



Holistic Education

Mehmet Gültekin* Fatih Mehmet Cığerci** Ati Merç***

Abstract

Education, like all the other fields in society, is influenced by social, technological, political happenings. The catastrophic environmental crisis and nuclear destructions in the 1960s and 1970s and the increasing corruptions, the breakdowns in family life, moving away from traditional, social and religious values worried people. Besides all these undesired changes, people began to lead a more routine life and devote their lives to values of materialist world. A group of sensitive educators reacted against people's moving away from traditional values and losing their "spirit" and they insisted that education should nurture development of the whole person in terms of intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual. In addition, they also believed that in educational process human values such as peace, honesty, equality, cooperation, love, and understanding should be taken into consideration. Emerging from such opinions, holistic education has gained importance among the educators in the world. This study is based on the historical roots, definitions, philosophies and principles of holistic education are explained.

Keywords: Holistic education, definitions, philosophies, principles.

* Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary Education, Eskisehir, Turkey. E-mail: mgulteki@anadolu.edu.tr

** Lecturer, Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, Bilecik, Foreign Languages Department Turkey. E-mail: fatih.cigerci@bilecik.edu.tr

*** Res.Assist. Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary Education, Eskisehir, Turkey. E-mail: atim@anadolu.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION

It is inevitable that education is affected by the social events, technological developments, and political power and so on. When we have a look at the historical journey of education, we can see that specific periods and events in the history like wars, economical transitions from village life to agriculture and from agriculture to industry directly influenced all education-related fields, including the education theories and approaches, teaching and learning techniques, students' and teachers' roles, etc.

While some education theories or approaches emerged as a reaction to the principles of other theories, some undertook a complementary mission and developed or revised the views of others. The World in the mid-1900s saw a new educational movement called "Holistic Education". But what was the reason behind this new movement? Did it emerge as a reaction to other theories or was it totally new and different from the previous ones? Without taking the events in the period into action, neither can appropriate and clear answers be given to such questions nor can the answers be fully appreciated. 1960s and 1970s witnessed some very catastrophic events such as environmental crisis, nuclear destructions as a result of which chemical and radiation pollution appeared. Moreover, people began to be more worried about the corruptions in the society, increasing family breakdowns, ignorance of the traditional values especially by the young people and new generations. People began to lead a more routine life relying mostly on working and consuming. As people moved away and ignored the moral, religious and traditional values, which are important building blocks of social and communal life, they became more materialist and devoted their life more to the "values of materialist world". Such kinds of happenings, of course, saw opposition from those in different fields, including some educationalists who believed that "conventional mechanistic utilitarian education" produced individuals who were away from reasoning and questioning and who were forced to use their brains and capacities to serve the materialistic world. The educationalists began to question the aims of conventional education to develop students' cognitive and physical skills. For them, education should mean more than this and they claimed that as John Miller suggests, an education should "nurture the development of the whole person and this includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual" (Miller, J. 2005).

In the following parts of this study, the historical roots, definitions, values and principles of holistic education are explained in detail.

The History of Holistic Education

Although as an educational movement in the modern world, the holistic education seems to be a recent movement, its historical roots dates back to indigenous cultures in which indigenous people believe, as opposed modern world view, that the earth and the universe have a meaning and purpose. However, the "holism" comes from the Greek term *holon*. The term means that the universe is made up of integrated wholes which cannot be reduced into parts (Miller, J. 2003).

Depending of the existence of such a word in Greek, it can be said that the Greeks also applied holistic education in the ancient times.

One of the most important figures in the history of holistic education is Rousseau, whose approach is, in fact, more humanistic than humanistic. As opposed to fundamentalists, for whom children are born in original sin, Rousseau believed that all children are born inherently good. Another figure in the holistic education is Pestalozzi, who was influenced by Rousseau. His ideas in education were that classrooms are where meaningful activities are held and where the teachers use their intuition (Miller, J. 2003).

