Creating Holistic Environments in Third-Level Education

Annette Lythaby¹, Caroline Murphy-Bennis² and Stephen Linnane³.

Holistic education emphasises the development of the whole human being, intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual aspects.

Understanding this philosophy involves examining theorists like John Dewey, and Rudolf Steiner, who advocated for learner-centered approaches that nurture diverse talents and abilities.4

Holistic Education Philosophy

What is the Holistic Education?

The term 'holistic' refers to a broad philosophical orientation which a number of innovative, radical, person-centered educators have drawn upon for nearly two centuries.

Historically, expressions of holistic pedagogy have come under the terms, 'progressive' and 'humanistic' education. The theorist John Dewey was an American psychologist, philosopher, educator, social critic, and political activist. He made contributions to numerous fields and topics in philosophy and psychology. Dewey thought that experiences and connections with the outside world help people learn and develop. These are further developed by the learner's life experiences and social interactions.^{5/6}

Why introduce Holistic Philosophy in third-level education?

The Age of Globalisation has emerging global issues which are especially challenging for educators. Many assert that humankind now has a collective responsibility to facilitate the construction of a shared global culture through educational socialisations. This is particularly true for those of us that are professionally committed to educating toward a future existence of peaceful co-operation to dominate our values, equal to our value to nationalism and individualism. Within this context it is critical that we contemplate on what we teach and how we teach. Holistic Philosophy develops inter-cultural competency as well as increased problem solving skills.⁷

What does a Holistic Education approach look like?

Teachers support students in creating a strong sense of self, fostering success and happiness throughout their lives by utilising holistic education techniques, such as integrated learning environments and community engagement.8

Cultivating a developing student's physical, emotional, moral, psychological, and spiritual qualities is the aim of holistic education. Personalised chances that are tailored to a student's abilities and emotions are essential. Students can make use of their unique strengths in a secure and encouraging learning environment.

Teachers need to be ready to guide pupils with different learning styles and educational backgrounds. Teachers can use a variety of techniques to foster a holistic learning environment such as yoga, meditation and other mind-body practices, thus creating an inclusive environment promoting;

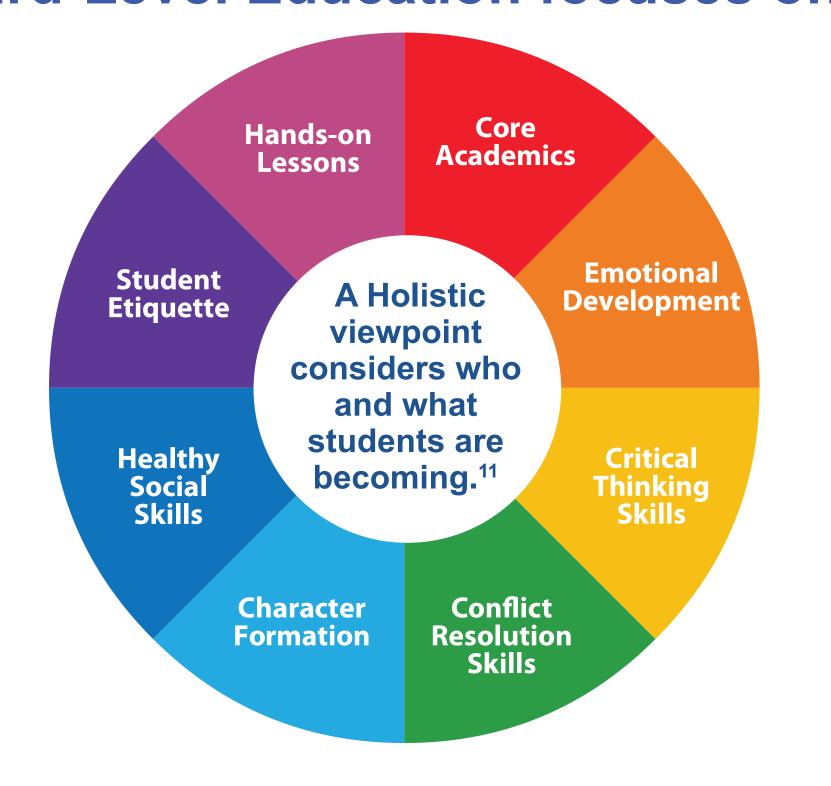
- Strong Student-Teacher Relationships in Smaller Classes
- Encouraging Self-Confidence
- Incorporating Emotional Reflection⁹

Holistic Philosophy in Higher Education

In the higher education sector, establishing the conditions necessary to promote student engagement, success, and retention is a persistent challenge but knowledge on its own is insufficient to produce a progressive world; instead, we need holistic education, which integrates education with essential universal human values and places a strong emphasis on picking up many skills. 10

It is necessary to see the student experience from a wider, more comprehensive, ontological, and holistic viewpoint that considers who and what students are becoming.¹¹

Holistic Education Environments in Third-Level Education focuses on:



Holistic Education Promotes Strong Self Identity

An Example of What a Holistic Education Envirnoment Looks Like in Third-Level Education

In September 2023, 1st year Communication Design students at **Griffith College Dublin were issued their first assignment project** 'Who am I?'. The assignment was to collect examples of printed matter and images that reflect the following:

- 2. Your current environment or the environment
- 3. That which motivates, inspires or excites you.
- The focus of this project was to build a strong sense of selfidentity by celebrating the diversity of each student and the class as a whole.

