



Holistic Education Within The Wesleyan Community: The Ghanaian African Perspective

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Different Philosophies of Education

It can hardly be contested that underlying any conception of education is a philosophy of education. A people's philosophy of education depends on what they have in mind in respect of the objective of education as well as the first principle from which their philosophy of education derives. This first principle, normally, includes the people's theories of values (axiology) as well as their theories of reality (ontology), and of knowledge (epistemology). Since these theories differ from one group of people to another, philosophy of education betrays diversity, which in this context, refers to varied groups, and may relate to demography, perspectives on life and behaviour in relation to other groups. Diversity in that sense involves the observable (gender, race, ethnicity, age and the unobservable (cultural, cognitive, and technical differences) characteristics."¹ In that sense also we may conceptualize diversity as "the varied perspectives and approaches . . . that members of a different identity group bring [into their interaction with others]."²

Human beings differ. Thus, all civilizations have included people who differed from one another in terms of race, gender, age, culture, religion, and worldviews. Gender differentiation was already noticeable in the Garden of Eden. With the aftermath of the debacle of the Tower of Babel, came multilingualism and ethnic and cultural diversity. The day of Pentecost, however translated negative multilingualism of Babel into positive multilingualism and enjoyable experience of appreciating God in diversity and blessing of one another in the context of unavoidable multi culturalism.

The Vision of the Methodist Church Ghana

The vision of the Methodist Church Ghana is to be "a vibrant, spirit filled church at the forefront of holistic evangelism and discipleship, training for transformation of society."³

In respect of education, the Methodist Church Ghana envisions "a nation-Ghana, in which every child receives quality education to the highest level possible. Education received will be based on academic excellence and the productive skills, which will lead to the development of individuals imbued with honesty, integrity, Christian values, professional and work ethics."⁴

¹ Robertson, Q. M *Disentangling the meanings of Diversity and Inclusion in Organization in 'Group Organizational Managements'* Iss 31. 2006. 212-236.

² Thomas Ely, 1990 as cited in Robertson, 214.

³ Methodist Church Ghana *Strategic Plan of the Methodist Church Ghana 2007*.

⁴ Methodist Church Ghana *Education Policy for Methodist Church Ghana 2001*. 14.

Based on this vision, the Methodist Church Ghana has formulated an educational philosophy that is intended to augment the existing philosophy that underpins education in Ghana and Africa in general. The general educational philosophy of Ghana and Africa is defined as “**education for critical consciousness**.” This philosophy of education assumes that “education is essential to the development of people . . .” Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, two of the founding fathers of African liberation from colonialism, held that education should aim at creating equity among the population instead of contributing to the rise of elitism that prioritises the interest of the elite rather than the interest of society at large. The societal interest included “the need to develop the nation’s potential to achieve industrial, agricultural and technological **emancipation**.”⁵ The said educational philosophy also called for the development of national consciousness and unity, political awareness, and maturity among all sections of the society. Education, so thought of, was to develop and modernise the nation’s traditions and culture to develop a new Ghanaian, healthy in mind, body, and spirit. These were at the heart of Ghana’s educational philosophy. With this holistic development of the human and the country in view, the Methodist Church Ghana has developed a philosophy of education that is not divorced from but informed by the national norms and goals with the necessary Christian enhancement (e.g., Colossians 1:27; Genesis 2:15; Deuteronomy 23: 12-14). The following is the broad outline:

- Knowledge of God.
- Religious Tolerance.
- Patriotism and Citizenship.
- Self Reliance and Dignity of Labour.
- Sound Moral Education.
- Science and Technology.
- Environmental Awareness.
- Sound Human Virtues as:-
 - I. Mutual Respect.
 - II. Equity and Justice
 - III. Honesty and Transparency
 - IV. Courage and Conviction and
 - V. Humility.

In the context of The Methodist Church Ghana’s education philosophy, the following educational objectives have been drawn for tertiary education.⁶ :

1. “To serve humanity and society.
2. “To open and highlight new paths to a better future for society and the individual through its research and inquiry.
3. “To actively participate in solving local, regional, and global problems e.g., poverty, hunger, illiteracy etc.
4. “To promote sustainable human development, the sharing of knowledge, universal respect for human rights, justice, and the application of democratic principles within its own institution and in society.
5. “To maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge through research and intellectual creation. Its teaching task is to educate responsible, enlightened, and active citizens, and highly qualified specialists while ensuring all-round education and well-rounded individual development.
6. “To promote and assert cultural identity and promote the propagation of cultural values.
7. “To contribute to the implementation of life-long learning for all.”

