

IMPACT OF *HOLISTIC LIVING* COURSE IN THE CURRICULUM OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF PSG INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Holistic living involves a range of philosophical orientations and pedagogical customs. Its core is on wholeness. It attempts to bring out manifold human experiences and also suggests that educational know-how upgrades a more balanced development and encourages the relationship with different aspects of the individual, namely, intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and aesthetic as well as the relationships between the individual and other people, the individual and natural environment, the inner self of the students and the external. This paper endeavors to understand the impact of introducing holistic living course in the curriculum of first year students of PSG Institute of Technology and Applied Research (PSGiTech). With the aim to evolve an interconnected and energetic pedagogy, holistic living classes have been incorporated in the curriculum to develop and nourish physical and mental health of the students. A total of 60 students responded to a questionnaire survey to measure their experience of attending holistic living course. Results indicate that Holistic Living course induces a positive move in the students' minds. Their participation in Yoga, meditation, and management games renewed their spirits among the conventional lecture hours.

KEYWORDS: *Holistic Living, Intellectual, Spiritual, Pedagogy, Curriculum*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

The relational worldview model for holistic living can be best portrayed through three major factors, that is, mind, body, and spirit that must come into balance together and their positive relationship of these factors and with society and nature. Besides the internal harmony of mind, body, and spirit, ancient literature vocalizes relational harmony with the ecology and society. It illuminates the intrinsic interdependence of all beings. Social harmony with the percepts of dharma and karma are considered essential for a healthy and peaceful life journey toward self-realization.

Engineer's greatest and most immediate question for the 21st century is to reanalyze and reengineer education to ensure the profession is not converted into a group of technicians on the sidelines of global competence. In this age of growth in technology and education, it is important to fine-tune the life skills of budding engineers.

With this as the objective, PSG iTech has come forward to bring about fresh blood into the mainstream of engineering education. Although it is agreed that conventional engineering fundamentals such as statics, dynamics, circuits, thermodynamics and fluid mechanics must remain the focus of engineering degree, we firmly state that engineering students are ill-served without reciprocal fundamentals in creative thought, historical and cultural context, holistic and innovative design, management and entrepreneurship.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The attempt to define and describe holistic education is suggestive of Aristotle's definition of education.

mankind is by no means agreed about the best things to be taught, whether we look to virtue or the best life. Neither is it clear whether education is more concerned with intellectual or moral virtue. The existing practice is perplexing: no one knows on what principle we should proceed—should the useful like, or should virtue, or should the higher knowledge, be *the main aim of our training?*

(Aristotle, Politics, 8:2:1337a35)

Holistic is an adjective defined as “relating to a whole, including or involving all of something, especially all of somebody's physical, mental, and social conditions, not just physical symptoms, in the treatment of illness” (Encarta Dictionary).

The origin of holistic education can be traced back to several major contributors. Originating theorists include Jean – Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau Bronson Alcott, Johann Pestaloz, Friedrich Froebel and Francisco Ferrer. More recent theorists are Rudolt Steiner, Maria Montessori, Francis Parker, John Dewey, John Caldwell Holt, George Dennison Kieran Egan, Howard Gardner, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Paul Goodman, Iran Illich and Paulo Freire. Keeping in mind the ideas of these pioneers, many feel that the core ideas of holistic education did not indeed take form until the cultural paradigm shift that began in the 1960s.

Holistic education evolved as a response to the outstanding worldview of mainstream education, often referred to the “mechanistic” or “Cartesian-Newtonian” worldview. Rather than attempting to accomplish an education model, holistic education seeks to question the fragmented, reductionist assumptions of mainstream culture and education (R. Miller 2000a, Schreiner2005). In other words, holistic education is concerned with “underlying worldviews or paradigms in an attempt to transform the foundations of education” (Nakagava 2001). As Ron Miller (1992), one of the leaders of the movement, argues 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*.

Significant forward motion was accomplished by the first national holistic education conference conducted at the University of California, San Diego, in July 1979, which comprised 31 workshops. According to Harris (1980), the term holistic came into use from this conference. The concept spread slowly until the late 1980 when a Canadian scholar, John P. Miller, published his book *The Holistic Curriculum* (1988), based on which a new journal called *Holistic Education Review* was launched in the United States..

