



VIEWPOINT ARTICLE

Holistic Education: A Combination of Pedagogy Frameworks for Bangladesh

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Crafting an ideal, holistic curriculum (curriculum for all) is indeed a crucial piece of the quality-education puzzle, as we know that one size does not fit all. Curricular reform in Bangladesh is essential to ensure sensitivity to learners' cultural and religious backgrounds and needs, place value on teachers' skills and knowledge, and enable learners to successfully develop and interact within today's complex and globalized world. The central ideas of holistic education are balance, inclusion and connectedness. This paper includes a description of sensational pedagogy approaches and the pedagogical framework of holistic education (transmission, transaction and transformation), using examples drawn from my own experience as a student in a non-formal setting. Finally, I bring out an example of contemplative practice of co-operative learning in math, art, music and visualization as a vehicle of holistic education. This paper offers a critical analysis for educators, curriculum designers, administrators, teachers and policy-makers interested in developing a holistic curriculum for the transformation of the Bangladeshi education system.

Keywords: personal experience; holistic education; pedagogy frameworks; meditation; Bangladesh

Introduction

“Because teachers and teacher educators are under pressure, in this unrelenting era of standardization of educational practices and student ‘outcomes’ to conform their self-representations to particular and predetermined identity frames such as ‘the reflective practitioner,’ their identities often get hardened into rigid, polarized, constitutive categories – the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ teacher for example. And they duplicate such categorizations with their students” (Miller, 2010, p. 219).

The standardization of educational practices based on the notion of human capital (Schultz, 1961; Rathgeber, 1989) holds that teachers' time and effort can enhance learners' skills and abilities, which are rewarded in the job market. Bowles and Gintis (1976) critique the human capital approach as “technocratic-meritocratic” (Brown & Saks, 1977) because of its over-emphasis on producing skills and knowledge for learners to become successful workers in the name of economic growth. It has also been criticized for its failure to adequately address inequality in society (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985, p. 319).

During the post-colonial period in South Asia, the newly-independent nations expressed their commitment to providing basic education to all citizens, largely based on the human capital paradigm. Western industrialized countries as well as inter-governmental organizations such as

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the World Bank have supported the developing countries' commitment to public education, including religious education, through support for the No Child Left Behind policy (FEBP, 2013). Miller (2010) criticizes the standardization of educational practices and the implementation of the No Child Left Behind policy (FEBP, 2013), which are both based on human capital theory and the belief that teachers' time and effort can enhance learners' skills and abilities, leading to job market rewards.

Miller argues that the current education system is fragmented and critiques the No Child Left Behind policy for its excessive focus on testing, resulting in a marginalization of the arts and a failure to educate the whole child. Instead, he advocates a contemplative holistic curriculum and holistic teacher training and management. According to Gandhi:

“A proper and all round development of the mind...can take place only when it proceeds with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another” (Gandhi, 1980, cited in Miller, 2008, p. 23).

How can this be applied to improving and transforming the education system (religious and secular) in Bangladesh? Public schools in Bangladesh face a number of serious and complex problems, including a high dropout rate, leaving many children without functional literacy and opportunities for further education. The religious or *madrassa* system, which has a long tradition in Bangladesh, also has serious shortcomings and fails to deliver quality education to its mainly rural and disadvantaged students.

In my own case, my father's biography and his education and religious philosophy have had a deep impact on my education. My father was a proponent of education, a gender-sensitive community leader and business man, enlightened by the Indian Renaissance and its various movements. He was closely involved in my education, along with my mother, who provided my moral and religious education. My parents' liberal philosophy and religious views also had an impact on my personal development and my emotional, mental, spiritual and sensational education. Thus understanding the potential and strength of a holistic education, I believe that it is possible to turn unproductive, fragmented pedagogies into a contemplative, holistic one.

Therefore, I explore how a balanced, whole teaching system can be generated by using sensational pedagogy approaches, introducing a meditation practice and using the three teaching positions/approaches of transmission, transaction and transformation. As Miller (2010, p. 41) puts it, “Since each approach reaches a different part of the child, they need to be used together in a way that nurtures wholeness. Ideally, they should be used to create a flow or rhythm in the classroom. It becomes problematic if we get stuck in one approach, as the energy can dissipate with just one method.” This paper explores what possibilities might open up if we construct our classrooms to develop analytical thinking by introducing sensational pedagogies, meditation, art, music, visualization and practice with the subject matter.

