

Book Review

Integrated Learning, Author : Ken Gnanakan

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RE-ENVISIONING INTEGRATED LEARNING IN THE ERA OF INSTRUMENTAL LEARNING

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In the present era of neoliberalism, the nature and role of education have undergone a redefinition. The intrusion of the market in educational sphere has shaken the philosophical foundations of education as a process as well as a discipline. The framework of progressive education emerged in the modern times is being marginalized in these proclaimed 'post-modern' times. On the one hand, the transmogrification of education into a marketable commodity has taken place and on the other hand, there has been a strong tendency in contemporary educational policy discourse to define education largely in terms of needs of the emerging economy. Besides, the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a productive force and its introduction in the field of education has also reshaped the nature of educational process. Further, the rapid growth of private schools and consequent segregation of student population, introduction of English medium in the private schools and diminution of teaching-learning process in the government schools to mere achievement of already set learning outcomes are the other developments which have outlined the contemporary educational scenario. As a result, the concept of education as evolved with the progressive movement in education since Rousseau aiming at the all-round and harmonious development of the child, is being marginalized and its place is being taken by a sort of education which would result in lopsided development of the students. In this backdrop, the book "Integrated Learning" by Ken Gnanakan is a significant publication as it presents a strong argument in favour of an education aiming at integrated learning for holistic development of children. The book consciously questions the logic of emerging conception of education for merely upskilling and increasing the competencies for the development of human resources by arguing that 'if all learning is tailored to the requirements of a particular profession-focussed on acquiring the required skills and specific knowledge base-then the student misses out on the larger picture of life itself. Students do not come out as well-rounded individuals. Job-oriented 'education', however, although lacking in wider integration, and perhaps because of it as well, lends itself suitably to be marketed as

attractively packaged programmes for captive consumers of a commercialised education'. It further argues that educational process is something far more than a pre-packaged programme of study, an academic experience, a paper degree, or an individual accomplishment. It is all about formation of the individual for the societal transformation: Education is not a matter of transmission of knowledge or concepts or ideas. It is not essentially "information", but about "formation". In order to corroborate such a conception of education Gnanakan discusses in detail the contribution of different educational thinkers from Plato to Paulo Freire towards progressive and integrated education.

While beginning his argument, he examines the educational ideas of Plato and Confucius in the ancient context. For Plato, education was intended to train the young men for providing political leadership and for building a better society. In his view, these goals could be achieved by imparting men diverse types of knowledge, skills and values that could form the basis of an ideal society. In the east, Confucius spelled out powerful educational insights having a long-lasting influence. He believed the true quest for knowledge would transform everyone and thereby would bring about the transformation of the entire society and also of the whole world.

While highlighting the need for an integrated environment for integrated learning, Gnanakan discusses the contribution of the pioneer theorists of modern education like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Maria Montessori. These thinkers developed a theoretical framework for child-centred education in a natural and free environment and ensuring an active role of the child in the learning process. Further, the foremost aim of education as visualised by these thinkers was the complete development of the child or as Pestalozzi viewed it in terms of the development of the powers of 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hands'. For the realisation of such an aim, Froebel envisioned Kindergarten based on the individuality and ability of each child, the importance of self-activity and play as a foundation on which the integrated development of the whole person can be based. Both Pestalozzi and Froebel laid stress upon connecting various

activities and subjects for enhancing child's learning. Much in line with these thinkers, Maria Montessori viewed education as 'not what the teacher gives; but as a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual'. In her conception, the purpose of education is 'to help develop a free child, one who knows what is to be and do'. To this effect, 'the whole child must engage in education; the mind, body and soul have to be part of the learning process'.

Such a conception of education as integrated to life of the child was further substantiated by John Dewey, who was an ardent critic of authoritarian, strict, pre-set knowledge approach with a preoccupation with transferring knowledge and not concerned enough with understanding and influencing the students' actual experiences. According to Dewey, life itself is the classroom for learning and true learning is a continuity of experiences, with real connections between what is learnt in the classroom and life in society outside. Further, in order to prepare children in an all-round manner to face social challenges more effectively a curricular approach to integrate the subjects like sciences, social sciences, mathematics, fine arts, music etc. would work.

Similarly, for Alfred North Whitehead education is not static but dynamic. It has rhythmic movement more in tune with human life. Education is a process characterized by growth, in which both the student and the subject-matter progress 'in a stream of events which pour through life'. Whitehead was against 'inert ideas' ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations'. Alongside 'inert' ideas, Whitehead was also concerned with the heavily loaded curricula prescribed by educational institutions. He enunciated two practical 'educational commandments': 'Do not teach too many subjects' and 'what you teach, teach thoroughly'. Instead of emphasising the number of courses or subjects, prescribed books, credit hours etc. emphasis should be on the quality of what is learnt. Whitehead underlined the fact that the 'main ideas' must be stressed and the student allowed the freedom to take 'every combination possible'. This will enable the students to discover the joy of integration.

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence further endorsed the need for an integrated education based on different types of intellectual abilities among children such as linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. An integrated approach to the various intelligences can enable a better kind of schooling as

different children would be able to develop their particular intellectual potentials.

In the Indian context, Rabindranath Tagore sought not only to integrate western thinking and Indian traditions in education, but also to include all that would integrate the individual with the truths that influenced the whole person. He underlined a form of education that was deeply rooted in the freedom of one's immediate natural environment, where learning was natural and the child felt at home. Tagore believed in aiming at the total development of the personality and therefore, pressed for creativity, freedom and cultural awareness in the curricula. In his view the best function of education is to enable us to realize that to live as a man is great, requiring profound philosophy for its ideal, poetry for its expression and heroism for its conduct.

Gandhiji's conception of education was concerned with a broader integrated development of the mind, body and soul. Education has to touch the whole person. In his view Craft, Art, Health and Education should all be integrated into one scheme. His Basic Scheme of Education is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death.

In Brazilian thinker, Paulo Freire's view, education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. For Freire, an integrated form of education in which people participate can provide the tools for transformation that would change the lives of deprived individuals and groups by gradually incorporating them in the mainstream and enabling them to actively participate in social life at various levels.

Thus, by revisiting the educational ideas of influential educational thinkers of ancient and modern times, this book by Ken Gnanakan has presented a strong case for an education based on integrated learning taking place in real life situations and aiming at the holistic development of individual child. In the times, when our schools are becoming more and more teacher-driven or technology-driven environments for dispensing pre-packaged lessons of instrumental knowledge and striving to achieve fixed learning outcomes, this book endeavours to create a theoretical rupture and reminds us of the long-cherished role of education which nowadays is being marginalized by the belligerent market.

