

# INTEGRAL VALUE EDUCATION TOWARDS THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANITY AND A NEW PARADIGM

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, Prof. Albert Ferrer presents a comprehensive overview of integral value-based education. First of all he clarifies the terms and the meaning, which is most needed for the common confusion that often predominates. Then, he traces back a brief historical mapping of this kind of pedagogy, mentioning the major authors and philosophical schools that have put forward a holistic form of education both in the West and the East -which is even more valuable, since Western scholars use to ignore the contributions from other civilizations like India-. In a third step, Prof. Ferrer identifies the core characteristics of integral education in human values, from the philosophical vision to the pedagogic tools to be implemented in the classroom. In a fourth and last step, he brings a philosophical conclusion that may help the reader to grasp all the depth and the urgent need for holistic value education.

**KEYWORDS:** integral, holistic, value-based education, pedagogy.

## **Educació integral en valors envers la transformació de la humanitat i un nou paradigma**

**RESUM:** En aquest article, el professor Albert Ferrer presenta una visió exhaustiva de l'educació integral basada en els valors. En primer lloc, aclareix els termes i el significat, cosa força necessària atesa la confusió general que sovint predomina. Després, elabora una petita història d'aquesta mena de pedagogia, tot mencionant els principals autors i escoles filosòfiques que han postulat una forma holística d'educació tant a occident com a l'orient –un aspecte fins i tot molt més valuós, ja que la majoria d'estudiosos occidentals acostumen a ignorar les contribucions d'altres civilitzacions com ara l'Índia. En un tercer pas, el professor Ferrer identifica les característiques centrals de l'educació integral en valors humans, des de la visió filosòfica fins a les eines pedagògiques que s'han d'implantar a l'aula. Finalment, arriba a una conclusió filosòfica que pot ajudar el lector a entendre tota la profunditat i la necessitat urgent d'una educació en valors holística.

**KEYWORDS:** educació integral, holística, basada en els valors, pedagogia.

## I. Introduction/ terminology.

The terms “**holistic**” or “**integral education**” often refer to the more humanistic and global type of pedagogy. Many times, they also imply the spiritual dimension of humanity –not in terms of outer/ orthodox religions but rather in terms of inner mystical spirituality-. Although proper holistic education cannot overlook the most profound domain of the human being, some pedagogies have been defined as integral even if they do not manifest the inner dimension clearly enough. Hence, holistic education has been confused with other labels like **alternative education**.

Here, we use the two adjectives –integral and holistic- as synonyms –which is quite conventional-. At the same time, we underline that integral or holistic education strictu sensu encompasses all the domains of humanity -all of them-, for which the spiritual –inner- realm becomes intrinsic to any genuine integral pedagogy.

There is another connection that must be clarified: **the link between integral/ holistic education and education in human values or value-based education**. We must be aware that value education can be understood and implemented in different ways, some corresponding to the most traditional patterns of schooling in the modern age, and some directly connected with proper integral education.

- If values are comprehended in strictly intellectual/ emotional terms within the standard human psyche, it is reasonable that they are simply taught as any academic subject. This notion of values is external to the subject –it is a social construct-; and commonly it is inculcated or even imposed from outside through a system of beliefs that will usually correspond to some religious creed or organization or to some other ideological system in society.
- Values as mentioned in India by Swami Vivekananda or Sri Sathya Sai Baba are something entirely different, and they are directly connected with integral or holistic education. From Philosophical Idealism or mystical philosophy, values are not to be inculcated or imposed from outside by any system of beliefs through some kind of catechism that will operate at the intellectual/ emotional level. From the point of view of integral education on spiritual grounds, values naturally unfold from within, from the depth of human consciousness, and only then, they are real and they have an ontological texture. Therefore, they are also universal –in spite of the relative cultural formulation-, which is clearly exemplified

by values such as love, peace or compassion, which are mentioned by sages from all spiritual traditions and cultures.

Otherwise, merely intellectual constructs implanted from outside do not really work, and as we all know very well, human beings educated in these traditional patterns show a striking and structural incoherence, since they systematically do the opposite of what they preach. We have seen too much of this kind of hypocrisy through human history. Only true integral education unfolding the ontological nature of values from inside can bring a real transformation of humanity and hence the world.

Some scholars have also underlined **the connection between integral education and systemic theory**. According to this kind of sociological/ anthropological thinking, the properties of any given system cannot be explained by the mere sum of its component parts. Instead, the system as a whole determines how its parts behave. Systemic/ holistic theories have overcome the limitations inherent to the mechanistic ideology predominant in the modern world, while integrating multiple layers of reality or experience within a global overview.