The class comprised of 21 students in total, 6 part-time mature students, 15 full-time students, including 4 students with

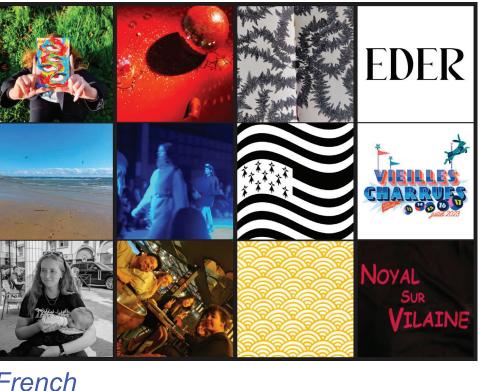
An International class of students: 3 Irish, 1 English, 3 South American, 1 French, 4 Russian, 1 Swedish, 2 Scandanadian, 3 Polish, 1 Swiss, 1 Dutch, and 1 Turkish

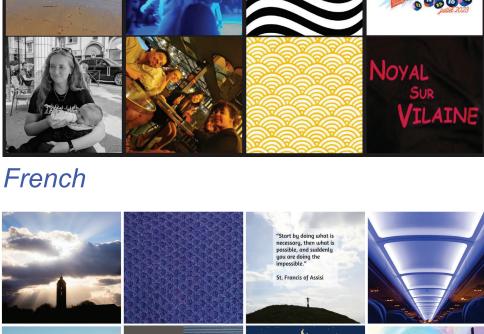
The assignment was part of a formative assessment with 25% given of the overall grade for Semester 1. Each student submitted a slide presentation and a printed and mounted piece of work. The assignment was both uploaded to Moodle and submitted in person. The 21 Students presented their work to the class over a two and a half-hour period.

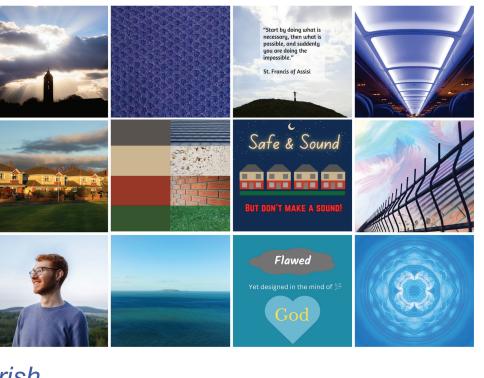
Every student was given 5 minutes to present their 'Who I am' project. Feedback was given by the Lecturer and the students which was very positive to every student. This experience advanced their character formation, emotional development and social skills with their peers. It was successful in building

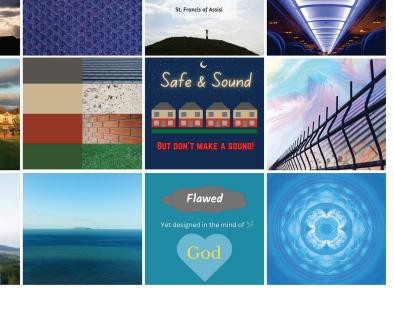
This also fostered a strong relationship with the Lecturer while also achieving one of the intended learning outcomes for the Module i.e. On successful completion of this module, learners can: (i) Explain the fundamentals of design language in visual communication through visual enquiry and good working

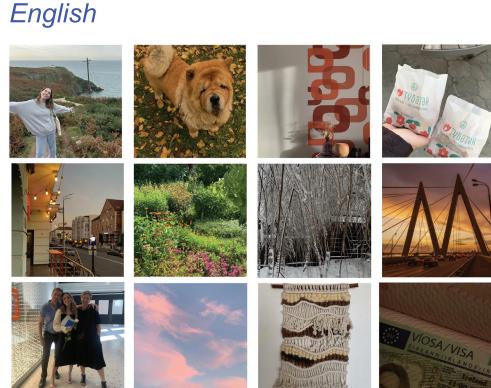
Examples of 4 Students 'Who Am I' Projects:











Russian

Griffith College Dublin Questionaire:

Post Semester 1, 2023 a Class of 14 Diverse 1st year International Communication Design students answered YES or No to the following after 12 weeks of a Holistic Learning Class Environment.

