

Analyzing Nurturing of Children's Identities through Holistic Pedagogy in a Language Learning Classroom

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Abstract – *Is it possible in this competitive world of merit based global education, for a teacher of a school, to nurture students in a holistic pedagogy? We live in a crazy world of social media, which connects us virtually and children are losing human connectivity with self and others, dismantling their inner stability of mind. The measurement of Happiness for parents and students depends on numeric-based academic success, rather being knowledge-based. School teachers forcefully rush to complete the syllabus. Parents push their children into branded tutorial cages, which are considered to be as trump-card of success. It's about how much you've earned, not what you've learned. The philosophies of our great visionaries like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda do exist in books of national's curriculum, school's almanac and educational manuals, but how far, are they instilled in a classroom pedagogy of a private or a public school teacher? Keywords: holistic learning, child's identity, language pedagogy.*

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INTRODUCTION

Cambridge dictionary defines the word 'Holistic' as dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone and not just a part. The objective behind holistic approach in teaching and learning is to help the students in learning the purpose of why the topic needs to be learnt, what is there in the topic that they are learning, how it is useful in their real life and such learning approach brings attention. It involves all the senses of the child, rather than just memorizing the chapter and writing something. The aim is to connect the concept of the lesson to the real life of a learner. Ron Miller, founder of the journal *Holistic Education Review* (now entitled *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*) has defined holistic education as *philosophy of education that is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning.* Very similar to the aims of education of great educationist and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore as reflected in Santiniketan, educational institution founded by him are *Self Realization*, considering Spiritualism as the essence of humanism; this concept is Tagore's educational philosophy. He stated that *"Self-realization is an important aim of education. Manifestation of personality depends upon the self-realization and spiritual knowledge of individual."*

Tagore emphasized moral and spiritual training in his educational thought. Moral and spiritual education is more important than bookish knowledge for an integral development of human personality.

In a book, under the title, Rabindranath Tagore's, *Educational Ideas and Experiments*, Christine Kupfer, quotes Tagore's vision of holistic school "The watery stuff into which literary nectar is now diluted for being served up to the young takes full account of their childishness, but none of them as growing human beings. Children's books should be such as can partly be understood by them and partly not. In our childhood we read every available book from one end to the other; and both what we understood, and what we did not, went on working within us. That is how the world itself reacts on the child consciousness. The child makes its own what it understands, while that which is beyond leads it on a step forward." [Tagore, Rabindranath 1917. *My Reminiscences*. New York: The Macmillan Company, p. 102.] For holistic teaching, "[A] teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame." [Tagore, R. *Creative Unity*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2002 (1922), 187.] In his school, Tagore also uses mantras, ['*Philosophy of Our People*,' p. 565] meditation (i.e., sitting still for 20 minutes in the morning, without being forced to think of anything in particular, even if children just "watch squirrels"), [Tagore, R. *Personality*. New York: The Macmillan Co, 1917, p. 178]. Tagore proclaimed that the main reason

why he can teach children, without having any qualifications, was that he knew how to make them happy. [The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 4, a Miscellany. Ed. Nityapriya Ghosh. Delhi, 'To the Child,' pp. 524-526.] His aspiration was to fill his students' hearts with joy and love. He recognized that emotions, and particularly joy, are a precondition for successful learning – not only because they make learning less strenuous, but also because they enable the learner not only to know but to properly assimilate information. [Tagore, R. Personality. New York: The Macmillan Co, 1917, p. 15] Tagore's education for love and sympathy included love to God and humanity (ethical and spiritual education), love to others (peace education) and love to nature (environmental education).

On the path of strengthening Holistic education, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), our great educationist of India, has set forth his philosophy in the life Divine. He based his philosophy on the original Vedanta of the Upanishads. Sri Aurobindo believed that earlier Vedanta represent and integral or balanced view of life. Sri Aurobindo believes that man is the maker of his own destiny and education is a big tool to achieve the target. He believed that the best thing in man in his spirituality. He was an intellectual who intensely analyzed human and social evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, the education must relate to the whole aspects of human life such as physical, psychic, mental, beauty, power, knowledge and love. Integral Education is basically the cultivation of these aspects in human being. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was an Idealistic to the core. His Idealistic philosophy of life was based upon Vedanta philosophy of Upanishad.