In the next section, I compare and contrast the curricula currently in place in government (secular) and *madrassa* (religious) secondary schools in Bangladesh in order to make policy

recommendations for a transformative, holistic curriculum for Bangladesh. I aim to consider schools in Bangladesh from a learner's perspective, with a special focus on the potential for curricular reform based on holistic education.

Bangladesh Secondary Education

The current secondary education systems in Bangladesh, both religious and secular, suffer from low quality, poor access, insufficient public expenditures, gender inequality, social and economic disparities, and inefficient policy implementation. Thornton and Thornton (2012, p. 22) note that until recently, "there was no over-riding education policy." A highly centralized bureaucratic system with little "decentralization of budgets and decision making" causes delays and inefficiencies for all policy reforms (Thornton & Thornton, 2012, p. 14), including in the education system.

With respect to curriculum policy, Bangladesh has a relatively fragile understanding of holistic curriculum and lacks a "student-centered, active learning environment as envisaged in national policy directives" (Park, 2012, p. 6), with unclear objectives for a holistic classroom. There is a lack of research-based knowledge, especially evaluations of the previous curriculum and the areas needing revision (Hossain & Jahan, 2008, p. 68). At the secondary level, the last revision and design was conducted in 1995 (National Curriculum Text Board (NCTB), 2012, p. 1), which was largely focused on the development of learners' entrepreneurial skills (Alam, 2011), and the new curriculum in Bangladesh National Policy 2010, which emphasizes "learning by doing instead of rote learning" (NCTB, 2012, p. i), has not yet been implemented.

Few studies explore the dynamics between the various education systems, the curriculum, and teacher development in Bangladesh, and there is also a scarcity of comparable empirical studies (Asadullah et al., 2006) of intercultural and interreligious processes (Dietz, 2013) and relations as they occur in the home, in the school, and in social spheres, especially from a holistic perspective.

With special attention, then, to the need to address holistic education, this paper takes a critical approach, understanding Bangladesh curriculum from a holistic and sensational pedagogy approach.

The provision of secondary education has expanded significantly in Bangladesh over time (World Bank, 2013), yet the secondary system has challenges that transcend such initiatives, including an "intended level curriculum" (Alam, 2012) that is fragmented. The intended level curriculum focuses on content, not process, and is based on a human capital view of developing knowledge and skills for employment. Current curricula are largely based on instructional guidelines, and pedagogy remains at the level of transmission (information).

Currently, there are 19,208 secondary schools in the general stream, 9,441 in the *madrassa* stream and 3,327 in the technical and vocational stream. However, of these, only 318 secondary schools are under government management (BANBEIS, 2013, p. 15). The two types of *madrassas* in Bangladesh are *Aliya* (reformed) and *Quomi* (unreformed) schools, with very different curricular content and worldviews (BEI, 2011, p. 10). Prior to 1971, only a few *madrassas* were established under the reformed, *Aliya* system, which includes secular content as well (Bano,

2008). Their expansion is a result of incentives introduced after 1979, when the state initiated a formal reform program to modernize *madrasas* (Asadullah et al., 2006).

The secondary secular stream is divided into Humanities, Science and Business Studies groups, with five compulsory subjects in grades 9 and 10: Bangla, English, mathematics, religious studies and social science/general science. (Education Watch, 2008, p. 43). The religious system, in contrast, is divided into five groups instead of three: humanities, science, business, *Hifjul Qur'an* (memorization of Qur'an) and *Tajwid* (rules of correctly reading Qur'an) (Education Watch, 2008, p. 43). *Madrasas* currently face various challenges “in preparing students for life in rapidly modernising societies and emerging globalised knowledge economies” (Park & Niyozov, 2008, p. 323).