Do you believe your institution places an emphasis on holistic education, ncluding aspects such personal development critical thinking, and emotional intelligence? 50%

YES

[accessed 19th February 2024].

Does your 60%

YES

Do you believe your prepares you for life

50% YES

Defining Holistic Learning Theory

Holistic learning theory is the theory upon which holistic education is based, the interconnectedness of all things including self, others, and one's environment. Recognising this interconnectedness, this theory identifies intelligent acts as those that would nurture or give to self, others, and one's environment. Unintelligent acts would be those that break down such interconnectedness by harming or taking from self, others, or one's environment.

A definition of holistic learning theory explains learning as a change in consciousness that occurs as a result of instruction, experience, or reflection that in turn leads to the furtherance of intelligent acts.

Characteristics of Holistic Education

- 1. Nurtures the development of the whole person.
- 2. Promotes relationships.
- 3. Seeks to incorporate real life experiences with learning.
- 4. Enables learners to critically examine and define their own values and views.
- 5. Recognises the trans-personal element.
- 6. Recognises the interconnectedness of all things. 12

Future Proofing Third-Level Education

Research indicates, that holistic admission approaches to thirdlevel education, are only evident in 'high-elite' Universities. In 2014, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) allocated 25 places as an experiment to alternative admissions. Factors such as 'Personal and contextualised data' and interviews were used to reduce bias. This experiment was modeled on traits of the American holistic review at Harvard University Massachusetts, to showcase that TCD was widened admission opportunities for students, and welcomed students that bring excellence in all its forms (Bastedo, 2021).

In teaching and learning, examinations for students are critised for pedagogy that diminishes the focus on the student's well-being leaving students are poorly prepared for both higher education and the workforce, as it feeds anxiety. Traditional examinations are less flexible in third-level education when it comes to our changing environment.¹³

Irish Government Policies in Education

National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030: looks at introducing more holistic styled measures into first year of the college experience but also provide initiatives for all students to develop broader skills some of which ties in with the holistic education philosophy. This can also be seen in the UNESCO's Framework for ESD for 2030.14

Holistic Education Benefits

Creating a holistic culture in the classroom has many hidden benefits. The students develop soft skills such as empathy which will develop them more as individuals rather than what they would just learn in the classroom. This is ultimately lead to these individuals being better members of society. Empathy and understanding are skills that we are greatly lacking in society, Higher Education Authority, (2023). 15

Benefits:

- Improved Academic Achievement
- Enhanced Mental and Emotional Well-Being
- Increased Problem-Solving Ability
- Reduced Impact of Inequities¹⁶

Studies indicate that by adopting a holistic approach in education through admissions and examinations contributes to the students:

- Creativity
- Physical well-being • Intellectual curiosity
- Soft skills
- Social interaction
- Emotional behaviour¹⁷

Summary

Education must embrace a holistic approach to ensure comprehensive human development, focusing on nurturing the mind, heart, and hands. It should cultivate critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and practical skills, enabling individuals to discover their true selves and effectively navigate their emotions and uncertainties. By fostering holistic learning environments, individuals gain essential soft skills sought by employers, enhance inter-cultural competency, and promote global citizenship. Recognised for its pivotal role in student success, holistic education is emphasised in initiatives such as the Irish Universities Association's University Charter and the Cassells Report. Accessible to all, regardless of background or learning style, education should celebrate diversity while providing inclusive learning environments. Through varied learning opportunities and assessment methods, teachers can create equitable educational experiences that cater to the needs of every student. 18/19/20

¹Annette Lythaby Facilities Manager, Avista CLG.



² Caroline Murphy-Bennis Assiocate Lecturer, Design Faculty, Griffith College Dublin.



Programmer Director, Law Faculty, Griffith College Dublin.



- 4. Nickerson, C. (2024) John Dewey on Education: Impact & Theory. Available from: https://www. simplypsychology.org/john--ewey.html#Dewey%20vs.%20Darwin:%20Theory%20of%20Emotions [accessed 19th February 2024].
- 5. Miller, R. (1992). Introducing Holistic Education: The Historical and Pedagogical Context of the 1990 Chicago Statement. Teacher Education Quarterly, [online] 19(1), pp.5–13. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/ stable/23475623. [accessed on: 26th February 2024]. 6. Nickerson, C. (2024) John Dewey on Education: Impact & Theory. Available from: https://www. simplypsychology.org/john--ewey.html#Dewey%20vs.%20Darwin:%20Theory%20of%20Emotions
- 7. White, Stephen R. "Aurobindo's thought and holistic global education." Journal of Thought, vol. 42, no. 3-4, fall-winter 2007, pp. 115+. Gale Academic OneFile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A265910168/ AONE?u=anon~5b5464ae&sid=googleScholar&xid=bf0b935d. [Accessed 26 Feb. 2024]. 8. School of Education, American University (2024). What Is Holistic Education? Understanding the History, Methods, and Benefits. Available at: https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/what-is-holistic Education/#What%20Is%20Holistic%20Education? [accessed 19th February 2024].

