A Transformative Approach in Malaysian Art Education: Revisiting

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Abstract:
The concept of holistic education in Malaysia is based on the principles adhered to by the country's National Education Philosophy (NEP), which focuses on the development of well-balanced and integrated individuals who have a firm belief in and devotion to God. In addressing the importance of the holistic notion in art education in Malaysian context, the Western concept of holism and integrated education are discussed from the perspectives of aim, philosophical principles underpinning the practices, curriculum, and the teaching and learning process. Most importantly, children and adolescents who have strong social and emotional learning (SEL) skills outperform their peers in academics, have better physical health, and have a higher quality of life. The authors discuss holistic paradigms for the future of visual arts education, starting with some of the key features of postmodernism holistic education, especially as they relate to a transformative approach to teaching art. A framework for improving art teaching has been proposed, which the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) can use as a guideline when reviewing art education policies.

Index Terms: Transformative Approach, Malaysian Art Education, Holistic Education, National Education Philosophy

1. HOLISTIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY (NEP) OF MALAYSIA: AN INTRODUCTION

The holistic education movement arose in the mid-1980s as a reaction to traditional education's dominating viewpoint at the time. In the postmodernism era, many scholars have argued the importance of holistic education by reframing the approach with the concept of pragmatic to understand the education (Campbell, 2011 & 2012; Forbes, 2003; J.P. Miller, 2019; J.P. Miller et al., 2018; J.P. Miller et al., 2014; J.P Miller & Nigh, 2017; Nigh, 2021; R. Miller, 2000 & 2016; Tucker, 2021). Post-modern educational concerns such as multiculturalism, diversity of perspectives, respect for the individual learner, and critical thinking. The Ministry of

Education developed the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Education (2013-2025) in 2013 with the goal of providing all Malaysian citizens with equal access to high-quality education that generates highly competent, knowledgeable, and united Malaysians (Ministry of Education, 2019a). The Malaysian education system has been concerned about the knowledge of a comprehensive approach to education. The National Education Philosophy (NEP) Act of 1996 stated:

"Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large" (Ministry of Education, 2019b).

Balance, inclusivity, and connection, according to J.P. Miller (2019), are three fundamental principles in defining holistic education. Balance refers to the appropriate interaction between each component of a person and the total person, whereas inclusion refers to the integration of multiple educational perspectives for real learning. Focusing on the relationships between all levels of experience, as well as those between humans and all other living things, results in connection. These ideas have far-reaching practical ramifications for both instructors and children who benefit from holistic curriculum. Simultaneously, they reflect the most contentious part of holistic education: spirituality.

Spirituality is a difficult subject to define since it has varied meanings for various individuals. It is associated with wisdom and compassion in the educational context (Yoshiharu Nakagawa & Miller, J. P., 2002) and to experiences of wonder and joy. Spirituality is a realization of personal development and an incentive for social change in the context of holistic education (Campbell, 2011 & 2012; R. Miller, 2000 & 2016). Although spirituality is frequently associated with theology or the humanities, it has recently been linked to science, particularly as part of the deep ecology movement (Bowers, 2005; Campbell, 2011 & 2012; Capra & Apffel-Marglin, 2002; Laszlo & Seidel, 2006), which identifies a sense of profound spiritual connectedness between humans and nature as a means of addressing the environmental crisis. Similarly, psychologists and sociologists have become increasingly aware of the value of cultivating empathy, or a sense of interpersonal closeness.

THE ISSUE PERTAINING TO HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

As Malaysian public schools seek to improve student performance, the holistic education concept—the principle of educating the whole person, beyond fundamental academics—is gaining traction in learning circles. Many organizations are recognizing that children require more than a solid foundation in core education; they also require community support and the development of a compassionate knowledge of the world around them. In truth, the Malaysian education system's holistic approach focuses solely on curriculum, co-curriculum, academics, student affairs, administration, and top management. Vischalache Balakrishnan (2019a) mentions although the National Education Philosophy is value-laden and holistic, the reality is rather different. Similarly, Natalie (2021) claims that holistic education is required in schools because the current curriculum focuses solely on memorizing materials, passing placement exams, and adhering to a rigid state-mandated curriculum. An Educationist Professor Noraini Idris mentions in an interview that the focus is too much on academics and lacking in terms of fun learning; but based on the

NEP, the country wants to produce graduates who are balanced in terms of intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotion (Nor Ain Mohammad Radhi, 2019).