According to Ashraf (2012, p. 8), the *madrasa* curriculum historically included mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, medical science and other subjects, in addition to religious teachings. However, the integrated *madrasa* curriculum later became fragmented and focused exclusively on spirituality, and since 9/11, it has been accused of terrorism and militancy (Bano, 2011; Park & Niyozov, 2008, p. 341). Ashraf (2012, p. 6) says that *madrasas* in India, too, underwent a dramatic change, where all secular subjects were removed and the focus became solely Islamic religious education for the reproduction of Islamic orthodoxy (Chandland, 2005; Malik 2012, p. 13; Mumtaz, 1998; Talbani, 1996). This change was a reaction to the British government's political aim to weaken *madrasas* during the colonization period (Metcalf 1978, in Asadullah et al., 2009).

The major concern about the *madrasas* is that, “Islamic institutions do not emphasize student centred pedagogies – methods that are deemed necessary to prepare students for the knowledge based economy” (Tan & Abbas, 2009, p. 6). However, recent *madrasa* reforms in Bangladesh do include the inclusion of modern subjects – math, English, science and social studies (Bano, 2008, p. 29; Park & Niyozov, 2008, p. 332) – which are taught alongside religious teachings.

To address the current challenges faced by the secondary education systems in Bangladesh, there is a need for “more interactive teaching methods to develop the creative faculties and skills of children,” and indeed the 2010 National Education Policy encourages appropriate techniques for innovation through effective teaching (National Education Policy, 2010, p. 9), yet it also has a special focus on “the delivery of education that helps find employment in the material world” (p. iii).

It is a non-government organization, BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), that has made advances in providing a holistic curriculum for children. In January 2009, UNICEF introduced the Childhood Development Resource Centres at pre-primary schools, with the collaboration of BRAC, providing course materials, learning materials and toys based on holistic pedagogy. The more holistic, participatory and student-centred approach developed by BRAC has led to the development of a number of other innovative programs in BRAC schools and resulted in the greater empowerment of girls, yet the quality of the education remains low (Khaled, 2011). Overall, however, the Bangladesh education system continues to be based on curriculum policy that is now several decades old and

on a narrow understanding of holistic curriculum in the curriculum policy, focused strictly on human capital. To bring about real change in terms of the quality of education in Bangladesh, a student-centred holistic curriculum should be further developed and widely implemented.

A critical perspective on curriculum

General curriculum theorists and multiculturalists seem to disagree on “principles, concepts and intentions” (Gay, 2004, p. 30), but they also share many similarities and connections with respect to the development of the whole child. Some of the conceptual connections between curriculum theory, multicultural education, and the transformational paradigm are intertwined. I thus apply Miller’s (2008) transformational pedagogy framework (further discussed below) to examine Bangladesh secondary curricula, as it has a dual lens that is both holistic and critical.

Curriculum theory is the interdisciplinary study of educational experience (Pinar, 2004, p. 2). Pinar and Grumet (1976) consider that curriculum is an autobiographical text and posit narrative as a theoretical basis for curriculum development (Weenie, 2008, p. 549). As educators, then, it is essential to recognize the essence of key moments in our past and present experience, followed by a progressive analysis of the future. Indeed, it is in this spirit that I incorporate a personal narrative and draw on my own educational experiences in Bangladesh in the development of my analysis.

Dewey believes that the child and curriculum are a single process (1902, p.11, cited in Pinar et al., 1996, p.26). With Dewey’s influence, Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978) focus on child-centredness, and Piaget asserts that knowledge grows with learners’ “individual constructions” (cited in Park, 2012, p. 14).

