The Spirituality and Wholeness in Education

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Abstract

The modern materialistic worldview has influenced educational institutions to emphasize more on inculcating students with skills and knowledge to the neglect of the students' values and virtues. Consequently, education is a commodity, shaped according to the market. Education, influenced by the market, neglects a comprehensive approach and students' intellectual, physical and cultural needs. Market's preference for the technical and natural sciences contributed towards the creation of the mechanical conception of education. The market also influenced the institutions of higher learning to neglect the role of humanities and social sciences. The humanity is also at the break of the ecological, nuclear, chemical and biological crisis, terrorism, moral degeneration, and there is increasing disregard for culture, tradition, and values. These challenges raised questions about outcomes of modern education. Since such education could not balance and fulfill students' material, intellectual and cultural needs; therefore, this paper examines how the holistic learning and teaching can pave the way towards the 21st-century education model.

Keywords: Holistic Education, Wholeness, Spirituality, Learning and Teaching.

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Historical Roots of Holistic Education

The East is often regarded as the cradle of civilization, philosophy and thought. Therefore, many educators, who had experimented with the conventional forms of education, began turning to the Eastern philosophies for the inspiration. Many of them have revitalized an ancient philosophical and educational thought. Although the term holism, itself, was coined in the 1970s, holistic education, as an idea, emerged as a reaction to and, consequently, as an alternative to post-modern challenges partly created by the conventional education. Since the holistic education is not a recent phenomenon, both classical and modern leading propagators in the field of holistic education include, for instance, Socrates, Plato, Rousseau, Emerson, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Steiner, Montessori, Rogers, Paul and Goodman etc. Indeed, it would have been subjective not to mention founders of the oriental and occidental philosophies, as holistic educators.

Although the scope, perspective and expression of holistic education are general, holistic educators always modernize its models, strategies and perspectives (Miller, 1997). The most outstanding modern holistic educators, who discussed the holistic theory and practice within diverse human, social and natural perspectives, include John Miller, Ron Miller, Edward Clark, David Orr and Scott H. Forbes. They use predominantly qualitative methods and examine the history of holistic education and its philosophical, psychological and sociological contexts. Holistic educators seriously focus their scope on ecological literacy, physical design and structure of the educational institutions, historical, social, cultural and spiritual context of education, multiple learning and teaching styles and integrated curriculum.

Although it is difficult to define the holistic education, for its origins, propagators and the forms of expression are diverse, it embraces a line of common values, represented in the idea of wholeness and interconnectedness. Indeed, by seriously taking into consideration an idea of interconnectedness, Miller (1996) defines holistic education in form of relationships by articulating "the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationship between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship with earth and the relationship between self and Self" (p. 86). This definition implies that holistic education aims to educate the whole student, by carefully considering and responding to his/her soul, body and mind, and educating the student as part of the whole, by considering him/her as a part of the society, humanity and nature (Mitchell, 2005; Moore, 2012). Therefore, unlike the conventional education, holistic education, as Forbes (2003) in his *Holistic Education* argues, puts equal emphasis on moral, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, cognitive, emotional, cultural and spiritual aspects of education.

Philosophical Dimensions of Holistic Education

The humanity, faced with ecological disasters, violence, wars, destruction, the breakdown of the family and society and disregard for traditional values, helplessly turned to the education for answers. The conventional education, however, being preoccupied with the market, materialism, technical knowledge and skills, and excessive overemphasis on the cognitive learning has not met, as a whole, the demands of the students, society and nature. Indeed, a widespread questioning of the conventional education has become a great concern of the educators, parents, researchers and scholars.

Due to the scientific and technological developments, the humanity has changed over the past few centuries. Such changes began influencing the conventional education to emphasize empiricism, rationalism, individualism, secularism, humanism, progress and development. The conventional education, as a result, began articulating materialistic dimensions of the individual, society and nature. Diverse personal, cultural and spiritual needs of the individual and the society, on the other hand, were neglected, which in turn resulted in social problems and the human detachment from nature (Forbes, 2003). Sources of spiritual and human needs, deeply rooted in Eastern philosophies, have been neglected while preference has been given to the satisfaction of materialistic consuming society. There is no doubt that such influence also resulted in the exclusion and the extinction of the Eastern traditional values, such as goodness, love, compassion, insight, wisdom, beauty, truth, liberation, that could counter and ultimately balance excessive materialistic emphasis by the conventional education. Since the present conventional education still glorifies and propagates extreme materialistic outlook, it is not cynical to declare, therefore, that it has failed to solve personal, social, national and global problems.