Vischalache Balakrishnan (2019b) reports due to the post-pandemic circumstances, there is a critical need to reconsider Malaysia's educational philosophy. Malaysian schools are lacking in holistic education because the focus is given merely towards academics. Children have intellectual abilities but other three components of NEP namely spiritual, emotional, and physical are inadequate, with the emotional skills being the lowest (Vischalache Balakrishnan, 2019a). Akin to Vischalache Balakrishnan, Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz (2021) maintains that progression

through autonomy, in which a student's emotional independence grows, allows them to acquire self-direction and problem-solving ability. Likewise, Wan Norliza Wan Mustapha (2017) states that in order to produce graduates, they must be prepared with soft skills such as knowledge (of the world at large, the sciences and arts), values (ethics, patriotism, and spirituality) and the ability to think critically (accepting diverse viewpoints, innovation, and problem-solving). Furthermore, Eades (2014) found that an engaging art educational programme with appropriate soft skills is critical to the success and recognition of any cultural component.

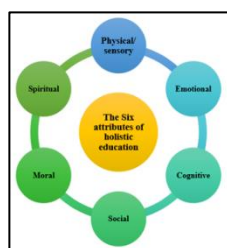## THE SIX ATTRIBUTES OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE ARTS

Figure 1.1 The six attributes of holistic education

Holistic art education potentially brings together, in an integrated manner, various theories in art education synthesizing them into a comprehensive curriculum while addressing a range of goals: encouraging intellectual inquiry, embracing imagination, promoting social change, and helping people to live peacefully with one another (Campbell, 2011).

However, in recent years, education has tended to limit its focus, focusing solely on the academic skills measured in high-stakes tests while ignoring many other elements of children's development. Holistic education, which focuses on cultivating and balancing all elements of the individual, including physical/sensory, emotional, and cognitive characteristics, as well as social, moral, and spiritual attributes (Figure 1.1), is believed to

be a transformative approach (Campbell, 2011 & 2012). One of the key components, emotional has a relationship between social and emotional learning (SEL) among children. It is important in art education programme because it provides a firm basis for safe and happy learning. It also improves children's ability to achieve in their schools, careers, and lives. The authors stress emotional attribute as established by Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz (2021); Vischalache Balakrishnan, (2019a); and Wan Norliza Wan Mustapha (2017) as a critical aspect that must be investigated in the context of Malaysia and in accordance with the NEP's philosophy. This is needed to improve current art education teaching in the schooling system.

Numerous studies have been researched related to social and emotional learning (SEL), an essential component of a well-rounded education to improve the art education policies. Edgar and Morrison (2021), their findings showed that further investigation into the congruence of the arts and SEL, exploring examples of SEL instruction in the arts, and the development of consistent messages for arts education utilizing SEL. Similarly, in a study, Farrington et al. (2019) states that arts education settings have a lot of potential. Learning literary or media arts, visual arts, theatre, dance, or music has significant intrinsic benefits for young people because it exposes them to creative humanistic experiences as well as the potential for rigorous skill development. A theory of action is needed because art practices and arts learning experiences has relationship between social-emotional components that can help young people's social-emotional competencies (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020; Farrington et al., 2019). A closer synthesis between arts teacher education and SEL by paying more attention to personal emotional growth, social awareness, critical thinking, problem-solving, information management, global innovation, and artistic competency in arts teacher education policy and recognizing the potential for improving arts learning (Eddy et al., 2021; Hellman and Milling, 2021). According to Lashley and Halverson (2021), considering the recent growth in SEL as valued school-based instructional goals, the authors discussed implications for school administrators and educators as they seek to identify and analyse student-derived arts SEL data, as well as for policymakers who require researched-based support for allocating more resources to the arts as powerful sources of SEL data about teaching and learning.

SEL has a significant impact on the production of children's studio art so that they can gain art experiences. In an interview, Toto Feldman mentions that K-12 schools are implementing curriculum to help children develop social and emotional skills in a positive and effective tangible way and

personal to stretch and grow their skills, self-confidence, and self-awareness. Furthermore, Maurice J. Elias discovered that SEL skills are critical for success in the arts and must be integrated into art education. It is difficult for children to create, perform, reflect, or respond if they are unable to connect their thoughts with the empathy (Weaver, 2021) that an artist requires. Susan Conte believed that children's social-emotional learning fostered enormous personal growth while also cultivating a classroom culture in which risk-taking is encouraged, children feel safe, and they can share their personal challenges and discoveries with one another. According to Saul Chernick, SEL skills are required for children to be in the frame of mind to create art (Studio in a school, 2021).