For India, Sri Aurobindo stressed on a kind of education, that is "proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit."

When it comes to discuss holistic educational teaching and learning today, it becomes imperative to include the philosophical contributions of Shri Aurobindo Ghosh towards Education as it relates the importance of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education in our Indian scenario with different components of education: principles of teaching, aims of education, curriculum, transaction, school, relationship of teacher and pupil, discipline etc. To Sri Aurobindo, Education of values was the most important. He believed that the best thing in man in his spirituality.

For teachers, Swami Vivekananda's vision on Holistic education, is also promoted through educational modules under the title "Swami Vivekananda and Education Empowering Teacher Educators" (2015) by NCTE (National Council of Teachers Education). And the book (Modules I-VI) is prefaced by the aim of holistic approach for teaching and learning by Swami

Vivekananda as, "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopedias the rishis." (Swami Vivekananda and Education Empowering Teacher Educators, Modules, NCTE, 2015).

OBJECTIVE

The present paper discusses the holistic educational contributions of three great Indian visionaries, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda who defined the importance of holistic approach for school children. These visionaries provided educational paradigms for Indian teachers and educational institutions for holistic pedagogy with an aim towards overall development of children, the focus was on development of high moral character in every child. The article highlights inputs of educational principles of these three visionaries in teaching two primary grades, grade IV and V of Delhi based, Queen Global International School where children were weak in language subjects like English and French. The students showed least interest and least cohesiveness among students. To bring any improvement among children, it was essential to understand children at their emotional level, therefore qualitative methods were chosen by the researcher. This research paper is a voice to revive the importance of holistic education for school children and teachers. It covers qualitative experiences of the researcher teacher while teaching young children, with an aim towards transforming competitive classrooms of self-centeredness into cooperative classrooms of togetherness by amalgamating holistic approaches of these three Indian visionaries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. CONCEPT OF EDUCATION AND PRINCIPLES/METHODS OF TEACHING

Rabindranath Tagore said— "The fact that education is something vital makes the teachers duties and responsibilities deserving of serious attention. The teachers should know that it is for him to inspire life in the students by his own living to enkindle the flame of knowledge in the students by his own knowledge." education based on the principle of freedom, natural trust, co-operation and joy. (Educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, Dreamsea Das, IMPACT: IJRHAL, ISSN (E): 2321-8878; ISSN (P): 2347-4564 Vol. 2, Issue 6, June 2014) Rabindranath Tagore emphasized the following methods of teaching:

(1) Teaching through Tours and Trips:

Tagore believed that the subjects like history, geography, economics and other social sciences can be effectively taught through excursions and tours to important spots. By this students will get an opportunity to observe numerous facts and gain first-hand knowledge through direct experience.

(2) Learning by activities:

Development of child's body and mind by learning through activity is essential.

(3) Narration-cum-discussion and debate method:

To develop oratory abilities of the students. Students were encouraged to solve problems of various areas through rational debate and thorough discussion.

(4) Heuristic Method:

Rabindranath Tagore introduced heuristic method as an important method of teaching in his educational institution. In this method first, the students, are asked questions to clarify their doubts on topics and teachers try to satisfy them by their correct answers. Then the teacher asks the questions to students to evaluate how far the students are able to comprehend the topic discussed in the class.

Sri Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy was the awakening of the individual as a spiritual being. It should be related to life truth and self-mastery by the child. Sri Aurobindo made a five-fold classification of human nature i.e. the physical, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual, corresponding to five aspects of education – physical education, vital education, mental education, psychic education and spiritual or super mental education.

Sri Aurobindo suggested teaching methods like activity method, observation, self-discovery, discussion method, learning by doing, learning by self-experience during teaching learning process. He enumerated principles of teaching like the first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task master he is a helper and guide. The teacher's work is to suggest and not to impose on the mind of the student but helps him to perfect his mind, the instrument of knowledge and encourages him every way in this process. Knowledge is within the pupil and the pupil has to must help himself to bring it out, but he needs help. Somebody must tell him where it is and how it can be 'habituated to rise to the surface.' The teacher alone can do this work. The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its growth. He stated that *"The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the*

parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition." Sri Aurobindo enunciated certain sound principles of good teaching, which have to important for a teacher to pursue holistic teaching approach, when actually engaged in the process of learning. According to Sri Aurobindo, the first principle of true teaching is "that nothing can be taught." He explains that the knowledge is already dormant within the child and for this reason. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster; "he is a helper and a guide." The role of the teacher "is to suggest and not to impose". Swami Vivekananda was an idealist and a spiritualist. With regard to teaching methods he was of the view that children should be made to learn themselves. As all knowledge is within them and learning is only a function of their mind, they should only be made active. The teacher and the curricula should act only as stimuli. The child should not be a passive recipient of knowledge. In Class Group Discussions with the teacher were considered most important a method of teaching-learning by him. Meditation and concentration were also considered important by him as through them developed the mental powers of the child. To develop self-confidence for learning was also emphasized by him that the teacher should encourage in the class.

METHODOLOGY

For the researcher, with a challenging aim to create holistic teaching learning environment in a classroom of grades IV and V in a Delhi based international school, where children were from upper middle class family backgrounds. It was observed that the performance report cards of maximum number of students of these grades showed low interest in English and French subjects. The students were enthusiastic learners, but why weren't they interested in reading and writing languages? Why weren't they cohesive among themselves in language activities? These were intriguing parts of quest for the researcher. As permission was granted by the school to the researcher to teach two languages, English and French to grade IV and V, from the month of October 2017 after their mid-term evaluation. It was decided to reconsider the teaching techniques based on the teaching concepts from the three Indian visionaries: Tagore's Heuristic methodology, Sri Aurobindo's principle of being a facilitator or just a guide and letting students find their answers through learning by doing. Swami Vivekananda's principle of open group discussions and doing guided Meditations in the classes. To understand children's at affective level, researcher adopted qualitative technique of diary writing to bring improvement in children's cohesive nature and in their academic performance. The researcher was the language teacher for these children. Observation was the main data collection tool. Diaries were distributed to the students to write

daily diaries with what they did, felt and one what one act of kindness they did during the day. Students showed positive enthusiasm on getting diaries and taking responsibilities given by the teacher. Responsibility of each student was to inquire from other students if they wrote in their diaries. The students were free to write anything, there was no word limit. The students were free to refuse to write the diary. Surprisingly, most of the students were personally keen to take the responsibility to write in the diary every day. The teacher only acted as a facilitator in opening the child's wings to feel them self-responsible and to encourage them for creative writing skills in the class. Final submission of the diaries was asked after two months, just before final exams in February, 2018. In the context of foreign language teaching, the french subject, the researcher, took Rabindranath Tagore's heuristic method, French vocabulary lessons were planned in song based form, composed and made by the teacher herself and it was taught to students with music. The students were asked sing the song to each other, to help and correct each other verbally. Most of the students showed interest and portrayed their leadership skills. The more they practiced it in the classroom, they more became proficient in singing the french words orally. The best part observed was the leadership skills where students were helping their peers in correcting them without any hesitation or pride. By following, Rabindranath Tagore's heuristic method in the foreign language classrooms, by giving these students to read the text, to ask questions to clarify their doubts on topics, then the teacher asks the questions to students to evaluate how far the students are able to comprehend the topic discussed in the class. The rate of participation increased in the class. Every student was observed involved in the process of learning with fun and freedom.

In English literature classes, the students need to refer to dictionary and find meanings of the meanings. Further relating the meaning with their own lives. The students were not interested before, but gradually they are showing interest in doing it by themselves. Guided Meditation is useful for young students to relax and bring focus to their thinking process. As the teacher-researcher is a meditation teacher also, the process to creating a calm yet innovative environment wasn't tough. The main objective of inculcating awareness and attention with the help of few minutes of meditative rounds are helpful as students participated and they were responsive during lesson-learning. Such pedagogical improvements by the school teachers should be encouraged by the school authorities as such kind of research work would be an on-going process for bringing a positive change. And it needs time, effort of the teacher and cooperation of the school.

CONCLUSION

Today, one of the major shortcomings of our educational system is that the focus is only one on

dimension of the student's well-being and that is the intellectual development of the child through academic instruction in any modernly equipped, English medium Indian schools. The hype of internet, games, social media, lesser interaction time between parent and child, has led to solitude and aggressiveness in children. It is imperative for teachers, parents and schools to understand that our pedagogy needs holistic educational approach as laid down by our own Indian visionaries of holistic education of Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda.

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