Market driven conventional education is increasingly being thought of as a commodity, being shaped according to the consumer demands. Beare and Slaughter (1993) are correct in comparing market terms and factory model organization with the educational institutions. Such commonly used terms and concepts include, for example, 'learning outcomes', 'outputs', 'processes', 'the end product of schooling' and 'students compared to customers'. Whose needs should the educational system attempt to meet in the first place apart for the market needs? Since the education has been turned into a commodity, being sold to financially capable buyers, it has become subjected to serve the market and not a broad society. Therefore, Grace (1989) is correct in asserting that market-driven education, as such, has become a private rather than a public good. Being influenced by the market, in addition, the educational institutions have subjected everything to the monetary values rather that moral values. Apple (1983) in his work *Education and Power* was among the first who criticized the

educational institutions that have overlooked the purpose of education for the sake of liberal open market economy. The capitalist market and the handful of rich capitalists, as a result, have been brought to the state of divinity in some educational institutions.

Many educators, being influenced by the market, vigorously declare that the role of education is to prepare students for the market needs. Consequently, educators overemphasize technical knowledge and skills, employability, a market value of courses and market needs. In order to respond to the market needs, educators predominantly emphasize cognitive aspects of the human development, which is in agreement with modern empiricism, neglecting to great extent the role of mind and soul in the acquisition of knowledge (Moore, 2012; Mitchell, 2005). Seligman et. al., (2009) in his article *Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions* articulated that some human dimensions cannot be approached from the cognitive perspective such as, for example, student's self-esteem, love and happiness, loyalty, self-realization and self-control, which could have played the essential role in the balanced human development, that could in turn serve both the market and the civil society.

Who benefits from educational dualism and fragmented curriculum? Al-Attas (1993) holds that fragmented view of reality has its origins in the modern science, which also ended up being fully implemented in the conventional education. Both have split man and nature into pieces. Parker (1993) illustrates the conventional education by using the conception of dualism and broken paradoxes. Thus, understanding parts and not the whole is a novelty of our time for educators and scientists, in the name of science, tend to divide everything into pieces. Due to a very rigid conceptualization of the curriculum students have no option but to specialize in a chosen field of study, most marketable one (Ricci and Pritscher, 2015). In the higher education, for example, the division of the disciplines are quite rigid and students are nor encouraged to give lessons from others field albeit they are forced to give such kind of courses as entrepreneurship. There is a little relationship and connectedness between fields of study and subjects being offered. It is unfortunate that such victims of the educational system miss the whole picture, learning very little about inner dimensions of human nature. The dualistic and fragmented knowledge could be compared with a beautiful reflective picture of which students are encouraged to see only one small part of it. Such dualistic education and fragmented knowledge serve only the market and not the individual and the society as a whole.

The connection between man and nature appears to have been lost. According to Pike and Selby (1988), dualist views of human beings and the nature are shaped by strong influence of reductionism, materialism, rationalism and utilitarianism. Being indoctrinated in such beliefs, students have detached themselves from nature and, instead of learning from nature; they

have become addicted to indoor games, television and computers. Obviously, there is no strong connection between man and the nature, which created the ecological crisis and the destruction of nature. Should education address these serious questions? Is the humanity, as very often proudly claimed, at the highest state of civilizational refinement? The purpose of life, as Lao-tzi founder of Daoism taught, is to grasp the meaning of nature as to attune ourselves with the nature, without destroying natural order and beauty (Mitchell, 1991). Does it mean that the Neolithic very often referred to as a 'primitive-uncivilized' man, was, in fact, was more civilized than modern self-styled 'civilized' man! The Neolithic man attuned himself with nature and the purpose, rather than greed, played an essential role in the relationship between man and nature. These so-called prehistoric values are even today widely cherished by the indigenous people who attempt to save and preserve nature. Where do we stand here as 'civilized-educated' world citizens?