In this approach, as the child/student is the centre of the curriculum, “every phase of the child’s development – the whole child – must be studied and provided for in the educational process. This is a pedagogical and moral imperative” (Entwistle, 1970; Frazier, 1976, cited in Gay, 2004, p. 37). The student-centred curriculum is less concerned with attaining the totality of the subject matter knowledge and more focused on the learner’s knowledge, skills, communication and self-development. Gay (2004) emphasizes that, “Principles of child-centred education and the basic tenets of multicultural education are very similar,” as they include “both personal and social content, goals and consequences” (Gay, 2004, p. 38). Similarly, the holistic curriculum subscribes to these same principles. Defining the holistic curriculum, Miller (2010) asserts that “the Whole Curriculum is the connected curriculum. It fosters relationships between subjects and various forms of thinking, and builds community.” Thus, the idea of a holistic paradigm is to develop a transformational and critical self where the learner is seen as a “whole being” to support “authentic learning” (Miller, 2008, p. 11). Miller (2010) further suggests that there are two strands of holistic education, one focused on personal growth (either psychological or spiritual) and the other on social change. These two strands are both part of the transformation position, complementing the other two positions in the educational endeavour: transaction and transmission, further described below (Miller, 2010, p. 67; Miller and Seller, 1985).

In 1907, Maria Montessori developed her philosophy of education based upon actual observations of children and noted that, through interaction with sensorial materials, children

develop and refine their five senses. The aim of sensorial lessons is to help children to learn from their environment. Different sensorial activities are related to math and geometry concepts and help to create order for children's minds in preparation for mathematical concepts. Montessori designed the materials and activities to "cultivate three kinds of skills: discernment of color and hue, sensitivity to smell and sound, and making comparisons and contrasts" (Gutek, 2004, p. 18).

Along the same lines, sensational pedagogy approaches—a form of co-operative learning—can guide learners to learn with nature, and parents' and teachers' involvement complement one another. Springgay (2011 p. 637) writes that "sensation is the information we gather with our senses and the body and the process of it being transmitted to our brains. Perception or consciousness is the interpretation of that information, the recognition of things, and the organization of them."

Drawing on the contributions of past holistic educators who worked both from philosophical notions, like Rousseau (1955), Pestalozzi (1898) and Froebel (1887), and by observing children's psychology using scientific pedagogy (Gutek, 2004), such as Montessori's sensorial training method and Ferrer's scientific investigation (Miller 2008), a more effective holistic curriculum can be developed to remedy the fragmentation currently present in Bangladesh schools.

Whole curriculum

Miller (2008) notes that the holistic curriculum has been present for centuries and is constantly being redefined. Well-known examples of whole teaching include Waldorf education (art-focused), Montessori education (cosmic education-focused) (Montessori, 1992) and the Summerhill school (humanistic) (Neil, 2010). They mainly focus on body, mind and spirit, and their main vision is to build a whole child. Miller (2008, p. 67) thinks that, "the holistic curriculum has been most effective when these strands have been integrated, as in the modern school of New York and the work of Myles Horton." Miller rejects Howard Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences approach as reductionist, as it assumes that different intelligences are linked to different parts of the brain. Instead, he proposes a soul-based approach to learning, based on transmission, transaction and transformation.

In the traditional method of transmission learning, learners are the receivers; they gather knowledge and skills through imitation or repetition following the lecture, guidance and repetition tasks provided by the teacher. Transactional learning is scientific, where the learners' role is a rational one as problem-solvers who learn through inquiry. They are engaged in an interactive process that is related to cognitive development. Transformational learning "represents a more holistic stance" and "acknowledges the wholeness of a child" (Miller, 2008, pp. 11-12). The curriculum and child are no longer seen as separate, but as connected, and similarly, teachers can connect these three positions – transmission, transaction and transformation – to bring them together in a holistic manner.

Regarding whole teaching practices in a multicultural classroom in a place like Bangladesh, culturally sensitive pedagogy is more useful than blindly following Western or dominant content. Sleeter (2013, p. 16) reminds us that Asian teachers must be careful about differences in contexts and curricular content, especially about how to engage in dialogue on

sensitive issues and act together on social justice problems. She recommends considering the implications of classroom-based practices in each setting. Gay (2013, p. 67) suggests that “some resistance to culturally responsive teaching should be expected, understood, and resisted” in order to hold up the “values and beliefs of culturally responsive teaching such as equality, justice, and diversity.” It is crucial that teachers and curriculum designers understand children’s living conditions and their “intellectual powers, ideas, emotions, values and behaviours” (Gay, 2004, p. 38).

