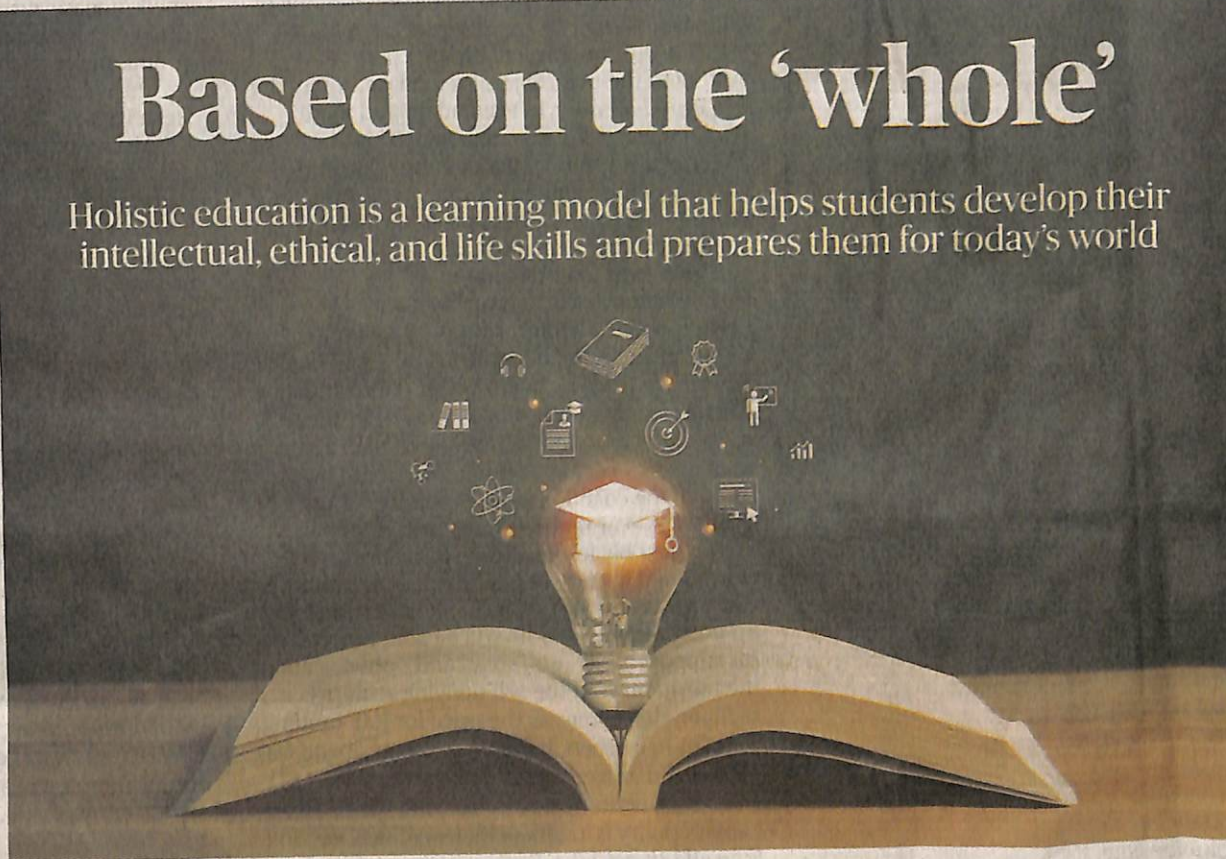


A. Joseph Dorairaj

Human beings are complex and composite wholes. This complexity can be addressed only by holistic education. Unfortunately, the kind of education imparted in most higher educational institutions is piece-meal and fragmented, with a preponderant focus on rationality. The emotional, spiritual, political and ecological dimensions are glossed over. This is a fallout of the Cartesian paradigm with its excessive emphasis on reason (*Cogito, ergo sum*).

Holism, which incorporates the idea of the 'whole', is at the roots of holistic education. The UNESCO document *Learning to Be: A Holistic and Integrated Approach to Values Education for Human Development* emphasises that "Education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values". Holistic education emerged in the 1980s in North America as a reaction against the mechanistic paradigm that resulted in a fragmented, reductionist model of education

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that left out the meta-rational dimensions of life, among other issues. John P. Miller's book *The Holistic Curriculum* (1988) and Ron Miller's journal *Holistic Education Review*, launched in 1988, formally inaugurated the campaign for a holistic education in the West.

In *What Are Schools for? Holistic Education in American Culture*, Miller cautions, "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".

In other words, it is not just another concept or

theory, but a way of thinking and living.

Design and implementation

Teachers have a crucial role to play in both the design and implementation of a holistic curriculum. They should ensure that it is multi-disciplinary with a fine balance of core papers and electives, especially those from across disciplines. Care should be taken to include art subjects for a science programme and conversely a couple of basic science subjects in an arts programme.

In addition to languages, a foundational course in Philosophy should be introduced so that students

are trained to think critically. Second, teachers should promote experiential learning. There is no point in filling students' minds with information bytes that have no direct relevance to life. On the contrary, learning by doing not only stimulates the students but also makes learning fun-filled, inferential, and lasting.

Third, teachers should be both indoors and outdoors people. Traditional classrooms required teachers to operate within four walls. But a holistic curriculum will liberate them from these narrow confines by inviting them to accompany their students on field trips. In fact, they

should occasionally shed their professorial garb and spend time with their students in the cafeteria doubling up as friends and mentors discussing literally everything under the sun. In other words, they should be connected to their students and be a beacon as the latter navigate life's narrow lanes and alleys.

Finally, a holistic curriculum demands re-defining of evaluation procedures, which should be designed to test students' thinking skills. In addition to subject knowledge, life skills should also be tested. Teachers should move away from the traditional roles ascribed to them and

re-invent themselves as mentors and catalysts.

Benefits

Imparting a holistic education has many benefits. The primary ones are: helping students develop into well-rounded individuals, interconnectedness, and a global citizenship with a multicultural outlook.

Today, in a world torn asunder by religious, cultural, linguistic, caste and geographic sectarianism, a holistic education can serve as a balm.

Quite a few students are being reduced to intellectual monsters with poor emotional quotient. Many lack a strong ethical base as well. Holistic education can, to some extent, heal fragmentation and divisiveness by taking into account the head, the heart, and the soul, and the synergy that fuses the different elements into a composite whole.

Gandhi's views on holistic education are profound. He declared: "unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair" and added that "a proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child" (*All Men Are Brothers*).

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