According to John P. Miller, it is essentially concerned with connections in human experience — connections between mind and body, between linear thinking and intuitive ways of knowing, between academic disciplines,

between individual and community, and between the personal self and the transpersonal self that all spiritual traditions believe to exist beyond the personal ego. The Holistic Curriculum briefly describes how holistic thinking assimilates spiritual and scientific perspectives, drawing upon romantic, humanistic, and other radical options to the atomistic worldview of the modern age.

Krishnamurti, J. (1953). *Education and the Significance of Life*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publisher [AQ: Please move the highlighted text to the reference list.]. Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was a remarkable teacher, one of the few genuine sages of the twentieth century. In *Education and the Significance of Life*, he provides a perspective that is not only radical but truly transformational. This is a piercing critique of modern schooling based upon Krishnamurti's profound wisdom into the human minds and its activity by fear, prejudice, and ideology. Here, Krishnamurti explains that our mainstay on dogmas, institutions, and authority figures prevents individuals from achieving the deep self-knowledge that leads to genuine wisdom. He argues that conventional forms of education "suffocate" the mind and heart by forcing young people to coincide with the adults' obligatory and incomplete understanding of the true meaning of life.

Holistic education addresses the broadest development of the whole person at the cognitive and affective levels (Singh, 1996). It aims for the fullest possible human development, enabling an individual to become the very best or finest and develop fully 'those capacities that together make up a human being' (Forbes, 2003). A main component of holistic education is its core on the *interconnectedness* of experience and reality. Holistic education attempts to develop a pedagogy that is interconnected and energetic and thus is in harmony with the cosmos. In contrast, much of traditional education tends to be stationary and fragmented, ultimately promoting disaffection and suffering (Neves, 2009). Holistic education focuses on the relationship between the whole and the part and suggests that teaching and learning approaches need to be established in a substantial vision. Within this holistic standpoint, the student is positioned as an active, participatory and critical learner who perceives and understands holistic education. The holistic vision involves a sense of the whole person connected to his or her surrounding context and environment (J, Miller 2004).

According to Scott Forbes (2003), holistic education frequently claims that it wants to (1) educate the whole child (all parts of the child), (2) educate the student as a whole (not an assemblage of parts), and (3) see the child as part of a whole (society, humanity, the environment, some spiritual whole, etc.) from which it is not meaningful to extract the student.

Holistic educators are persuaded that the further development of civilization and human consciousness requires a revived measure of respect and reverence for the inner life of a growing person (R, Miller 2006). Holistic education furnishes students with a sense of meaning and order for things. By acquainting students to a holistic view of the planet, life on Earth, and the emerging world community, as a "context of meaning", holistic strategies permit students to sense and extrapolate the various contexts that shape and give meaning to life (Clark 1991). Holistic education is an expedition for both the educator and the student. For both, the nature of holistic education can change as they progress through the program and draw diverse expertise from it. The process of holistic education must therefore be adaptable and energetic to hold these personal differences and influences and, moreover, differences in the rate of personal progression (Hare 2006). Holistic education is the education for 21st century, aimed at evolving human beings with a global conscience, a vision of peace, love, and intelligence (Nava 2001).

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

PSG Institute of Technology and Applied Research, an engineering institution, was established in the year 2014, with a vision to promote knowledge and impart technical and life skills in the mainstream of technical education. With five engineering programs, namely, ECE, EEE, CSE, and mechanical and civil, right from its inception, it has continued to produce quality results in the Anna University Examinations, staying No. 1 in the ranking. Currently with about 950 students, numerous one credit courses and value-added courses are being provided to upgrade the technical knowledge of the students. From the academic year 2016, in alignment with the vision and mission statements of the institution that states, *“To achieve excellence in education and research and nurture engineers with ethics, who will face global challenges to serve industry and society”*, it was decided to acquaint *Holistic Living* course in the curriculum as a value-added course other than the regular courses offered by the Anna University, during the first semester. Holistic Living Education allows budding engineers to pay attention to the interconnectedness among body, mind and soul. It elaborates their emotional intelligence to face real-life challenges and ultimately nourish their holistic development and wholeness.

NEED FOR AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

The integrated curriculum unfolds knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions in all disciplines of development including social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual. Additionally, it guarantees that learning is meaningful and pertinent to a child as it preserves the focus on holistic development.

The broader objectives of introducing holistic living in the curriculum are:

- To develop knowledge, skills, attitude and dispositions to enhance their physical well-being
- To acquire knowledge about body–mind health and maintain a desirable level of health and fitness
- To function as contributing members of society by developing effective social skills and emotional competence
- To develop the disposition to be learners – curiosity, independence, social responsibility, initiative, creativity, willingness to take risks, to ask questions and to persevere

METHODOLOGY

What is a holistic “curriculum”?