## **II. A brief historical mapping.**

Scholars have found it difficult **to map the history of integral education and identify the key historical contributors** since the core ideas of holistic education are as old as mankind and may be traced back to virtually all cultures of human history. Only modernity has imposed another world view radically cut from these core ideas -timeless and universal-. Still, some major figures and schools of thought can be easily identified, among which we would stress Vedanta, Buddhist philosophy and Plato/ Neoplatonism in the ancient world, and Kant, Hegel and Rousseau/ Romanticism at the dawn of the modern age.

Together with Rousseau, the names of Pestalozzi and Froebel should be added. Among the Romantics, several authors manifested a keen interest in education –on holistic grounds-: Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Jean-Paul, Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, etc. In the XXth century, we should especially mention the heirs of Theosophy, R. Steiner and M. Montessori, together with the founders of American Pragmatism like J. Dewey and F. Parker, as well as the renowned father of Jungian psychology, Carl Jung. More recently, we could point out some reputed names like H. Gardner, D. Goleman, K. Wilber, A. Maslow, C.

Rogers, etc. In the last decades, transpersonal psychology has brought a substantial contribution to integral education.

Needless to say, **Western scholarship usually ignores the bestowal from other civilizations, in particular India**, where integral education comes back to the Vedic period, while modern India has provided the most profound formulations for this kind of pedagogy with great sages and philosophers like Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore, Swami Yogananda, Sri Aurobindo, Shivananda, J. Krishnamurti, Sri Prabhupada, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, etc. In no other country in the world are there as many schools of holistic education as in India. But, as Prof. R. Panikkar always reminded, the inertia of cultural imperialism still undermines the capacity of aperture of the West to a real intercultural dialogue.

### **III. Main features of integral education.**

1. In spite of historical, cultural or personal differences, **integral education presents a set of core characteristics**. To start with, **the main goal of education** would not be academic training but the formation of character, the education of the human being as such, and hence, the transformation of humanity towards higher states of consciousness above the still prevailing selfishness, egoism, unlimited desire, division, conflict, violence, domination, etc. Holistic education aims at helping the growing child or youth to become what he or she is already in potential terms. One of the major figures of transpersonal psychology, **A. Maslow**, refers to it as "self-actualization" –or self-realization in the more traditional vocabulary of spiritual traditions-.
2. The holistic perspective is concerned with **human realization at all levels**: physical, relational, ethical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual. Whatever is the concrete way of structuring and unfolding all the domains of human personality, integral education always engages students in an active role through their own learning process, which means that holistic pedagogies promote **the self-education of the child**. This kind of education also fosters positive values and attitudes, maturity and responsibility, together with community life and the sense of brotherhood and unity. Holistic pedagogies help the growing child overcome obstacles and difficulties and face challenges.

3. Nevertheless, **integral education is not confined to positive values and community life** –as in mere scouting for instance-; it goes far beyond since **it unveils all the depth of the human being.**

At a strictly psychological level, integral education tries that each child strives to become all that he or she can be. Hence, there would not be deficits or disabilities according to pre-established standards, but rather differences in psychological tendencies and multiple intelligences.

Sill, human realization would not be limited to psychological criteria, since the inner spiritual dimension would constitute the last and most profound layer of any genuine integral pedagogy. As we warned above, this is not the realm of outer organized religions, but rather the very breath of the Spirit within, the depth of human consciousness. From this spiritual/ mystical depth, integral education emphasizes **the coherence between thought, word and deed**, that is, the harmony between the inner and the outer world. It also tries to develop in the child's mind the notions of **interdependence and interconnectedness** –so dear to the forerunners of quantum physics like Planck, Heisenberg, Bohr or Schrodinger--.

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To sum up, **integral education inherits the mystical insights and wisdom of the ancient traditions of Philosophical Idealism and spiritual philosophy, though it tries to adapt this millenary timeless heritage to the modern world.** In Western civilization, **Socrates** would be the most paradigmatic figure while following the immortal inscription on the **Temple of Delphos**: -Man, know yourself, and you will know the universe and the gods.

4. **A holistic curriculum will be very different from the typical modern schooling** –which reduces education to pure academics, and hence, to professional training from the predominant mechanistic ideology of Industrial Revolution-. Holistic pedagogies do not neglect academic training, although they will shift from the mechanic ways of academic teaching –quantity of information to be memorized and poured down in tests- towards true academic excellence lying in free creative thinking, imagination, inquiry and self-expression.
5. Beyond academic excellence, integral education will bring children to know about themselves. **Holistic education is essentially Socratic** –Know yourself- which is also at the core of the Indian **Upnishads**. Moreover, integral education knows that self-knowledge

is essentially relational, since the human being is essentially social. Therefore, integral education will educate children through **relationship and dialogue**, something that the modern sage, J. Krishnamurti, expounded with sharp lucid insights.