As Miller (2010, p. 59) puts it, “Whole teaching is more an art than a science; thus, it calls upon teachers to use their intuition in deciding what strategy to employ and when to use it... Working from their intuition, teachers can develop their own rhythm to reach the whole child. In this way whole teaching develops organically from within teachers and becomes a genuine and felt experience for both themselves and their students.”

Teacher education is essential for facilitating a holistic classroom, as it requires multiple intelligences as well as self-understanding. Teaching practice during teacher training provides a deep understanding of self, learners, classroom ecology and context.

In the next section I discuss a few examples of possible contemplative practice for co-operative learning that could be applied in Bangladesh.

Examples of contemplative practice for co-operative learning

Preparing a math class with singing or stories can be a great start of transmission. According to Miller (2010, p. 46), “The arts are central to each main lesson, as it is the artistic sense that integrates the main lesson.” For example, the teacher can read a story that is connected to the language of math and then encourage learners to feel and paint with colours. Younger children do not sketch outline shapes; they fill in shapes with colour. Miller (2010, p. 46) identifies such activities as transactional, as “modeling and designing are used to help in solving math problems.”

Music can also be incorporated into math lessons by having learners listen to different genres of local music, as music changes learners’ moods in positive ways. Teachers can ask groups to create lyrics and a short song about how to solve a math problem. Here the main objective would be to create a song for students to remember when trying to find a solution or remember formulas, in order to help them to relieve stress when dealing with math problems. For example, after watching a video on perimeters, a teacher may ask students to play traditional instruments such as a *tabala*, *aktara* (one string) or harmonica and create a folk song about how to find the area of a square, rectangle or triangle. This way, learners brainstorm their ideas about the lyrics and the tune and practice being mindful in the present.

Art and ancient crafts, pottery and imagery can be incorporated into a math lesson by providing hands-on experience with a task, enabling students to be directly involved with their learning and to take ownership, as well as promoting team collaboration and building on important skills. By preparing organic colors for pottery, children can be introduced to ‘an awareness of plants and herbs project’ including an outdoor activity. Storytelling could be used

to further explore colors through the dark story of Indigo in Bengal and the birth of paint (Sutro, 2005).

Visualization can also be helpful as a relaxation exercise prior to solving a math problem. It engages learners' bodies, helping them to be aware of the present through the practice of breath counting. This is a form of attention control that allows students to move into the present and to quiet the body and mind and ready the self to explore the complexity of a math problem. Learners can be asked to close their eyes and visualize what they see about a math problem. They may then be able to draw what they see and connect it with their math learning using their visuo-spatial skills and abilities. These skills can ease anxiety and stress as students are able to visualize in their mind what they see before they actually approach the math problem. This technique can also be helpful for other subjects as well as other areas in life as a way of coping with stress. In the next section, drawing on my personal experience, I discuss how the inclusion of sensational pedagogies can enhance learners' perceptions using the five senses and connecting body, mind and soul to interpret information, recognize objects, and organize them.

Autobiography: A personal experience of sensational pedagogies

In order to illustrate the usefulness of a sensational pedagogy approach in curriculum, I use my autobiography as a contrasting/complementary exploration of lived experiences. Autobiography refers both to a particular research approach and the product (e.g. curriculum). As Pinar (1975) writes, autobiography portrays the historic moment of a researcher and is an integral part of curriculum development and analysis. My autobiography and my pedagogical theories about Bangladesh education are interconnected.

Miller (2010, p. 122) believes that “students awake to the processes of life by connecting to the earth. The curriculum teaches students not only about environmental problem-solving, but more importantly, how we are fundamentally embedded in the earth's natural processes.” In the primary years, holistic education can emphasize the connection with the earth through gardening and farming programs, science and math outdoor projects, guided nature walks to local conservation areas and other activities as a part of an environmental and community-building program. Miller (2010, p. 68) thinks earth connections can rekindle children to the natural processes of life. For example, the wind, the sun, the trees, and grass can help children be alive and awaken them.

Similarly, Springgay (2012, p. 255) proposes “a sensational pedagogy that would enable educators to reconceptualize teaching and learning as embodied, effective, and as a co-ontological experience.” She suggests that informal education starts with creative forms such as art and oral recitation, major events and crises, and sensational pedagogies – smell, taste and sound. We need to teach our children in natural and informal ways so that their minds are challenged and their horizons are broadened.