Wholeness of Knowledge, Teaching and Learning

Gardner (1999) argued for multiple intelligence and diverse learning capacities of students. His seven multiple intelligences include linguistic, logical/mathematical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, musical, kinaesthetic and visual/spatial. In this regard, the holistic educators also consider multiple ways in which students learn and thus develop holistically (Mulalic and Obralic, 2016; Sloan, 2012; Edwards et. al., 1998). This theory clearly indicates that the human nature is diverse, which requires multiple approaches to teaching and learning. Thus, the holistic educators do not simply consider the cognitive development of the student, as it is the case with the conventional education, but, in addition, seriously take into consideration student's aesthetic, moral, physical, cultural and spiritual capacitates (Miller, 1997). Human beings are unique, connected to biological, ecological, psychological, social, ideological, cultural, environmental, religious systems (Miller, 1996). Therefore, the educational system must equally correspond to human rational and spiritual dimensions, reflecting a soul, mind and body, as to match students' diverse needs (Sloan, 2012). Does the conventional educational system respond to all of them equally? If the conventional education does not student's intellectual, social, emotional, moral, intuitive and creative potentials, it fails to explore connections between mind, soul and body, which is actually at the heart of holistic education philosophy (Moore, 2012; Mitchell, 2005).

By emphasizing the unity rather than fragmentation, the education should *integrate knowledge as a whole* for only as such it can develop a whole student, whose responsibility towards himself, society and nature could emerge. Such integrated approach should establish stronger and more meaningful relationship between subjects, offered by the educational

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institution. Then, there is an urgent need to *infuse values into each subject*. Aristotle is explicit in stating that "every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action and rational choice is taught to aim at some good; and so that good has been aptly described as that which everything aims" (Crisp, 2000, p. 3). This simply implies that technical sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and humanities should equally at goodness, ethics and morality.

Sterner, an Austrian holistic educator, rejected a dogma that we are but flesh and blood devoid of soul. There is also a widespread tendency among educators to separate mind, body and soul. He argued that the education must consider *whole dimensions of a student*. In other words, they must emphasize the development of 'whole' student, his intellectual, physical and spiritual dimensions. As we are unity of mind, soul, and body so is everything else in this world. Nothing is separate, everything is connected and related to the whole (Sloan 2012; Riley-Taylor, 2002). Therefore, Childs (1991) is correct in asserting that exercising and strengthening the relationship and connection between soul, mind and body must be an essential focus of education. Instead, the educational institutions have overemphasized cognitive development of students. The educational institutions have to address both human and material developments by seriously taking into consideration students, society and nature. Thus, there should not be a rigid separation of humanities and social sciences from natural and technical sciences. Forbes (2003) argues that students naturally become excited when educators converge and overlap diverse disciplines for such approach is in agreement with their diverse physical, intellectual and spiritual needs. He goes even further in declaring that if educators are serious about educating citizens, not only exploitative labour than the traditional divisions between disciplines has to be erased.

Disregard and detachment from the soul and mind resulted in cognitive and rational approaches to values, ethics and morality, as such quantified and reduced to dry and meaningless information. Students, as victims, have become helpless under compulsive-conditional mainstream trend glorified and propagated by some educators and capitalists. Survival of the fittest, power, greed, supremacy, popular egoist cultures, conflicts and destructions have become realities in students' minds for these are accepted as values of the modern civilization. Healthy eastern traditional values represented in compassion, loving-kindness, forgiveness, reciprocity, happiness and respect have been neglected. Miller (1996), as a result, argues for the spiritualization of knowledge, which could bring back into the curriculum and revitalize importance of intuitive and abstract aspects of knowledge. Thus, the educational institutions must infuse into the curriculum wisdom, compassion, equanimity and loving-kindness. There is no doubt, then, that the goal of the education is to educate the mind and soul because they are real sources of right, moral and accountable acting. Forbes (2003)

argued that education must prepare students not only for a job but also for life. Furthermore, he argued that since mind and soul are sources of goodness and not the cognitive brain there is, indeed, a need for the spiritualization of knowledge.

