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The Journey Towards Wholeness: An Exploration of the Inner Life of Teachers

By Anba Rathnam

The word 'educate' with its Latin root *educere* means to bring out or to evoke some hidden or latent potential. Looking at the current education system, it seems as though knowledge or information is 'fed' into the students, rather than bringing out their full potential. Thomas Moore comments that since the 'usual practice is to stuff what we consider valuable into a mind...this approach should logically be called *induction* – forcing in, not leading out' (Miller, 2000, p.vii). The current approach to education seems to be the opposite of what it means to educate, and we find that this has damaged the relationship between the head and heart, between talent and passion. As a consequence, we live by depending solely on the knowledge derived from our head (brain) and have divorced ourselves from deeper knowing and intuition. This has resulted in our minds being fragmented and this is the opposite of wholeness. Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to win the Noble Prize in Literature, recognised the fragmentation inherent in the school system, with the tendency to separate the intellectual, the spiritual and the physical (quoted in Rathnam, 2014):

Formerly when life was simple all the different elements of man were in complete harmony. But ... school education put its entire emphasis on the intellect and the physical side of man (or human). We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical and the spiritual life. (p. 14)

If we assume that every human being has the potential to be uniquely his or herself, then the purpose of educating another should be to 'lead out' this natural talent or unique potential rather than 'forcing in' information. The development of wholeness in teachers is a pre-requisite for developing the whole child. Educators themselves need to nourish their souls, explore their inner lives and integrate wholeness in their lives, before attempting to develop students' wholeness. J.P. Miller (2000) asserts that 'if the student's soul is to be nurtured and developed, it follows then that the process must begin with the teacher's soul' (p. 121)

and adds that if the teacher's soul is constricted and impoverished or not whole, then there is little hope that the student's soul will be nourished.

Developing wholeness requires one to really observe the workings of our mind in relationship, because it's only in our relationship with someone else that we see our reactions, thought, desires, attachments, identification, and so on clearly. To enable learning to take place, there must be cooperation between the teacher and the student. Krishnamurti (1981) explains that 'to learn about oneself the educator is not concerned with himself but with the student. In this interaction (with the student), one begins to see the nature of oneself – the thoughts, the desires, the attachments, the identifications...each is acting as a mirror to the other; each is observing in the mirror exactly what he is' (p. 99).

Krishnamurti (1996) describes presence as total attention to the now, the moment. He says that 'attention is a flame and that attention is not something that you come to; it is attention now to everything...to pay complete attention, not partial' (p. 360).

J.P. Miller's notion of nurturing one's soul (Miller, 2000); Rathnam's framework of the Whole Teacher (Rathnam, 2013) and Krishnamurti's notion of total attention at the present moment are good examples of frameworks that can be used to assist teachers in developing wholeness. In the absence of wholeness, there will be fragmentation in the way we think, feel and act. In the absence of wholeness, the fragmented teacher will stuff their students with information just to pass examinations and thus deny the flowering of the student's innate potential. It takes a whole teacher to bring out the natural talent of our students. It takes a whole teacher to nurture a whole child.

In this article, I discuss Krishnamurti's approach to holistic education and the nature of wholeness. I also briefly share selected results from my original research, conducted as part of a doctoral (PhD) study at the University of Toronto, on wholeness experienced by teachers, as critical for helping each child counterbalance fragmentation with the unfolding of his or her unique potential. The interviews with teachers were conducted at the Oak Grove School in Ojai, California. The research used relevant literature (such as mentioned above) in order to map out teachers' wholeness through exploring the following six categories: thinking, practical lives, inner lives, vocation/calling, contemplative approaches and pedagogy.

The Oak Grove School, founded by Jiddu Krishnamurti in 1974, is a progressive co-educational day and boarding school serving preschool through college preparatory high school students. It is one of a number of schools and foundations in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, all based on Krishnamurti's intentions for education.

David Moody, the first teacher appointed to the Oak Grove School, describes the intention of the school:

The school's aim was nothing less than to work a revolution in the consciousness of mankind – to bring about a way of life that was whole, sane, intelligent, and informed with a sense of the sacred. The central element in this intention was to 'uncondition' the mind of the student, a process that entailed unconditioning the teacher as well. In this way, a new kind of mind would emerge, one that would affect the consciousness of the world. (Moody, 2011 p. 28)

Since all of the teachers who participated in the research study understand wholeness through Krishnamurti's notion of the nature of thinking and the conditioned mind, in the next section we present briefly the process of observing wholeness through a consideration of the conditioned mind and the process of thinking.