These broad objectives, defining and informing Methodist education may be summarised in terms of teaching, research and public service which are traditionally, the basic functions of higher institutions of learning. On these, one may refer to the document, *Education Policy for the Methodist Church Ghana*. (Pages 24,25).

In my view, our philosophy of education must facilitate a brand of education in which traditional values, norms, attitudes, and practices, as a prerequisite for indigenous development, blend with modernity, which encourages, innovations, inventiveness, and creativity.

⁵ As stated in the *Education Policy for the Methodist Church Ghana*, 14.

⁶ I must state that these educational objectives are shared in common in the Wesleyan Tradition.

The philosophy that will best facilitate this blend of education we have in view must be that of *pragmatism critically appropriated within the context of educational holism*.

Pragmatism

In the context of pragmatic philosophies of education, the goal of education is:-

- The successful organisation and reorganisation of experience as adaptation to life. Here science will not be considered in terms of a detached end but as that which leads to the holistic becoming of the human.
- “The promotion of the growth of a life, which is fruitful and inherently significant. This calls for the knowledge of God as well as the knowledge of the human and the environment.”
- “Social transformation.”
- “The practical adaptation to present needs rather than intellectual excellence alone”.⁷

From these goals we wish to make the following three points:

1. Our educational institutions must commit to ethical leadership. Here we naturally assume a fundamental commitment to peace, justice, integration, freedom, and solidarity as integral part of our educational commitment.
2. Ethical values must be connected to the concrete educational actions we promote.
3. In our educational leadership, we must engage the whole person and not only the mind, given that “the deepest learning is that which involves the whole person.”

One has stated elsewhere, that “*Pragmatism* holds that knowledge is relative, instrumental, practical and problem solving.”⁸ This is in keeping with traditional African conception of education, which was relative, practical, and instrumental.

In the light of these educational goals, one would like to refer to the following eight principles espoused by the World Council of Churches⁹ in respect of holistic education, and to buttress the points we have made:

1. “Belief that it is God who is the Creator and Sustainer of life.” This principle forms the basis of the affirmation of the centrality and unity of all creation in God.
2. “Education is for transformation.” In this sense, education must facilitate social transformation – transformation of persons and communities. It also requires “the transformation of educational institutions, policies and activities resulting in holistic practices at all levels; multi disciplinary perspectives; a focus on wholeness in human development...”
3. Education must aim at “the development of the whole person in community.” “This includes physical, social, moral aesthetic, creative and spiritual aspects as well as intellectual and vocational dimensions.” Holistic education, in this sense, goes beyond the cognitive dimension which dominates conventional education and “encourages the quest for meaning by introducing a holistic view of the planet, life on Earth, and the emerging world community.”

⁷ For details of the theories the various educational philosophies, see Hunnux, Milton D *Chronological and Thematic Charts of Philosophers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. 36.

⁸ Asante, Emmanuel, ‘Holistic Leadership in Education: An African Call’ in *Responsible Leadership. Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives* eds Ch. Stückelberger and J. N.K. Mugambi Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007. 97-106.

⁹ Schreiner, Peter et. Al. *Holistic Education Resource Book: Learning and Teaching in an Ecumenical Context* New York/Munich/Berlin: Waxman, 2005. 20-22.