In Bangladesh, I was nurtured in a holistic home environment and indeed believe that sensational pedagogies supported me and nourished my soul in my development as a whole child. My father's philosophy was that the infusion of horizon and action will bring freedom, and my life has been guided by this philanthropic, progressive idea: *One step, then another. Two*

steps are made. This is how we face struggles in our daily lives, one after another, and how we can overcome them.

Art was a big part of our education in my family. To teach shapes, my father taught us how to draw a Banyan tree first. This tree was mysterious to us as it has many trunks; the branches constantly send roots to anchor to the earth. These roots are the symbols of positive, friendly and nourishing Mother Nature. My mother helped us to make pottery, and in addition to learning colors, shapes and sizes, and the sheer pleasure of working with the sticky clay, my mother used storytelling and familiar ceramic objects to teach math, using beautiful earthen dolls she bought during the Bengali New Year festival. My father, too, told stories throughout my childhood. I vividly remember learning about constellations through his colorful and beautiful stories of the seven sisters of Indian astronomy.

Sensational pedagogies make learning meaningful and personal and connected to mind, body and soul. The smell of white lily, for example, reminds me of my elementary school, where there were gardens of white lilies in front of each classroom. These gardens were created by the school supervisor, Ms. Marium, who was fond of gardening and put all of her efforts into making the school premises beautiful. The smell of the lily has always been my inspiration for writing poems and stories. Similarly, visiting the famous Brahmaputra River with my class, and particularly the sound of the flow of the river, was a very memorable introduction to the names of the main rivers of Bangladesh.

Certainly, holistic and sensational pedagogy approaches must vary across contexts, and what works in one setting may be entirely irrelevant in another. The ages of the children, rural or urban settings, classroom diversity, the skills and experience of the students and teacher and a range of other factors all influence what kinds of lessons will be most meaningful and instructive. In any case, though, developing a peaceful society, fostering a whole child and creating a universal love in the child is important, as discussed in the next section.

Importance of pedagogical dialogue and teaching with love

Holistic education requires us to respond to the learner with openness, curiosity, love and sensitivity. Bell hooks (2000, p. 5) emphasizes the “ethic of love” that includes “care, affection, recognition, respect, communication, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (cited in Miller, 2010). Furthermore, “we need whole teachers to teach the whole child” (Miller, 2008, p.98).

Goldstein (1997, p. 24) writes that, “Placing love at the centre of an educational enterprise has significant implications.” I believe that love in educational settings is the core of the curriculum, as children start learning at home through their mother’s love and affection. In most cases, as the primary caregiver, the mother is the main source of learning, with the father and teachers having increasing influence as well over time. In my case, my mother had an important role in my learning but my father was the main Guru who taught me everything with love, and his presence was very significant in my learning. Miller notes that the presence of the teacher or Guru was important for the Greeks and Indians. He quotes from Hadot: “Philosophy then becomes the lived experience of a presence. From the experience of the presence of a beloved being, we rise to the experience of a transcendent presence” (2002, p. 70). Miller (2008,

p. 68) asserts that “this is similar to the concept of *darshan* in India, which involves being in the presence of an enlightened or realized person. Again this relationship between teacher and pupil is not just intellectual but is based on affection and love.” This Guru and learner-based ancient education system was present in India and Bangladesh, making it a culturally relevant basis from which to develop a holistic curriculum in the region.

Freire writes, “the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation. But rather when the former first ask herself or himself what she or he will dialogue with the latter about. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education” (Freire, 2007, p. 93).

Following Freire (2007), I emphasize the importance of dialogue in pedagogical and curriculum development, as this approach allows a range of opinions and perceptions to be taken into account. In Bangladesh, for example, dialogue between the government, various stakeholders and the two major education streams (secular and religious) could facilitate the creation of justice and equity in the classroom and the development of a whole curriculum.

Bell hooks, while admiring Freire’s notion of education as the practice of freedom, notes that “neither Freire’s work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom” (1994, p. 7) and that “making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (1994, p. 39). I believe that a democratic setting and dialogue in education can develop into a radical interaction, inspiring action to change the world. As Freire (2007, pp. 92-93) says, “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated.”

