be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning. Regarding evaluation of students' achievements, NEP 2020 says that the aim of assessment in the culture of our schooling system should shift from one that primarily tests rote memorization skills to one that is more formative, is more competency-based, promotes learning and development for our students, and tests higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity.

Environment-related Learning

Environment further supplements and strengthens the children's home and school learning. Its positive components add to and the negative ones restrict the target of Holistic Learning. Besides the home and the school, Child's physical environment includes the outside noise, quality of outside buildings, layout of the streets & roads, prevailing climate, following of the rules and regulations of the recognised bodies, the type of relationships with the people in the vicinity, etc. Holistic Learning gets a positive support if the climate is child-friendly, the layout of the adjoining buildings, streets and roads is good and the people follow the rules and regulations established by the competent authorities. On the other hand, the toxins, pollutants, noise, crowding, adverse climate change, etc. are detrimental for child's growth. Floods, wildfires and other negative weather conditions destroy infrastructure and economies, and pose unique threats to young bodies and minds. In order to liberate the children from such environmental disorders, all concerned should take efforts to make the environment children friendly.

Besides the physical environment, children are influenced by their social environment also. Their social environment includes their family members, school mates & teachers and other people whom they observe and/or with whom they interact. Such encounters may be positive or negative. The positive interactions add to or strengthen their knowledge base; whereas the negative influences impinge upon their learning. Positive social environments develop the virtues of good qualities, like acceptance, kindness, forgiveness, etc. Contrary to this, negative social environment, like neighbourhood crime and gambling dens, drug-abuse, racial discrimination, etc. will have detrimental effect on one's Holistic Learning.

Community and Society- based Learning

The people, living in the same geographic place and having similar interests, are said to be part of a community. Society is a broader term and consists of different communities. According to MacIver and Page (1965), "Society is a system of usages and procedures, authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties."

Learning attained at home and school is to be complemented by the community and society. The internal school environment includes its structural components, psychological approach of the principal and the teachers, social interactions with the peers and teachers, etc. Students, to generate a Holistic Learning, have to extend such interactions to the various community sectors. They are expected to apply their classroom

knowledge to a real-world setting. They can make their learning further wholesome by applying their updated school knowledge by visiting historical monuments, museums, business complexes, art galleries, etc. Their knowledge may also be updated by inviting outside experts in different areas. Such encounters help in determining students' career paths also.

With reference to Holistic Learning, it is not required that the learners will be required to approach community and society literally; what is required is that the community and society-based learning should take place at home and in school under the guidance and cooperation of parents and teachers. The media and electronic gadgets, like computers, mobile phones, etc. are there to facilitate learning. Cleanliness, for example, is first learnt at home, environment and then from school. As the child comes in contact with the community, he/she can further realise the importance of keeping our environment clean through the locally adopted means. When he/she comes in contact with a larger society, like the videos from some advanced countries, he/she comes to know about the cleanliness instruments, segregation of dry and wet garbage, keeping garbage-drums at different places etc. In this way, Holistic Learning is gained by the learners.

Conclusion

Holistic Learning, for an individual learner, is the optimum learning derived from the holistic curricula, both hidden and explicit. The hidden or implicit components may not be in black and white, but these are the positive components and form part of Holistic Learning. The explicit components of the curricula constitute the different syllabi meant for different classes. The parents and the teachers have to be conscious of the fact that they have to optimize their children's Holistic Learning. They should try to update the children's learning from the pool of explicit and implicit curricula and each child's Holistic Learning will depend upon his/her capacity to learn based on his/her cognitive strengths, attitude, aptitude, intelligence, interests, facilities available, etc.

References

- Bronfenbrenner U. (2001), The Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In: Smelser N, Baltes P, editors. International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences. Elsevier; New York. (Retrieved by Google)
- Dewey, J. (1999), Experience and Education; Free Press: Washington, DC, USA.
- INTERNATIONAL Bureau of Education : (2013), Glossary of Curriculum Terminology, UNESCO (retrieved by Google)
- MacIver, R.M. and Charles H. Page: (1965), Society: An Introductory Analysis, Macmillan.
- Miller, R. (1992), What are Schools for: Holistic Education in American culture (2nd ed.), Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.
- Montessori, M. (2010), The Montessori Method; Earth Angel Books: Blacksburg, VA, USA. (Retrieved by Google)
- Sukhomlinsky, V. (2016) My Heart I Give to Children; EJR Language Service P/L: Graceville, QLD, Australia. (Retrieved by Google)
- <http://astralsite.com/1110/HolisticLearning.html>
- <https://www.educationworld.in/nep-2020-school-education-holistic-development-of-learners/#:~:text=NEP%202020%3A%20SCHOOL%20EDUCATION%20%7C%20Holistic>
- https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_07.pdf
- <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jobs-careers/national-education-policy-2020-impetus-to-entrepreneurial-revolution-129839>