The Conditioned Mind

The conditioned mind is that part of the brain which stores all the past happenings or experiences. In essence, we are conditioned psychologically (from past hurts, sorrow, anger, etc.), socially (from society's social stratification), religiously (from the different faith and creeds) and much more. Krishnamurti (1970b) suggests:

Our conscious and unconscious responses to all the challenges of our environment – intellectual, emotional, outward and inward – all these are the action of conditioning. Language is conditioning; all thought is the action (and) the response of conditioning. (p. 277)

According to Krishnamurti, memory forms knowledge and it is in the retrieval of this knowledge that the thinking process is born. The connection between thought, memory, knowledge, experience and thinking has been described by Krishnamurti (1996) as follows:

Memory is knowledge stored up as experience. There is an experience; knowledge of that experience as memory, and the response of that memory is thinking. If you examine it, all our lives are based in the past, our roots are in the past. There is knowledge of the present only when there is a complete understanding of what the structure and the nature of the past is. (p. 296)

What is the relevance of the conditioned mind with regards to the process of teaching and learning in the classroom? The teacher certainly has more knowledge of the subject matter being taught; nonetheless both the teacher and the student are conditioned. Krishnamurti felt that besides merely transmitting knowledge to students, teachers must be concerned with their behaviour and also look into the possibility of unconditioning the conditioned mind. Krishnamurti (2006) clarified this further:

Teaching is the greatest profession in the world, though the least respected, for if the teacher is deeply and seriously concerned, he [or she] is bringing about the unconditioning of the human brain, not only his [or her] own brain but the brains of the students ... helping both the student and himself [or herself] to free consciousness from limitation. (p. 161)

For Krishnamurti, a timeless state or quality is beyond material welfare; it is a state that cannot be interrupted by the thinking process. The state of wholeness can be considered such a timeless state. Therefore, any investigation into the unknown state, or the timeless qualities, has to begin with the understanding of the known state (or conditioned state like fear, loneliness, anger, jealousy, etc.). Krishnamurti often suggests that the mind is not capable of inquiring into the timeless state (non-physical domain) and can only inquire into the material state (physical domain). Let's call this non-physical domain the unknown state and the physical domain the known state. Krishnamurti further asserts that the material state of the mind cannot inquire into the timeless state of the mind. In other words, the unknown state cannot be communicated or inquired upon directly, but if the known state is observed, understood and negated, then what remains would be the unknown. As an example, if love needs to be understood (the timeless state), then the person needs to understand the factors preventing him/her from being a loving person (the material state). Conditioning such as hate, fear, jealousy could be observed, inquired upon and negated.

If most of us are conditioned psychologically, our inquiry into 'how do we know what matters' will still be in the known state. But if we begin to inquire into our conditioned state, then perhaps we can know what matters. In the context of Krishnamurti's philosophy, wholeness is not a goal or an aim of life but rather a state that one arrives at, when fragmentation drops away. With this in mind, in the next section, we will move to the interviews carried out with teachers in the context of my doctoral research.

Interviews with the teachers

The research investigating the wholeness of teachers in a Krishnamurti school had multiple domains and points of focus. For the purpose of this article, we will touch briefly upon the theme of 'Wholeness of Life' within the domain of the Inner Lives of Teachers.

Krishnamurti implies that wholeness is one's natural state and this school of thought agrees with the philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta* or the *Non-dual* philosophy. Krishnamurti (1996) explains the wholeness of life as an act of looking at life as a whole or in other words, looking at 'our education, our occupations, our hobbies, work, and all the travail that exist inwardly, the psychological conflicts, the anxieties, the fears, the pleasures, the sorrows' (p. 322). In essence, Krishnamurti stresses that we do not compartmentalise looking at life with a particular experience or a

particular point of view, but rather cultivate an awareness of wholeness. This is illustrated through the teachers interviewed in the following ways:

One of the respondents, Mary, is aware of each child and shared that 'when they walk through the door I see wholeness, I see a child who is whole – not an empty vessel to fill up. I feel very humble, the children are teachers and I have a great deal of respect for children and for childhood' (Rathnam, 2013, p. 199)