9. School of Education, American University (2024). What Is Holistic Education? Understanding the

History, Methods, and Benefits. Available at: https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/what-is-holistic Education/#What%20Is%20Holistic%20Education? [accessed 19th February 2024]. 10. Shukla, B., Soni, K.M., Sujatha, R. and Hasteer, N., (2023). 'Roadmap to inclusive curriculum: a step towards Multidisciplinary Engineering Education for holistic development'. Journal of Engineering Education Transformations, 36(3). Available at: https://sciresol.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/srs-j/jeet/pdf/ Volume-36/Issue-3/Jan%202023-134-145.pdf [accessed on: 27th January 2024]. 11. Bowden, J.L.H., Tickle, L. and Naumann, K., (2021). 'The four pillars of tertiary student engagement and success: a holistic measurement approach'. Studies in Higher Education, 46(6), pp.1207-1224. Available from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03075079.2019.1672647 [accessed on: 3rd February

References

Do you you feel a sense

of belonging and

connection within the

campus community,

ncluding relationships

with peers, faculty,

and staff?

60%

YES

- 12. Johnson, A. (2023). Holistic Learning Theory: More than a Philosophy. Journal of Contemplative and Holistic Education, [online] 1(2). doi:https://doi.org/10.25035/jche.01.02.03. [accessed on: 18th
- 13 Trinity College, (2017) Feasibility Study In Admissions Application Guide 2017. Available at: https://www.tcd.ie/ study/assets/PDF/tcd-feasibility-study-2017.pdf [accessed on: 18th February 2024].
- 14. Benefits for graduates: Department of Education, Ministers Foley, Harris and O'Gorman launch ESD to 2030 – the 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (30th June 2022) accessed at https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0efe2-ministers-foley-harris-and-ogorman-launch-esd-to-2030the-2nd-national-strategy-on-education-for-sustainable-development/[accessed on: 15th February 2024]. 15 Higher Education Authority. (2013). Minister Harris launches €9 million funding to help improve access for students with an intellectual disability. [online] Available at: https://hea.ie/2023/06/29/minister-harris-launches-e9million-funding-to-help-improve-access-for-students-with-an-intellectual-disability/. [accessed on: 29th
- January 2024]. 16. School of Education, American University (2024). What Is Holistic Education? Understanding the History, Methods, and Benefits. Available at: https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/what-is-holistic Education/#What%20Is%20Holistic%20Education? [accessed on: 29th January 2024]. 17. Bastedo, M., (2021). Holistic Admission in a Global Phenomenon. Available at: https://websites.umich. edu/~bastedo/papers/Bastedo2021_Chapter05.pdf [accessed on: 18th February 2024].
- sustainability mindset in a business school'. Developing a Sustainability Mindset in Management Education. Available at: http://soraiaschutel.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Chapter-11-sustainability-mindset. pdf [accessed on: 18th February 2024]. 19. Amanda Datnow, Vicki Park, Donald J. Peurach, and James P. Spillane, (2022) Transforming education for holistic student development. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/transforming-education-forholistic-student-development/ [accessed on: 18th February 2024].

18. Schutel, S., Becker, J.P.L. and Audino, J.F., (2018). 'Holistic education, transformative learning and

- 20. Cerna, L., Mezzanotte, C., Rutigliano, A., Brussino, O., Santiago, P., Borgonovi, F. and Guthrie, C., (2021). Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework'. Available at: https://www. researchgate.net/profile/Francesca-Borgonovi/publication/356904358_Promoting_inclusive_education_ for_diverse_societies_A_conceptual_framework/links/61d2b9a6e669ee0f5c81857a/Promoting-inclusiveeducation-for-diverse-societies-A-conceptual-framework.pdf [accessed on: 30th January 2024].
- Fig 1. Datnow, A., Park, V., Peurach, D. and Spillane, J. (2022). Transforming Education For Holistic Student Development Learning From Education System (Re)Building Around The World. [online] Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/ uploads/2022/09/Brookings_Report_Tranforming-ed-for-holistic_FINAL. pdf?fbclid=IwAR1dQ1v0I6ogDlbDGlsyu7LASUp9OcQhzAiePpnKm2CddGxLa3BlPHj5BOA
- Fig 2. Griffith College Dublin, Caroline Murphy-Bennis, Examples of 4 Students, Communication Design Students, 'Who Am I' Projects, [October 2023]. Fig 3. Griffith College Dublin, Caroline Murphy-Bennis, 1st year Communication Design student survey, 'Creating Holsitic Environment at Third Level Education', [February 2024].