Since time immemorial, there seems to be no single method or technique for practicing holistic education. To understand holistic curriculum, we need to apprehend that each student is a energetic assemblage of experiences, feelings, ideas, dreams, fears and hopes. Exactly for this reason the curriculum of holistic education at PSG iTech has been planned so that the teachers were given autonomy to address topics of their preference.

Participants

About 53 students of a class attended holistic living courses in a session of 50 minutes per class for two days a week. Topics like time management, mind mapping, etc were addressed on reflective engagement mode. Meaning arises from the Reflective engagement between a person and the world, and the holistic educator’s job is to ease this meeting, to help it become more reflective, to help it touch deeper parts of the learner’s soul. The growing individual

takes the world into his or her experience, incorporates it, assimilates it, and responds to it. The study participants comprised first semester electronics and communication engineering students. Table 1 presents the study population demographics.

Table 1

SI.No.	Male	Female	Total
1	26	27	53

Students of holistic living classes were given liberty to share their feedback about the conduct of the classes. A questionnaire was given at the end of the semester to record the experience of students in attending the holistic living classes. Figure 1 demonstrates the various topics addressed by the teacher and the rank given by the students for the topics in the order of their interest and priority.

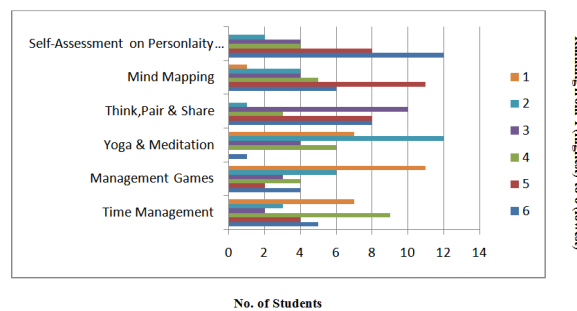


Figure 1: Bar Chart representing the Topics and Ranking of Students

RESULTS

It is observed that topics such as *Yoga and Meditation* and *Management games* obtained the maximum score. Yoga plays a robust role in the wholesome development of students. Hence, as a part of the holistic living classes the first year students attended a one-hour yoga program. The response from the students in conducting yoga sessions in between the regular class hours had a positive impact in the minds of the students, since it was reviving and stimulating, and they also stated that such sessions should be part of the curriculum on a regular basis.



Figure 2: Students Performing Pranayama during the Holistic Living Class



Figure 3: Participation of the Students in Management Games

Constant feedback from the students about the oversight of holistic living classes were considered. Depending on students' feedback, the teacher made necessary arrangements prior to the class. Involving the students in management games demonstrated to be an eye-opening session, as they get an opportunity to probe one's self in relation to the society. The teachers of holistic living curriculum must respond to the learner with an open, inquisitive mind and a loving heart and a sensitive apprehension of the world he or she is growing into. However, this is practically difficult with the growing demands of the present engineering education. A holistic teacher cannot be a technician, allocating a series of workbook exercises or performing a script he or she learned in a teacher training program. A holistic teacher should be sensitive to the students' needs and, at the same time, cognizant of the challenges and possibilities the world offers that person, at that moment and in that place.

Figure 4 is a visual characteristic of a questionnaire survey on the impact of holistic living classes conducted at the end of the course. All seven questions were to examine the learning experience of the students attending the holistic living classes. Majority of the students gave an acceptable remark about the classes, whereas some students suggested that more classes be allotted for conducting management games and Yoga.