Individualism significantly contributed to the breakdown of the family. Preference given to the individual rather than the society has resulted in selfishness, indifference and social bankruptcy. Then, the modern industrial and technological pressures, the educational institutions have fallen in the same trap by glorifying material growth to the neglect of the individual and social growth. Very often educators by neglecting that social responsibility as one of the most important aspects of the education, forget that students are not only destined to be good engineers, IT experts or economists but they are also destined to be good sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, leaders and friends. Social communion is at the heart of the holistic education, whereby an individual is a miniature and the reflection of the society who represent values, ethics and morality and social responsibility. Certainly, the education primarily exists for the sake of the society, aiming at inner personal liberation and transformation of the society. Therefore, the purpose of the holistic education, as variously defined by many philosophers, is to bring about the flowering of goodness from within the individual and the society (Harrison and Mather, 2015; Forbes, 2003). Since the ultimate aim of holistic education is the development of holistic students, it is therefore possible to produce good and responsible citizens.

Cajete (1994) emphasizes the interconnectedness of things with nature. This Taoist philosophical idea and call for returning back to and attuning with nature is pretty much in agreement with the holistic education. Why should the educational institutions play the role in bringing students' attention to and interest in the reflection on and learning from nature? The role of the education is not simply to explore the materialistic nature but to consider, as well, its metaphysical value. Student's mind has to transcendent the physical nature in order to be able to discover natural ethical principles and ethical order. Malaguzzi, a founder of the Reggion Emilia School, reinforced Taoist idea of nature as a pedagogical tool and the environment as a teacher. The natural context fosters exploration, self-discovery, actualization, problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, imagination and motivation (Edwards et. al., 1998). Besides, nature does not only represent material dimension but it represents, as David Orr (1992) beautifully describes, "…silence, humility, holiness, connectedness, courtesy, beauty, celebration, giving, restoration, obligation and wildness." Scientists must explore ethical, spiritual and cultural dimensions of natural sciences. Only by emphasizing multiple approaches to the study of the nature, the education can create awareness of the environmental problems. On the contrary, experiencing nature, living with

the nature, establishing the relationship with nature, attuning with nature, being in harmony with nature and caring for nature can not occur if students only approach physical dimension of nature and study nature to get good grades or use nature for material satisfaction. This involves profit and selfishness, which ultimately leads to further destruction of nature.

One of the major aims of the educational system should be teaching students how to establish and maintain mutual and healthy relationships. Thus, the holistic education offers an alternative to the conventional education by exploring inherent relationships between students, society and the nature. Such relationships must be founded on the mutual trust, dialogue and interaction, love and compassion; which is contrary to the idea of the survival of the fittest, market gladiatorial competition and material and professional hierarchy. The former relationships could solve many of our personal, social and ecological problems. The later conception of the relationships results in sorrow and human suffering, aggression, violence and destruction. Obviously, many of these relationships are not emphasized in the educational institutions or they have been approached from the materialistic and so-called professional hierarchical perspective.

Apart for warning and conveying information about human, social and ecological challenges, have educators made any difference in decreasing these dilemmas? Holistic educators take into consideration the inner nature of each student and attempt to develop teaching methodology to match student's needs. Holistic educators, consequently, have developed their interests in learning styles, collaborative learning, critical and analytical thinking and the multiple intelligences (Forbes, 2003; Ricci; Vasic, 2016 and Pritscher, 2015). Multiple approaches to teaching and learning, in addition, strengthen student-educator relationship and prevent passivity, memorization and dependency on textbooks. Holistic educators, being not dictators, act as helpers and facilitators whose task is to help students explore from within knowledge. They also take into consideration the Socratic dialogue and the natural context in which learning and teaching take place (Mulalic and Obralic, 2016; Ricci and Pritscher, 2015; Edwards et al., 1998). Thus, education must emphasize a strong relationship between educators and students who should emphasize discovering students' inherent natural needs rather that relaying on textbooks and throwing at students very often unnecessary and meaningless bulks of information (Childs, 1991). Since humanity's problems are increasing not decreasing, educators fall short of educating the students. Ethical maters cannot simply be reduced to information but on the contrary the change must come from within and inner aspects of the human nature must be understood by educators, their mind and their soul in order to explore goodness of students. Thus, educators must consider wisdom, insight, spirituality, compassion and loving-kindness that can help in changing the mindset of the

students. Forbes (2003) argues that educators and students in the educational institutions are equal for all are following the path of learning. Therefore, such relationship is based on friendship and mutual respect rather than on hierarchy and authority.

