Holistic Education (Word count-1002)

Though the principles, perspectives and frameworks of holistic education can be traced far back in recorded history to early philosophical and religious teachings, the contemporary use of the term is rather new. Definitions, methods, philosophies and descriptions of holistic education vary somewhat among educators and scholars as it has been viewed from different perspectives, but it is basically concerned with educating the whole person--body, mind and soul--to develop his or her fullest potential.

The term holism and holistic was coined by Jan Smuts from the Greek words “holus” which mean whole, and “holon” which means entity. Smuts saw holism as a process of creative evolution in which the tendency of nature is to form wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts. He developed a philosophy of holism early in the twentieth century that viewed reality as organic and evolutionary, including both its material and spiritual aspects. These ideas, were published in his most important book, *Holism and Evolution*, in 1926, have recently become more accepted, though holistic educators do not generally regard Smuts as an important influence.

The historical philosophical and psychological figures who are considered to have more directly influenced the field of holistic education often includes Rousseau, Emerson, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Steiner, Jung, Krishnamurti, Whitehead and Maslow. A more recent list of influences on holistic education might include the following individuals: C. Rogers, M. Ferguson, F. Capra. J. Pearce, D. Bohm, D. Sloan, K. Wilber, P. Palmer and T. Roszak. Although none of these individuals identified themselves as holistic educators or would be identified as leaders of holistic education, their ideas and
writings have been an influence on the field. J. Miller and R. Miller are current writers who identify with holistic education and would be considered leading figures in the field.

From the list of influences above it can be seen that holistic education has some relation to and can to some extent be identified with, but not limited to, the major influences these individuals have founded, such a romanticism, transcendentalism, humanism, systems theory and integralism.

Holistic education has developed largely as a reaction to the mechanistic, reductionistic and materialistic conceptions that have come to dominate popular thinking and education in the last century. The result of these paradigms has been a fragmented and limited approach to human development and education that has lead to a focus on developing physical, behavioral and intellectual capacities for economic and material benefits while ignoring or discounting social, emotional, psychological, moral, creative, aesthetic and spiritual natures and capacities. Holistic education has emerged out of a need to address this imbalance and the growing disillusionment with the current apparently dysfunctional approaches to further individual and collective human interests and potentialities. As holistic education challenges the dominant worldview and practice in education, it has been marginalized, and its influence in educational, scientific and political areas limited.

Holistic educators believe that the body, mind and soul are integral aspects of human nature that should be considered in treating the whole person and that holistic education is a more defensible, practical and effective approach to developing well-balanced and healthy people who can be valued contributors to society according to their potentialities.
and the opportunities available to them. Until all aspects of the human being and the environment are properly treated in education, individuals and humanity will suffer from a lack of balance and the denial of part of their reality.

Holistic education views all aspects of life as interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. As such, it is ecological and global, encouraging an understanding and appreciation of multiple contexts and connections. When we disconnect or dissociate with reality, especially parts of ourselves, we are limiting development. Education should consider the whole person—physically, mentally and spiritually—and recognize that we affect our environment and our environment affects us. Holistic educators are especially concerned with the failure of modern education to consider the emotional, social and spiritual natures of students. It seeks to develop the full potential of the person in a humanistic fashion that recognizes and honors each individual’s unique talents and capacities.

Holistic education sees active positive engagement in relationships with the world and others as one of the most powerful means of authentic education. It believes in the innate goodness of people and that they will develop into happy, healthy and well-balanced individuals given the right conditions. Education then is primarily a drawing out or unfolding of the individual’s potentialities, not a dispensing of information or instilling of learning. To do this requires the educators to be well developed themselves and to be sensitive, knowledgeable and creative in helping their students realize their true natures.
It encourages individual and collective responsibility in an ongoing quest for greater realization, fulfillment, meaning, understanding and connection.

Holistic education finds traditional education harmful in that it fragments and compartmentalizes knowledge and learning into subjects and discrete unconnected units, encourages competition over compassion and cooperation and is subject- and teacher-centered rather than spirit- and learner-centered. Holistic education sees the whole as greater than the sum of its parts and that the whole system approach requires moving from the limitations of a rationalistic, linear and simple approach to a more intuitive, non-linear and complex view. It connects and makes a relationship among linearity and intuition; body, mind and spirit; the individual and the collective and the many and varied forms of knowing and knowledge. As a result, individuals attains a degree of autonomy and authenticity that allows them to be progressive agents in advancing their own and others development and welfare.

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See also Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Steiner

References and Further Reading