6. Integral education will attach great importance to **the teaching strategies, pedagogic tools and educational methods**, convinced that the mainstream school system has impoverished pedagogy by overstressing the academic lecture method and bringing it from top down, from college down to primary school. Holistic education will certainly favour a **more Socratic/ dialogal method of teaching**, while it will promote a **more active role of the student**. Furthermore, integral education is by definition **child-centred and value-based**: it seeks to unveil the uniqueness of every child or human being, instead of moulding the growing human being into fixed and rigid social patterns; it also seeks to unfold the fundamental human values –such as love, peace and compassion- from within. This means that there should not be any dualism in education; **values and academics are inseparable**. The whole educational process and campus must be imbued with values and a certain ethos.
7. Ultimately, **integral education is essentially transformative rather than informative**. As **Albert Einstein** warned, modern science and technology are like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal –the ordinary mind, valueless, selfish and destructive-. For holistic pedagogies, the most fundamental goal of the educational process would be the transformation of the human being towards higher states of consciousness and vibration.
8. On the other hand, **integral education emphasizes relations and dialogue, interdependence and interconnectedness**, whereas mainstream schooling has operated a brutal fragmentation of knowledge and reality. This means that holistic pedagogies will favour interdisciplinary approaches and team work –without dismissing personal effort-. Just like systemic thinking in social studies and quantum physics in science, holistic education recognizes the various facets of reality as connected and integrated. Together with this transdisciplinary spirit of inquiry, integral education recognizes the dialogal nature of the cosmos, life and humanity.
9. **As per the evaluation methods, holistic pedagogies will avoid the mechanical tests so well developed in mainstream**

**schooling** –till the most aberrant formulations in Asian countries like India, where students are forced to memorize without understanding in order to pour down this blind quantity of information in disciplinary tests-. Integral education prefers another kind of academic excellence based on **essays and commentaries**, though it fully elaborates all the possible tools to encourage **the spirit of inquiry and creativity of the student**. The concept of **the project** becomes a major evaluation method in holistic schools.

10. **The teachers's role faces another major mutation from mainstream schooling to integral pedagogies.** In the typically modern school, the teacher is regarded as a figure of authority who controls and punishes –just like the state-. **Integral education comes back to the profound spirit of the master/ disciple relationship** –the Gurukula of India or the Greek Paideia-. This means that the teacher is seen as a friend or mentor who accompanies the growing human being from love and respect for the unique nature of the child. Consequently, integral education will prefer dialogue to monologue, cooperation to competition.

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**In conclusion**, integral education in the modern age culminates the historical drift towards human realization evolving through all cultures of mankind with new developments and achievements. Contemporary holistic education constitutes the humanism of our time, the actualization of millenary traditions of philosophy and wisdom at the dawn of a paradigm shift.

#### **IV. Integral education and the paradigm shift. To bring back that Glory to the Earth.**

**At the deepest level of the integral and multi-dimensional nature of humanity lies an inner reality** that is inseparable from the very breath of Life, a state of Peace beyond any mental discourse on peace, an infinite Joy beyond the duality of happiness and sadness of common emotions, an unconditional and stirring Love beyond any possessive or egoistic feeling in the ordinary emotional mind, the Light of lights that is One with all fellow beings and the Cosmos entire. In that depth inside, the most profound and universal human values are a living reality, and from that depth inside the human being becomes truly human and divine.

Although unfathomable, these **higher states of consciousness** have been beautifully depicted by the greatest poets, both from the East and the West. In modern Europe, Romanticism has revealed the most profound nature of Man and Cosmos in front of a rising mechanistic world that was unable to understand it and unwilling to listen to it.

After the horrors of the French Revolution, that, instead of nurturing a new mankind repeated the tyranny of the past, the Romantic poet could chant a truly new vision that was the real awakening to a higher level of reality:

“I was only then  
Contended, when with bliss ineffable  
I felt the sentiment of Being spread  
O’er all that moves and all that seemeth still;  
For in all things  
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.”

**William Wordsworth**, “The Prelude” (version of 1805- 1806).

**To accompany the child and youth along this ladder towards higher states of consciousness would be the true meaning of education and the only path of future for mankind.** Anything else can be training or instruction, but not education – “**educare**” in Latin, that is, “**e-ducere**”, to unfold from within the innermost nature of humanity; “**bala vikas**” in Sanskrit, literally meaning the blossoming of the boy/ child from within-.

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“A school should not be considered to be just a commonplace arrangement designed for teaching and learning. It is the place where the consciousness is aroused and illumined, purified and strengthened.”

**Sathya Sai Baba.**

The atrocities, horrors and crimes against mankind during the IIIrd Reich, and in particular in the extermination camps, were perpetrated by men -and women too- with college/ university degrees and even Ph.D. After more than 60 years, European/ Western education has still not changed –in general terms-; it is still merely academic.

