Chapter 76
Artful Learning:
Holistic Curriculum Development for Mind, Body, Heart, and Spirit

Randee Lipson Lawrence
National Louis University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter begins with a critique of traditional models of curriculum development as overly rigid, fragmented, and disconnected from the true nature of the learner. Holistic learning is described as engaging the mind, body, heart, and spirit of the learner in relationship to the learning environment. Holistic learning is earth-centered, participatory, and inclusive of the cultural context of the learners. These various learning domains and their relationship to curriculum are discussed, including the application of learning from indigenous communities. Several examples of arts-based and creative learning activities are offered along with holistic ways of developing learning objectives and assessing learning.

INTRODUCTION

The typical curriculum in adult and higher education is based on the acquisition of knowledge, primarily fostering the rational or analytic abilities of the learners to the exclusion of other ways of knowing. Traditional schooling privileges propositional or cognitive epistemologies. We are taught by listening to lectures, reading scholarly writing and engaging in rational discourse. While these ways of learning are valid, they draw on only a part of our human potential, as we are whole, thinking, feeling and sensing human beings. To be fully human, according to Greene (1995) requires accessing our imagination and seeing beyond what is, to what could be. The role of imagination "is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected." (p. 28). The intent of this chapter is to describe a holistic, spiritual and imaginal approach to developing curriculum that engages all of who we are.

Integrating affective, somatic and spiritual dimensions along with the cognitive into our curriculum through artistic expression (visual art, drama, music, storytelling and poetry) engages multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2006) freeing learners to fully participate in the learning process and to explore meaningful relationships between the subject and the self, and the self with others, which often leads to lasting change or transforma-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8246-7.ch076

tion. Students who are willing to risk stepping out of their comfort zone to embrace these alternative ways of learning tend to discover that they have reawakened an aspect themselves that was there all along but had been dormant. Intentionally inviting creative expression into class activities and assignments makes space for holistic learning to occur.

In 1926, Eduard Lindeman wrote: "*Education is life* – not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living. Consequently all static concepts of education which relegate the learning process to the period of youth are abandoned. The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings." (Lindeman, 1926, pp. 4-5). If as Lindeman passionately declared, the whole of life is learning, then we must consider the ways in which learning occurs as an integrated whole.

Understanding Holistic Education

Miller (2007) sees holistic education as incorporating the principles of balance, inclusion and connection. It maintains a balance of individual and collaborative learning, the content and pedagogy of the curriculum, factual knowledge and imagination, rational and intuitive knowledge and quantitative and qualitative assessment. Miller is not suggesting we get rid of our traditional rational curriculum but that we balance it with the intuitive, the embodied and the spiritual. Inclusion does not see the curriculum as something that is given to the student but rather something that is created with the learner. Connection focuses on relationships between the different ways of knowing, relationships between the learner and the larger community, relationships with the earth and the learner's relationship with his or her soul. Miller (2006, p. 3) also describes "timeless learning" which is much more than learning facts. It is a type of deep powerful learning that touches our soul. It is embodied, connected, integrated, soulful, participatory, mysterious and unexplainable. Miller believes this learning can also be transformative as it "can lead to profound change in the individual" (p. 8)

In 1990, eighty international holistic educators gathered at a conference in Chicago and drafted the statement *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective*. This vision statement was created as a critique of public education at that time. Holistic education was seen as including the following components and purposes (Flake, 1993):

- Deepening relationships to self, family, community, the planet and the cosmos.
- Balancing learning for economic gain with learning necessary for responsible action.
- Respecting individuality by eliminating uniform assessment.
- Focusing on experiential learning.
- Honoring multiple ways of knowing including the spiritual domain.
- De-emphasizing the role of teacher as technician
- Promoting freedom of inquiry and expression
- Teaching for participatory democracy and social justice.
- Educating for global citizenship.
- Promoting earth literacy. Recognizing the interdependence of all beings.
- Nourishing the health of the spirit

According to Collister (2010, p. 52) "Holistic education is not a curriculum or methodology. It is a set of assumptions that recognizes that humans seek meaning, not just facts or skills." Holistic learning activities are embodied, experiential and make use of aesthetic activities that engage the senses.

Heron (1996, p. 104) advances a "holistic epistemology" which incorporates four kinds of knowledge including experiential (through direct encounter), presentational (intuitive and imaginal), propositional (theoretical and conceptual) and practical. "In my view those modes of knowing