Another teacher, Ecila, mentioned that education not only relates to reading, writing, and calculating but relates to awareness of something larger and shared that:

Being aware of the birds in the trees, being aware of hearing birds singing as you are walking to the library, being aware of the rains that just happened, listening to the rain, watching how the hillsides seem to turn green overnight, being aware of the animals and all the critters that cohabit in this environment with us, being aware of how we feel in these moments when we are on walks together, being aware how we feel at these moments when we're really frustrated with math. (Rathnam, 2013, p. 199)

As if nature was listening to an interview with still another teacher, Neville, a woodpecker was outside the classroom when Krishnamurti's notion of wholeness was being discussed. We listened to that pecking sound and continued the interview with the pecking sound in the background. Just at that moment, it felt like we were both learning about the wholeness of life and the conversation was integrated into the pecking sound as Neville noted and asked 'Well... do you hear that woodpecker?' (Rathnam, 2013, p. 200)

These three extracts demonstrate that these teachers have been reflecting on the notion of wholeness and we can imagine how this understanding can impact their students' lives.

Hence Whole Teacher Education is a needed element in realising Whole Child Education. If the teachers are fragmented and are troubled in body, mind and spirit, how can they help students to see their own conditioning. A teacher who is flowering in wholeness, no matter what subject he or she is teaching, is much more likely to impact his/her students' lives through using the curriculum and pedagogy in a way that results in students experiencing the desire for further inquiry on the subject. It is very important for teachers to strive to give deeper meaning to the subjects they are teaching. This can only happen if they themselves are passionate about the subject matter. To transform the people around us, our students and the world at large, we need to transform ourselves first. Without the inner transformation, the outer action becomes corrupted, becomes an escape, and becomes selfish. With the inner transformation involving the integration of the body, mind and spirit that flowers in wholeness, our actions becomes integrated, holistic and sacred.

Conclusion

If the source of thinking is in the past, can the mind that is conditioned know what matters? In other words, can the conditioned mind or the mind that is biased know what matters or what is important? Wholeness operates in the realm of the present moment and since our thinking always operates in the past, can we know what matters? In order to understand the present moment, we need to understand the current network of thought with its conditioned effect and begin to inquire and eventually end the cycle. The understanding of the present moment and the inquiry into the conditioned state of mind will enable annihilation or the end of the conditioned mind. In the absence of the conditioned mind or as a consequence of understanding one's conditioned state, we will begin to experience wholeness. Krishnamurti was insistent that the current turmoil or difficulty in educating a student stems from the fragmentation of the educator. He felt that without self-knowledge, there is no basis for educating another and added that:

It is only by understanding the ways of our own thought and feeling that we can truly help the child to be a free human being; and if the educator is vitally concerned with this, he will be keenly aware, not only of the child, but also of himself. (Krishnamurti, 1953 p. 106)

It is natural that without self-knowledge, there will be fragmentation in the way we think and feel. Without self-knowledge, our conditioning will dictate our thinking and feeling. The consequences of the fragmented teacher results in stuffing the pupil with information just to pass examinations and we can deduce that when teachers lack wholeness (or are fragmented) or are confused, narrow minded, and problematic, that state will be transferred or absorbed by the students. How do we know what matters when inquiring into wholeness? Our fragmentation needs to be understood first before understanding the notion of wholeness. One of the research participants interviewed shared this notion and stated that:

From Krishnamurti's perspective in order to understand the whole you have to understand fragmentation. Don't look for wholeness, look for fragmentation, and when you understand that, then you'll get a sense of what wholeness is ...understand why you can't relate with nature, understand why you have conflict with the people you're around, understand why you're unhappy, or lonely, or bored, or all the ways that are indicators of fragmentation. Know and understand why with some people you're happy and other people you're miserable, just understand these borders, understand these fragments, understand this disconnection. (Rathnam, 2014, pp 204-205)

We can see from the responses of the teachers in this research project that they were connecting to their students and themselves in the present moment. If fragmentation needs to be understood before understanding wholeness, we will only know what matters when we look for our own fragmentation. As such, understanding our conditioned mind is a pre-

requisite in beginning to understand 'how do we know what matters?' The journey towards wholeness is a life-long adventure and filled with mysteries that cannot be understood using objective thinking alone but requires the mingling of the thinking heart that combines the objectivity of the brain and the subjectivity of the heart to begin the journey into wholeness.

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