Currently, Bangladesh faces constant internal conflict, and peaceful co-existence is often under threat. Thus, there is an urgent need to address issues of “conflict over culture and ethnicity” (Burayidi, 1997, p. 251) among minority groups in Bangladesh. A contemplative, holistic pedagogy has the potential and strength to reduce the conflict by including a culture of peace in the curricula.

The inclusion of world religion and meditation in the curriculum could initiate a true dialogue between teacher and student, thereby engaging them in critical thinking and enabling them to understand each other. Without “revolutionary” dialogues, requiring both reflection and action, the transformation of pedagogy into a radical pedagogy is impossible.

Meditation and creating human wholeness

In Western education, meditation and yoga have gradually become an integral part of the holistic curriculum. Whole child education consistently engages learners in loving-kindness practice, involving chanting a mantra together. Salzberg (2011, p. 1) asserts that, “loving-kindness is essentially a form of inclusiveness of caring, rather than categorizing others in terms of those whom we care for and those who can be easily excluded, ignored or disdained.” When learners engage in loving-kindness practice, they acknowledge that they all share the same desire

to be happy, and they also find ways to achieve that happiness. Salzberg (2011, p. 180) suggests that this practice moves learners from their “normal self-preoccupation to a completely inclusive attention toward all beings.” The power of loving-kindness thus teaches that one must be a righteous person and kind to each living being. When we love others, it helps to shape our own *self*. The mantra used in loving-kindness practice is similar in some ways to the prayers of many of the world’s religions. Thus, for learners of any culture or religious background, yoga and meditation practice could be helpful for understanding self and mindfulness in learning.

For new learners, practicing meditation with the teacher in the classroom is of great help. They will find the teacher’s tone of voice helpful for settling their minds and preparing the body and mind to slip more easily into mediation. Meditating at home, it may take a little bit more time to take ownership of the body and mind. Continuous practice over several weeks could help learners to feel safe and secure in their relationships with the body, mind and soul. These relationships are interconnected, and all are essential to learning. Thus, meditation can help students to be focused and can be beneficial for learning and mastering new skills. In the Bangladesh context, the introduction of meditation in schools could also help to reduce the gap between *madrassa* and public schools and unify the curricula.

Conclusion

My personal experiences with holistic education in the home environment, parental involvement in my natural and informal education (a form of sensational pedagogy) and meditation practice leads me to believe that a combination of these pedagogical frameworks can form a part of a whole child curriculum that can transform the education system in Bangladesh. The secular education system in Bangladesh focuses on human capital, and the religious system focuses on the self or the spiritual growth of the soul. A whole curriculum needs to be developed for both systems that encourages knowledge and skill development as well as learning about the self, the community and spirituality. This whole curriculum must be more radical, as learners need to take action to develop their souls and to bring about change in their communities.

Of course, there are a number of obstacles to designing a holistic curriculum, including political and motivational factors, dialogue between stakeholders, civil society and the government is absolutely essential in order to develop and implement an integrated holistic curriculum for Bangladesh.

Meditation can contribute greatly to moving toward a holistic approach and the practice of mindfulness, integrating the secular and religious curriculums into a holistic one. I feel strongly about the importance of an authentic meditation practice for young people, and I also believe that any rigid practice or ritual can be problematic for children. I am interested in further exploring how these practices can be safely monitored and guided to ensure their safety for children and to maximize their potential to encourage journeys toward mindfulness, toward a love of the self and others, and toward a personal understanding of and relationship with one’s soul.

The religious education systems in Bangladesh, as in the rest of South Asia, have an important role to play in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and in the expansion of quality education. The sensational pedagogy approach and meditation may meet the needs of

both religious and secular streams and could thus be incorporated into both streams in an endeavor to transform the curriculum and design a holistic education system. An inclusive and balanced curriculum and pedagogy that is based on whole child education could go a long way to reducing the social and economic disparities between rural and urban students and to supporting diverse groups of students in the secular and religious education systems in the region.

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