LEARNING FOR EMPATHY IN ART BASED PROGRAMMES

Empathy is one of the most important aspects of holistic art education. Aesthetic empathy is essential to the process of aesthetic perception, and it is thought to be the foundation for the growth of appreciation by many art educators. Art appreciation entails knowing, recognizing, comprehending, and appreciating the work of art and not merely just appreciation as the meaning of the words. However, the nature of regional cultures and tradition, which development of an art that is frequently not recognized by the Malaysian society, are the main factors preventing the arts neglected from being appreciated (Izani Mat, Mohammad Baharuddin Abdul Rahman, Harleny Arif, & Elis Mokthar, 2020).

In previous studies, arts-based programs are a very effective, engaging, and age-appropriate way to teach children about empathy. Castillo et al. (2013) and Ishaq (2006) in their research findings mentions that engaging in creatively oriented interventions (visual art and performance art) has resulted in significant increases in empathy in international middle and high school populations. Brown and Sax (2013); Goldstein and Winner (2012); Gorrell (2000); Ishaq (2006); and Rabinowitch et al. (2013) found that in the United States and the United Kingdom, music, theatre, visual arts,

and poetry have all been utilized to teach empathy and emotional awareness to children and teenagers. Goldstein and Winner (2012) found that acting training increased empathy in elementary school children; Rabinowitch et al. (2013) found that children aged 8 to 11 have higher emotional empathy after participating in a musical group intervention; and Brown and Sax (2013) found that arts enrichment preschool children who participated in music, dance, and visual arts activities subsequently experienced greater emotion regulation as suggested by Decety and Lamm (2006). Kozol (2005) discovered children's social, emotional, and academic development is aided and enhanced when they participate in the arts. Carlozzi et al. (1995); Grant and Berry (2011) identified that empathy and creativity have long been related.

Carlozzi et al. (1995) discovered a positive link between creative growth and the ability to interpret affective messages and show sensitivity to others' feelings. As a result, they suggested that creative programming be included in educational curriculum delivery to help youngsters develop empathy. Children can become more aware of opportunities to touch the lives of others and engage in perspective taking by using creativity to scaffold empathy development (Grant & Berry, 2011). Children can learn from their peers through creative expression (Davis, 2008), enable prosocial behaviors (Grant & Berry, 2011), and enhance identity building and understanding of cultural differences (Ishaq, 2006) through art activities that involve hands-on and group-based interactive approaches. Morizio et al. (2020) discovered that group-level data and individual data of direct behavior ratings suggested a minor gain in empathy development, responsible decision-making, and self-management skills, providing a basis for further research on the effectiveness.
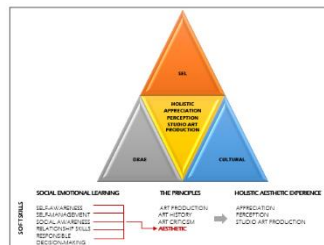
2. CONCLUSION

Figure 1.2 A Framework in Art Education for the Purpose of Social-Emotional Learning

Holistic art education is a teaching and learning strategy rather than a technique or method. As a result, each art educator shapes it considering his or her own interests as well as the needs and interests of his or her children in schools. It's time to train the teachers from preschool right up to university on the aims and objectives of the National Educational Philosophy and how they can transform their own teaching to ensure their subject matters involve the different domains (Vishalache Balakrishnan, 2019a). Teacher education must produce pedagogically thinking teachers with adequate theoretical background knowledge and a reflectively critical attitude toward the challenges of the teaching profession. Our teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills needed to carry out their duties effectively in the classroom, school, and community.

Upon reviewing literature from previous research, there is a correlation between student involvement in the arts and social-emotional learning. The authors developed a framework (Figure 1.2) in art education for the purpose of social-emotional learning among children. The soft skills such as self-

awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making can be incorporated one of principle in art education, aesthetics. This principle emphasizes children's appreciation and perception through studio art production for a holistic aesthetic experience. The underlying ideas must be incorporated in the teaching and learning of visual art in order to establish a holistic art education.

Children who engage in the arts have an outlet to express themselves and develop a social identity. Arts education is important not only for the sake of the arts, but also for the positive impact it has on children's' everyday lives. The effect of openness in terms of knowledge can strengthen the nation's knowledge and soul while also instilling confidence and identity in Malaysia (Izani Mat, Mohammad Baharuddin Abdul Rahman, Harleny Arif, & Elis Mokthar (2020). By combining regional and global art appreciation in Malaysian art education curriculum the dignity of regional art that distinguishes the nation's culture can be elevated to an international level. Finally, a thorough appreciation of art through the improved Malaysian art education curriculum in line with the NEP's philosophy can result in a strong national identity that serves as an example to the rest of the world as it navigates the globalisation era. As a result, both the ministries should review current policies in art education to ensure that they are consistent with the National Education Philosophy (NEP).

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