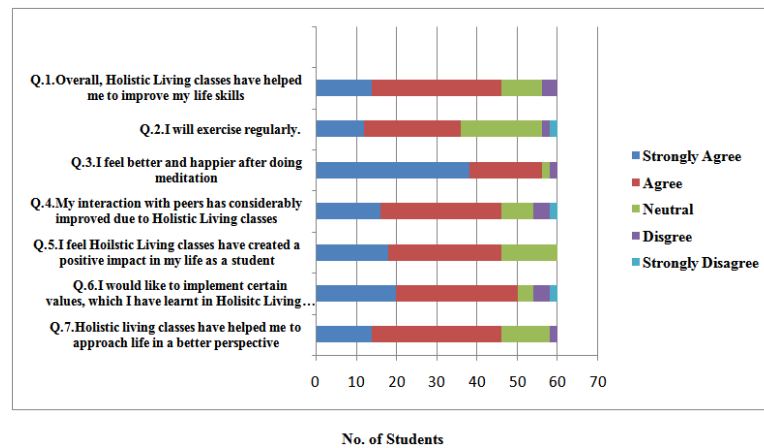


Figure 4: Questionnaire on the Impact of Holistic Living

DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study is to test the impact of holistic living classes in the curriculum of first year engineering students. It has been observed that Yoga and meditation as a part of holistic living class created a positive impact in the minds of the students. Yoga concentrates on all parts of a person's emotions, intellect, physical body and soul. Yoga completely assimilates a holistic approach to education, allowing students to go further in understanding their personal best and making connections within themselves and with others. Figure 4 demonstrates the most frequent responses to open-ended post-survey questions on attending holistic living classes. Overall it has been observed that these classes generated a constructive feedback among the audience. It can be explained that the meaning arises from the reflective engagement between person and the world, and the teacher's job is to ease this meaning, so that it becomes more reflective and touches deeper parts of the learner's soul. The growing individual takes the world into his or her experience, incorporates, assimilates, and responds to it. The student starts feeling the belongingness to the world, thereby shaping his or her purposes accordingly.

Some of the reflections of students who attended holistic living classes are:

“... I am happy about the fact that my institution has incorporated

holistic living classes in the curriculum ...”

“... emphasis can be given for more number of practical

sessions rather than theoretical input ...”

“... holistic living classes are very refreshing; it has helped

me to evolve as a different person altogether ...”

“...the teacher created a stress free environment in the class ...”

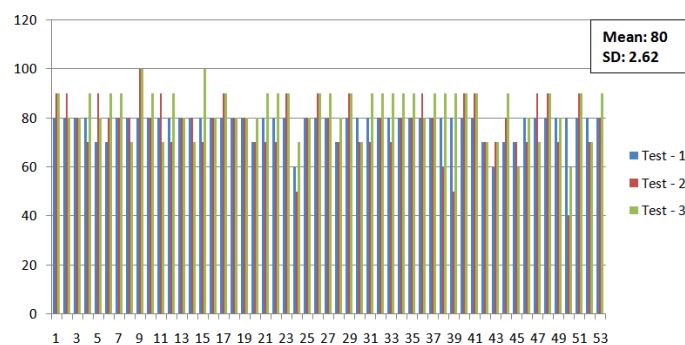


Figure 5: Performance of Students in the Continuous

The purpose of introducing holistic learning in the academic mainstream is to highlight the education of the student beyond the boundary of the classroom. It is more than the education of the student and addresses the very broadest expansion of the whole person at the cognitive and affective levels. Though the aim of holistic education is to groom students for a fulfilling and productive life in which only their skills and attributes are questioned, it is also important to understand their learning curve by executing assessment and evaluation strategies.

Hence like other courses holistic living also had continuous assessments. Based on the topics taught by the teacher, three tests were conducted. Overall 53 students appeared for the tests which involved both objective and descriptive questions. As a part of evaluation scores were given as grades. Figure 5 illustrates the score of the students in all three tests. The average of all the tests is 80 and standard deviation is 2.62. It has been confirmed that students' performance showed a continuous improvement from Test 1 to Test 3. The structure for precise training and appraisal involves getting baseline data to know where the student started, continue assessment to discover where he or she is going and to determine whether the student is at the awareness, exploration, and inquiry or utilization state.

CONCLUSIONS

Holistic education represents a new expedition for both students and teachers, leading one of them to grow and critically understand strongly held values and beliefs. For the educator, this could be a distressing proficiency; the teacher is moving out of the comfort zone of subject specialization into areas of personal uncertainty. The teacher is no longer concentrating on subject expertise but is guiding students in developing and understanding their own values and prejudices, their critical thinking and behaviors and confronting opinions that are new to them without clear demarcation of right or wrong. This is inconstant niche. Frequently this may be a joint exploration for both students

and teachers, with the teachers providing their greater life emprise to the learning process. An education that starts with standards, with government accreditation, with a choice of good books, with lesson plans — in short, with a predestined “curriculum” — is not holistic, as it loses the living reality of the growing, learning, and seeking human being. It is not the broadening of the engineer’s education that merits the public, but the present educational system that does not train professionals to conceive holistically about the time impact of their technological and scientific brainchild in society. This call to a holistic approach is, in fact, a call to reclaim the true mission of the engineering profession.

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