Apart from Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Montessori and Rudolf Steiner are important holistic educators, who both founded their schools on holistic bases. Montessori's education is called "cosmic education", in which she believed that every person are the parts of the universe and especially young people should be encouraged to feel part of the wholeness of the universe, as a result of which learning will naturally attract the students and be inviting. However, to achieve this, it is the holistic teachers who are to decide which ways and techniques are convenient for their students in certain situations and contexts. In other words, diverse learning styles are at the core of education. Furthermore, Montessori also believed that besides mental and physical development, the spiritual development of children should be supported (Miller, R. 2000). The other figure, Rudolf Steiner is the founder of the Waldorf school movement. He is also opposed the conventional education which aims physical, emotional and mental development of students. Actually, according to Steiner, human being or hole person is "physical, emotional, and intellectual, as well as the distinctive characteristics and myriad interrelationships of these dimensions" (Steiner, 1996).

In the late 18970s a group of people, Theodore Rozsak, Goerge Leonard, Joseph Pearce, Beverly Galyean, Jack Canfield, James Fadiman, formed Holistic Education Network and published two volumes of proceedings. Although their activities lasted for a few years and then they studied on other projects, the holistic education continued to gain popularity among educators and psychologists (Rudge, 2008). In the mid-1980s holistic education became recognizable in North America as a reaction against mainstream education or conventional mechanistic education (Miller, 200; Nakagawa, 2000). John Miller and Ron Miller published *The Holistic Curriculum* in 1988 in Canada. In the following years, these two important figures continued to publish books, articles and journals. For example, Ron Miller published a journal called *Holistic Education Review* in the U.S. and also published *What are Schools for? Holistic Education in American Culture*. In addition, a group of educators including Ron Miller founded the Global Alliance for Transforming Education (GATE), which organized annual conferences. Perhaps, one of the most effective events by the GATE was the one in 1991, at the end of which it issued *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective*. At this conference, 10 basic principles of holistic education were listed. On the other hand, Yoshiharu Nakawaga wrote a thesis on holistic education called *Education for Awakening: Eastern Approach to Holistic Education*, which was later published into a book. Then came the book of

Nava (*Holistic Education: Pedagogy of Universal Love*) and Forbe's thesis (*Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Ideas and Nature*) (Rudge, 2008).

Holistic Education: Definitions, Philosophies, Principles

It is difficult to make a certain and definite definition of holistic education. It has different meanings and definitions for the initiatives of this approach. For John Miller, Ron Miller and Nava (Miller, J. 2005), holistic education nurtures the development of the whole person in terms of intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual. For him, it is the spiritual part of the holistic education which was ignored by both Progressive and Humanistic Education, which can be said to be bases for the holistic education. The spirituality means making students have sense of awe and wonder, which involves deepening e sense of connection to cosmos (Miller, J. 2005). The spiritual vision in holistic education has four fundamental concepts:

- There is divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things, and lives and minds.
- We are all part of a complicated life and we are connected and dependent to each other.
- Every life has a purpose in the universe.
- We are involved in a constant evolution (Rudge, 2008).

For Nakagawa and Forbes, the main aim of holistic education is self-transformation; that is, it is to transform the self into higher self and to reach the "ultimacy", by which Forbes means "the highest state of being that a human can aspire to" (Rudge, 2008)).

As for the philosophies underlying the holistic education, Nakagawa put forward six main philosophies: Perennial Philosophy, Indigenous Philosophy, Life Philosophy, Ecological View, Systems Theory, Feminist Thought (Nakagawa, 2000).

- *Perennial Philosophy* is an ancient one which is based on main themes such as divine Reality, Oneness, Wholeness and various dimensions of reality. All these themes are incorporated by holistic education and can, for instance, be recognized in the works of John Miller.
- *Indigenous Philosophy* is based on the major points like reverence for nature, the earth, the universe and the Spirit, which all building blocks of holistic education.
- *Life Philosophy* argues that there is a main Life force or a universal Life process, generating and organizing every being in the cosmos and that everything and ever life in the cosmos has a purpose and meaning. It also claims that the life and the universe are in a constant evolution. The aim of the education is to connect our lives with the fundamental Life.
- *Ecological View* believes that all beings in the nature, life and universe are interconnected and interdependent, which means that everything in the universe is the part of same ecosystem.
- *System Theory*, like ecological view, believes in the interdependence of everything but the ecological system should be explored and explained in a

systematic way. That is why; the theory divides the system into subsystems like the world and systems of plants and animals, primordial life forms, inanimate forms, etc.