4. Education must honour “the uniqueness and creativity of persons and communities on the basis of their interconnectedness.” Here, holistic education “affirms that we can build true learning communities in which people learn together from each other’s differences, learn to value their own personal strengths, and are empowered to help one another.”
5. Education must facilitate and enable “active participation in a world community.” Holistic education, as indicated by this principle, “promotes ways of mutual understanding and respect of the existing diversity of cultures and religions...” It seeks to understand how this diversity can enrich us but also how diversity can cause conflict. Thus “holistic education includes methods of conflict management to establish conditions for peace and justice at all levels.”
6. Education must lead to the affirmation of “Spirituality as being the core of life and hence central to education.” Holistic education focuses on “those human depth dimensions that account for a spiritual basis of reality.” Spirituality, according to the WCC document, “is a state of connectedness to all life, honouring diversity in unity. It is an experience of being, belonging and caring. It is sensitivity and compassion, joy, and hope. It is the harmony between the inner life and the outer life. It is the sense of wonder and reverence for the mysteries of the universe...” One is very much aware that when issues of spirituality are raised in connection with education, all sorts of pictures about the supernatural are evoked in the minds of people. Some are challenged by the intangible conceptions of the supernatural and are prepared to believe only in tangible things. Yet spirituality gives people hope and causes people to rise above the imposition of their physical environment. We cannot always explain the ‘how’ of everything. Yet we cannot also deny the reality of things we cannot explain. Spirituality instils hope in people and enriches human existence. The affirmation of spirituality then cannot be ignored in holistic education. Holistic education is informed by sensitivity to depth experience. As we noted earlier, It is the harmony between the inner life and the outer life, sense of wonder and reverence for the mysteries of the universe.
7. Education must promote “a new praxis (reflection and action) of knowing, of teaching, and of learning.” Under this principle, the document affirmed that teaching is a vocation, “requiring artistic sensitivity and scientifically grounded practice.” Holistic education, in that sense, calls for mutual attentiveness in respect of teachers and learners. Both “teachers and learners are mutually accountable, above all, to seeking a meaningful understanding of the world.” Here both teachers and learners are seen as partners in the project of education. This is in the sense that both teachers and learners are seeking meaningful understanding of the world.
8. Finally, the document affirms: “holistic education relates to and interacts with differing perspectives and approaches” of education. The understanding here is that holistic education is informed by the diverse educational approaches: - “Critical Pedagogy, [traditional pedagogy] feminist pedagogy, constructivism and transformative learning theories and global education.”

All the above-mentioned educational approaches and theories raise some fundamental questions in respect of us as human beings in communities. Thus, a holistic approach to education can hardly ignore any of them. Holistic education, understood as all-encompassing educational approach, must bring the different educational approaches together in the nexus of holism.

Conclusion

It becomes obvious from the foregoing that we have no other option in respect of ethical education than that of the holistic paradigm. In our educational leadership, we must engage the whole person and not only the mind, given as we noted earlier: “the deepest learning is that which involves the whole person.” Education involves the mind, the heart, and the hand.

The whole person can hardly be a whole person without the community which informs and defines the person’s individuality. Human beings are gregarious. It means that a person’s wholeness, as defined by the community, and

as the context of the individual human being, must be taken into consideration in education. "Holism asserts that everything exists in relationship, in a context of connection and meaning and that any change or event causes realignment, however slight, throughout the entire pattern."¹⁰

Holistic education, in the sense of education informed by holism, must promote the quality of human relationship within a community characterised with diversity and individuality. Embedded in holistic education then are ethical values that transform the educational process with a view to human responsibility. Tampered with ethical commitments our educational projects must be holistically inclusive, and intolerant of the discrimination evident in mechanistic education, especially in gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and material limitations, and economic inequalities.

The characteristic nature of holistic education paradigm, in contrast with that of mechanistic education paradigm indicates that the former creates the pedagogical conditions for the unfolding of the inner potential of the learner. I hazard to agree with the statement that our knowledge of the outer world is defined and informed by an internal knowledge of ourselves. Only by knowing ourselves can we know the external.

Holism asserts that everything exists in relationship in a context of connection and meaning and that any change or event causes realignment, however slight, throughout the entire pattern.

The concept of education informed by holism promotes the quality of human relationship within a community characterised with all diversity and individuality. Embedded in holistic education are ethical values that transform the educational process with a view to human responsibility. Tampered with ethical commitments, our educational projects must be holistically inclusive and intolerant of the discrimination evident in mechanistic education, especially regarding gender, race, religion, physical and material limitations, and economic inequalities.

John Dewey, a noted pragmatic educationist observed: "The objective of a progressive education is the correction of unfair privilege and unfair deprivation."¹¹ Reacting to Dewey, Henri Levi observed: "the most complete application of this principle is to create an educational system that intervenes in the social system. So that there is no systematic relation between a person's social origins or gender and his or her ultimate social attainments."¹²

¹⁰ Asante *Holistic Leadership* 105.

¹¹ Quoted in Bull, Vivian A 'Economic Justice' in *Education for Human Responsibility in the twenty First Century: Third International Conference of the International Association of Methodist Related Schools, Colleges and Universities at the Belfast, Northern Ireland, July 16-20* Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. 2003. 62.

¹² Ibid.

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