

Chapter 11

A Holistic Educational Philosophy Embodying Conscious Citizenship: Transforming Mindsets From Action to Being

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ABSTRACT

The chapter outlines a philosophy of education that is holistic and embodies conscious citizenship. Students educated with this philosophy in mind are resilient, internationally minded, and interested in improving life and living on the planet. Institutions which aim to mold such citizens consider that educating mind, body, and spirit are essential, as well as providing opportunities for students to develop on a continuum of social awareness, social engagement, social commitment, and social initiative. Transforming mindsets in educational institutions necessitates faculty to be reflective practitioners and requires the designing of programs that empower purposeful living. Ultimately such institutions are transformative; they move beyond success to empowering continuous transformation. Such institutions can lead to the development of citizens who not only work (action) towards the common good but contribute to the common good in the way that they live life (being).

INTRODUCTION

At the onset of the 21st Century it was evident that the world was developing in manifold and multi-faceted ways suggesting the need or rather the necessity for a different type of citizen. The values and ethics oftentimes guiding social and political institutions are more so under examination and are being directly challenged as life and living on the planet become endangered. The United Nations Global Goal agenda adopted in 2015 by 193 countries suggests that unless sustainability is accomplished by 2030

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(UN, 2015), life and living will drastically deteriorate. There is an urgency to act so as to reverse deleterious effects, yet acting often means ‘fixing’ what has been damaged. Whether or not one acknowledges the Global Goal agenda simply noticing the harmful effects of inequality, lack of access to education, climate change or polluted oceans and land, suggests that humanity is on a course that will ultimately adversely affect all humans. Thus, the author suggests that 21st century global and societal needs require an educational trajectory that strives “to empower individuals to transform the world as architects of their own learning” (ACS Athens vision); an educational philosophy that presupposes that knowledge is individually and socially constructed by learners who are active observers of the world, active questioners, agile problem posers and critical and creative problem solvers; an educational philosophy that embraces conscious citizenship by recognizing that young learners, as all human beings, are constantly in a ‘state of becoming’ and that developing mindsets and ways of being in harmony with all living, will ultimately develop citizens whose acts reflect such higher purpose.

This chapter discusses an educational philosophy adopted by the American Community Schools (ACS) Athens that guides educational practice. Such a philosophy is defined within the 21st Century framework; informative decision-making derived from critical thinking, relevant competencies to the learner’s environment and inspiration that comes from understanding complex concepts in a unique and refreshing way. It is an educational experience that is holistic and embraces conscious citizenship. The chapter also advances the concept of reflective practitioners and intentionally designed programs that mold student mindsets leading to ethical decision makers, and finally shares recommendations on how to create a culture that promotes and establishes both.

HOLISTIC EDUCATION

Developing internationally minded students who are ‘comfortable’ anywhere in the world and who take their rightful place as global citizens; confident in their ability to use knowledge affectively and able to make ethical and moral, political, social, aesthetic and economic choices, is the aim of international education. Though international mindedness, which, according to the UNESCO declaration, considers certain universal values, among them “freedom, intercultural understanding, and non-violent conflict resolution” (Hill as cited in Hayden, Thompson & Walker 2002, p. 21) is something to strive for, the contextual influence of cultural and social environment factors on human behavior is not to be ignored. Individuals are socially embedded; survival depends to a large degree on cooperating with others and usually others with whom similar values, principles and beliefs are shared (Nicoll, 2020). Yet, even individuals and families who now live, work and develop locally are under a global influence. Furthermore, succeeding in today’s world is synonymous with continuous competition and competition pre supposes a winner and a loser; diametrically opposed to the idea that man is social and needs others to survive thus requiring cooperation.

As previously defined by Gialamas, Pelonis, and Medeiros (2014) a holistic educational approach incorporates academic, emotional, physical, intellectual and ethical components of learning to endow students with the tools necessary to become balanced, resilient individuals able to successfully cope with the changes life will bring. Embedded within a holistic educational experience is meaningful education; allowing learners to apply learning to daily living within a framework of principles and values, that leads learners to define and achieve their personal, academic and professional goals and growth. Most importantly, the creative power of human beings is remarkable. “People function like actors authoring

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