

## WHOLE CHILD APPROACH: A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE AT EDUCATION

*by:*

**Leonardo M. Apales**

*Teacher II E.C. Bernabe National High School*

Mahatma Gandhi, a political ethicist, stated that education means an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man; body, mind and spirit.

In 2018, a report came from the Program for International Student Assessment or PISA of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD which showed Filipino students ranking the lowest among 79 countries in reading, mathematics, and science. The OECD 2018 PISA Country Note for the country stated that fifteen-year-old students scored lower in mathematics, science, and reading than those in most of the counties and economies which participated in PISA 2018. This was followed by another international test in 2019 from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study or TIMMS which showed that Philippines' Grade 4 students obtained the lowest scores in science and mathematics among 58 other countries involved in the study.

These reports and other synonymous data revealed that, among other things, memorization is not enough. Traditional approach to learning such as rote memorization worked in the past but it is no longer sufficient to solve the problems of the present.

As such, Gandhi mentioned the 'all round drawing out of the best in the child'. His statement is similar to the core of whole child approach. As maintained by Slades & Griffith in 2013, they described this approach as one that focuses attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical as well as cognitive development of students. The whole child approach views the purpose of schooling as developing future citizens and giving the basis for each learner to fulfill their potential.

In the study, they also recommended a synchronized whole child policy recommendations such as: (1) recognize that ensuring all children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged should be a national priority and encourage parents, educators, and community members to support and provide a whole child approach to education for each student; (2) develop and support meaningful accountability systems; (3) ensure access to a well-rounded curriculum that is reflected in standards, assessments, accountability systems, and public reporting of achievement; and (4) reconceptualize the goals and interventions for chronically underperforming schools from punitive and unproven sanctions.

These recommendations are applicable in the Philippine educational setting. One, school leaders and teachers can ensure all learners are engaged and challenged by consistently reviewing our curriculum and mechanisms that the education sector employs. Second, policy makers should create a well-rounded accountability system that is not only data-driven but also values-laden. Third, we have to ensure that curriculum can be echoed in public reporting and assessments. Lastly, we should be reminded of the need to alter punitive sanctions that are not only ineffective but also outdated.

Furthermore, what is interesting in the whole child approach is that it can also be applied outside the classrooms according to Koffman et. al., in 2009. The Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program or JIPP, a school-based gang intervention program in America, targets at-risk learners by using a systemic, whole child approach. It is a holistic perspective in which all aspects of learners are treated and supported. The goals are to reduce suspension rates, dropout rates, behavioral referrals, truancy, and gang activity by targeting the macro areas of students' lives: family, community, and education. JIPP can also be recreated and localized in the Philippines where gangs exist in some neighborhoods in the country.

However, Black & Berg, in 2006, stated that educators have to understand that there must be changes in the quality of teaching too. They suggested that while the addition of

various health, recreational, social, and other support services is important in children's success too, academic achievement gains will not improve significantly unless schools improve learning and teaching. Removing nonacademic barriers is insufficient. Schools must actively enable learning through improved teacher quality, an engaging and challenging curriculum that is tied to our real world, and effective school leadership.

Thus, the aforementioned studies about the whole child approach show the importance of a transformational quality of teaching and school leadership to produce holistic Filipino learners.

#### *References:*

Blank, M., & Berg, A. (2006). All together now: Sharing responsibility for the whole child. Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, DC Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Report.

Koffman, S., Ray, A., Berg, S., Covington, L., Albarran, N. M., & Vasquez, M. (2009). Impact of a comprehensive whole child intervention and prevention program among youths at risk of gang involvement and other forms of delinquency. *Children & Schools*, 31(4), 239-245.

Slade, S., & Griffith, D. (2013). A whole child approach to student success. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 10(3).