- *Feminist Thought* focuses on “caring” relations and such relations can be listed in education and school as caring for the self, for the inner world, for others, for animals, plants and the Earth, etc.

As for the principles or goals of holistic education, on the one hand, we have 10 principles outlined at a conference in 1991 by Global Alliance of Transforming Education (GATE) and on the other hand, we have other principles acknowledged by the leaders in the field. The principles of the initiatives of the approach are Spirituality, Wholeness, and Interconnectedness, all of which have been explained above. On the other hand, GATE issued ten principles at a conference on holistic education in 1991:

Principle 1: Educating for Human Development: Education should support the development of human as a whole. In educational process human values such as peace, honesty, equality, cooperation, love, understanding should be taken into consideration.

Principle 2: Honoring Students as Individuals: Every learner should be recognized as unique and valuable. The knowledge about learning styles, multiple intelligences and psychological foundations of learning should be put more into action in education and individuals should not be classified as “gifted”, “disabled”, etc.

Principle 3: The Central Role of Experience: Education should create an ideal environment in which learners have the chances to experience with the wonders of the natural world, life and nature.

Principle 4: Holistic Education: Every educational institutions and educational policies should take wholeness in the educational process into account.

Principle 5: New Role of Educators: The traditional roles of teachers are to change; therefore, teacher training education programs should be organized in such a way that educators should be aware of their own creativity and inner growth. On the other hand, the school systems, as well as the natural world, workplace, all places of learning, should be kept away from bureaucracy

Principle 6: Freedom of Choice: At each stage of the education and learning process individuals should have opportunities for their own choice.

Principle 7: Educating for a Participatory Democracy: The education should be so democratic that every citizen can take part in different ways in the community and the planet.

Principle 8: Educating for Global Citizenship: Every individual is a global citizen.

Principle 9: Educating for Earth Literacy: Education should be based on respect for life and promote literacy everywhere by which people will be able to recognize their role, scope of responsibility.

Principle 10: Spirituality and Education: Each individual should be recognized as spiritual beings and they express themselves via their talents, skills, intelligence, etc. Therefore, education should also support the growth of spiritual life in a healthy way.

All these principles also give information about what the holistic education is, what the components of the holistic education are and how they will reflect on education, schools and curriculum.

Finally, for a better understanding of the subject and to give a brief summary of the features of holistic education, Gallegos Nava made a comparison between mechanistic education and holistic education as follows (Schreiner, 2005).

Mechanistic Education	Holistic Education
Interdisciplanarity	Transdisciplanirarity
Fragmentation of knowledge	Integration of knowledge
Systemic	Holistic
Empirical and analytical	Empirical, analytical and holistic
Development of thought	Development of intelligence
Scientistic, dogmatic	Secular, spiritual
Reductionist	Integral
Focused on teaching	Focused on learning
Static, predetermined curriculum	Open, dynamic curriculum
Curriculum focused on disciplines	Curriculum focused on human knowledge
Superficial changes in behavior	Profound changes in awareness
Academic Disciplines	Inquiry based
Mechanistic psychology	Perennial psychology
Explores the external quantitative dimension of the universe	Explores the external/internal and quantitative/qualitative dimensions of the universe
We can know the planet without knowing ourselves	Only by knowing ourselves can we know the planet
There exists only one intelligence: logical-mathematical	There are at least seven equally valid intelligences
Based on bureaucratic organizations	Based on communities of learning
Based on the mechanistic science of Descartes, Newton, Bacon	Based on the cutting-edge science of Bohm, Prigogine, Pribram
Paradigm of simplification	Paradigm of complexity
Predatory conscience	Ecological conscience

CONCLUSION

We live in such a world that new social, environmental, technological changes take place continuously and all these changes have their influence and reflections on education. There are now increasing numbers of educators who believe that education for our era must be holistic. Such educators believe that everything on our earth is interconnected in countless ways and that we must form a sustainable, just, and peaceful society in harmony with the Earth and its life. We must also respect diversity of life form in our planet.