But all that academic knowledge would be for what? For exploiting our fellow human beings and devastating the whole planet? - As many managers with MBAs are doing from the big corporations that

ravage the Amazonia, or as many petty business men with “culture” are doing from the smallest workshops where young children work as slaves-.

Mankind has still not learnt the lesson of 1945, and history continues to repeat itself, with an acceleration that is characteristic of our time. The Europeans who illusively thought that 1945 was finished, had to witness the horrors of Stalinism, Maoism, the Red Khmers, the dictatorships of Latin America, Vietnam, etc, –until the horrors happened again even on the soil of Europe in Yugoslavia-.

**1945 will only be closed through a shift in the state of consciousness, and this should constitute the main goal of education.**

Meanwhile, many among the “best” private schools of the world, also the most expensive, still advertise their pedagogy without mentioning not only the spiritual dimension –of course- but even human values; it is only a matter of training skilled professionals capable of taking afterwards the best paid jobs –which compensates the investment done by their parents-. In parallel with that, the Authorities of the European Union want to cancel philosophy of education as a subject in the career of education, being replaced by pedagogic technologies.

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Many people are still blind with the technological mirage of our time. Faced with acute problems, human authorities on the Earth think that they will find the solutions with more technology; while it is the technology –or science, or knowledge- without values, without a holistic sensitiveness, that has produced the present catastrophe, evident enough at the ecological level. We will not arrange anything with more technology; the system by itself is unsustainable. Only with values, only with a holistic outlook, **only with a shift of paradigm, may we have some future ahead.** As Albert Einstein said, we can never solve a problem with the same state of mind that has created it.

The emergence of a new science, with fields like quantum physics, relational theory, epigenetics, deep ecology, Jungian psychiatry, transpersonal psychology, sophrology, etc, implies a lucid acceptance and even understanding that **the human being is multi-dimensional, like the universe;** not only are there different states of consciousness but even different levels of vibration and reality, and a multiplicity of parallel universes.

**In this quantic horizon, the time has come to dare to speak,** and not to feel any shame or to hide oneself behind subterfuges. The time has come to dare to speak of the spiritual/ mystical dimension

of humanity, and –of course- of God. But not that distant and terrifying God that lies there in Heaven very far from us, and judges and condemns; since, as Lord Jesus uttered, the Kingdom of Heaven lies within us. Here we speak of the Brahman that is the Atman -the very essence of ourselves-. We speak of the God of love and compassion chanted by the greatest saints and sages of the West and the East, like Saint Francis of Assisi, Kabir, or Swami Yogananda.

**What we defend** is finally a matter of common sense: **to integrate all the dimensions of humanity** for the sake of children and all human beings; **to come back to the true, original –etymological-meaning of education –“e-ducere”, “bala vikas”-**.

Which means, to raise the fundamental issue of **the transformation of the human being –from within-**: the real, ontological transformation of humanity towards higher states of consciousness and vibration **TROUGH EDUCATION**.

Only that can assure us that the IIIrd Reich will never happen again. Only that can open a path of future for mankind –at the historical point where self-destruction is not only possible but more than probable-. To deny it through the XXIst century would be to deny reality, and finally, a suicide.

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**This transformation can only occur in total freedom, through a genuine pursuit, research and inquiry.** Transformation cannot be imposed –only outer systems of beliefs and catechism can be imposed from outside-. We can only transform ourselves; of course, with the caring and affectionate guidance of a true teacher, who will never impose but only suggest, who will at the maximum show the path that will have to be trodden by ourselves, since the true master is the one who wants the pupil to become his own master. As **Lord Buddha** would say: - Do not believe me; just listen to me.

Truth cannot be imposed from outside as a concept. It can only be experienced from inside as a reality. There is no other reality than Life itself, and we can only live our lives ourselves. In this shining horizon of love and realization, education becomes a caring guidance, when the teacher is a true “guru” –friend, philosopher and guide-.

**The tragedy of Romanticism** arose from a lucid awareness of the sinister destiny of the modern world, begetting all the horrors that humanity has witnessed from the Terror of the French Revolution until the crimes against mankind in the recent civil war in the for-

mer Yugoslavia. The Romantics understood in depth the process of modernization, since their comprehension dawned from deeper layers of human consciousness. In this tragedy, **the Romantic hero** realized with grief and nostalgia that the Light of a higher reality was vanishing in a joyless dismal world increasingly dominated by the lowest tendencies of the most superficial ego.

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The Soul that rises with us, our Life’s Star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
 And cometh from afar.”  
 “Turn wheresoe’er I may,  
 By night or day,  
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.  
 Yet I know, where’er I go,  
 That there hath past away a glory from the earth.”

**William Wordsworth**, “Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”.

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**The Romantic hero feels that there hath past away a glory from the earth.**

**We do believe that integral education in human values can bring back that glory to the earth.**

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