The educational institutions must reconsider fundamental human ultimate concerns as the meaning and the purpose of life. These ultimate concerns, students are more interested in than in the acquisition of dry technical knowledge and skills. The education has, then, great responsibility in nurturing the total human being. In order to embark upon human ultimate concerns, the educational institutions must undertake a serious path of liberation from behavioral conditional-materialistic educational approach. Forbes (2003) brilliantly explains, though being greatly influenced by the oriental philosophies, that material acquisition and satisfaction of our needs and desires is not the answer to human dilemmas, which is a call of the educational institutions and the market economy. The society, consequently, struggles to satisfy its unfulfilling desires and adds even more to its sorrow, pain and suffering. Unless the educational institutions address the ultimate human concerns and understand that soul and mind are the original sources of our happiness, social dilemmas and universal social depression and crisis of all kinds could not have been redeemed. If the educational institutions only attempt to instil in students technical knowledge and skills empowering them to secure themselves only materially and neglect ultimate human concerns they are indirectly adding to the sorrow and the crisis of the world.

The question of how can we keep from destroying ourselves has been hunting the humanity throughout the centuries. It is unfortunate that legalism, which is often given preference to in the educational institutions, is one of the major means to facilitate and impose values on students. Behaviorist theory of the human nature has been used not to understand man but, on the contrary, it has been used as a tool to exploit people through conditioning. Students have detached themselves from the educational institutions because values are being imposed on them, rather than explored, and they have got frustrated with what they learn through compulsion and conditioning. Since the educational system does not focus on the inner nature of man, his needs and wants, students very often reject such kind of education except as in the form of technical knowledge.

Goodness, liberation and truth must come from within and not from without, as many unfortunately forgotten philosophers and educators have confirmed (Forbes, 2003). Holistic education, as a result, emphasizes the development of students according to their own nature and their innate love of nature and compassion for all living beings. Holistic educators act as facilitators of student self-development and attempt to help bring about change and realization from within. Therefore, the holistic education puts much emphasis on an inner human

dimension of freedom, a freedom of mind and freedom of a soul (Moore, 2012; Mitchell, 2005). As a whole, the philosophical conception of freedom has been confused with the artificial political conception of freedom unfortunately taught as one of the highest forms of freedom. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a profound protagonist of the holistic education asserts, "freedom is found in no form of government, it is, in the heart of the free man." Change from within and liberation results in individual happiness and expression of compassion and loving-kindness, as Buddhist assert, for all living beings. Such students do away with selfish interests and live in harmony with the society and nature.

Conclusion

Is the holistic education idealistic and utopian? As a physician who is concerned with identifying the medical problem and its cause, and prescribing the diagnosis and the course of the treatment, the researcher, acting as a physician, has attempted to do exactly the same. Certainly, our current human dilemma and a range of human crisis confirm that the education has not answered to our personal, social and environmental problems. Why has the education failed in its mission so miserably? If a physician fails to identify the illness and its cause, he/she would not have been able to heal un unfortunate patient who is desperately seeking help. This analogy one can apply to the conventional education that has failed miserably in solving human dilemmas and challenges for educators have failed, as well, to identify causes and challenges the humanity and education have been facing with. Indeed, it is a mystery why educators always attempt to run away from themselves and, instead, blindly follow alien unnatural patterns? Whose educational philosophy, foreign! Whose needs, market needs! What knowledge, prescribed knowledge! How to think, as taught! Indeed, without exaggeration, this is an analogical description of the modern education.

Holistic education, on the other hand, is the most realistic and an optimistic philosophy of education, though coming not as a savior, for it is natural and comes from within, yet connects everything into a single whole. It identified serious shortcomings of the conventional education and had suggested practical remedies to the current human and educational dilemmas. Integration, rather than the fragmentation of the curriculum and knowledge, is primarily aim. As Hinduism, it includes everything and excludes nothing for everything is the whole or the part of the whole. It nurtures the development of the whole person, thus, answering equally to the mind, soul and body. It neglects none and addresses human ultimate concerns by facilitating change from within. It nurtures goodness and exist for the sole purpose of teaching students the meaning and the purpose of life, thus serving the individual, society and nature.

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