In terms of education, holistic education is of the opinion that individuals should search meaning as an intrinsic aspect of their full development in a more healthy way and by this way a health society can be created. On the other hand, holistic education nurtures the aspirations of the human spirit. Finally, it does not outline a particular curriculum in education but give suggestions about how holistic curriculum should be. However, a holistic curriculum should take into consideration that education should be dynamic and create an awareness of learners' whole lives and that learning is a lifelong process, both an inner process of self-discovery and a cooperative activity and is active, self-motivated, supportive, and encouraging of the human spirit.

REFERENCES

- Miller, J. (2003). Holistic education: learning for an interconnected world. *Encyclopedia of life support system (EOLSS)*. www.eolss.net/SampleChapters/C11/E6-61-04-01.pdf (Cited on 15.12.2012).
- Miller, J. (2005). Holistic learning. *Holistic learning and spirituality in education* (Ed: Miller, P.; Karsten, S.; Denton, D.; Orr, D.; Kates, I.). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Miller, R. (2000). Holistic Education: a brief introduction. *Paths of learning*. www.pathsoflearning.net/articles_Holistic_Ed_Introduction.php (Cited on 17.12.2012).
- Miller, R. (2004). Educational alternatives: a map of the territory. *Paths of learning*. http://www.pathsoflearning.net/articles_Educational_Alternatives.php (Cited on 17.12.2012).
- Nakagawa, Y. (2000). *Education for awakening: an eastern approach to holistic education*. Brandon, VT: Foundation for Educational Renewal. (www.books.google.com).
- Rudge, L. (2008). Holistic education: an analysis of its pedagogical application. Phd. Dissertation. Ohio: The Ohio State University.
- Schreiner, P. (2005). Mechanistic versus holistic education. *Holistic education resource book – learning and teaching in an ecumenical context*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag. (www.books.google.com)
- Steiner, R. (1996). *The child's changing consciousness as the basis of pedagogical practice*. New York: Anthroposophic Press.
- GATE (Global Alliance of Transforming Education) (1991). Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective., 240-241. <http://www.ties-edu.org/GATE/Education2000.html> (Cited on 09.07.2012)

Holistik Eğitim

Özet

Eğitim; toplumdaki diğer tüm alanlar gibi, sosyal, teknolojik, politik vb. olgulardan etkilenmektedir. İnsanoğlu, 1960'lı ve 1970'li yıllarda yıkıcı çevresel krizler ve nükleer felaketlerle, artan toplumsal yozlaşmalar, ailedeki çözümler, geleneksel, toplumsal ve ahlaki değerlerden uzaklaşmalara tanıklık etmiştir. Tüm bu olumsuz değişmelerle birlikte insanlar, yaşamlarını materyalist dünyanın değerlerine göre sürdürmeye başladılar. Buna karşın duyarlı bir grup eğitimci, insanların geleneksel değerlerden uzaklaşmalarına ve "maneviyat"larını kaybetmelerine karşı çıkarak, eğitimin bireyleri; bilişsel, duyuşsal, fiziksel, sosyal, estetik ve manevi açıdan bir bütün olarak yetiştirmesi gerektiğini savunmuşlardır. Ayrıca bu eğitimciler, eğitim sürecinin barış, dürüstlük, eşitlik, işbirliği, sevgi ve anlayış gibi değerleri dikkate alması gerektiğine inanmışlardır. Bu düşüncelerle ortaya çıkan holistik eğitim, tüm dünyada eğitimciler arasında önemli yer bulmuştur. Bu çalışma, holistik eğitimin tarihsel sürecini, tanımlarını, felsefelerini ve ilkelerini açıklamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Holistik eğitim, tanımlar, felsefeler, ilkeler.