

OPTIMIZATION OF EDUCATION: PROMOTION OF WELLNESS

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Abstract

Our present higher educational system is not adapted to the native conditions of modern life. Higher education is expected to produce happy and well adjusted persons. This dimension of education is related with the happiness and wellness of the students. Wellness is a concern for optimizing human behavior and functioning and for integrating body, mind and spirit as part of this process. The Wheel of Wellness model proposes the significance of five –life tasks as central to healthy functioning. These tasks are spirituality, self direction, work and leisure, friendship and love. Wheel of Wellness model can easily apply in higher education through dynamic and enlightened teachers, participative and interactive lectures, active learning and multimedia technologies, clear objectives and tools and self development, personality development and value education programs.

Key Words: Wellness, Wheel of wellness modal, Higher education

Introduction

We are entering an era in which the higher education is assuming a comprehensive and enhancing character. Mere knowledge is not enough for today's students. They are expected to improve their abilities to perform complex acts as problem –solving communicating, reasoning and interpreting. In addition it is expected that higher education will produced happy and well adjusted persons. These holistic aspects of personality are related with the happiness and well being of the student.

The term wellness has roots in ancient Greek philosophy, where the concepts of cure and hygiene were personified by Panacea and Hygeia, each representing an approach to health.

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The concept of mind and body unity has been found in both ancient Greek and Eastern philosophies.

Dunn (1961), who is widely credited as being the “architect “ of the modern wellness movement, defined wellness as “an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. He also suggested that counselors and educational psychologists were in a unique position to help individuals to achieve high-level wellness. However, educators have been perceived to be at the forefront in this arena (Dunn, 1977)”.

Archer, Probert, and Gage (1987) defined wellness as “the process and state of a quest for maximum human functioning that involves the body, mind, and spirit” or what Maslow (1970) would term an intrinsic motivation toward self – actualization and fulfillment. Adams, Bezner and Steinhardt (1997) defined wellness as “the general perception experienced by individuals that there will be positive outcomes to events or circumstances.” Myers and colleagues (2000) defined wellness as a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well being in which body , mind and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community. Ideally, it is the optimum state of health and well being that each individual is capable of achieving.” Snyder and Lopez (2002), however, stated that positive functioning comprises six dimensions of wellness (self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery and autonomy).

Clearly, what is common across definitions of wellness is a concern for optimizing human behavior and functioning and for integrating body, mind and spirit as part of this process.

Wheel of Wellness Modal

Sweeney and Witmer (1991) and Witmer and Sweeney (1992) first proposed a holistic model of wellness and prevention over the life span based on the writings of Adler (1927/ 1954), Maslow (1970), and others who studied characteristics of healthy persons. Several other models have been developed by researchers such as Adams et al. (1997) and, more recently, Compton (2001). The following dimensions appear to be consistent in all the models (Gropp, 2006):

- Aspects of the self (intrapersonal, affective or cognitive behavior, spirituality, personal growth);
- Other domains of life (interpersonal, social and contextual, in love and work) in which the self manifests itself.

In their Wheel of Wellness modal Witmer and Sweeney (1992) proposes the significance of five life tasks as central to healthy functioning. These tasks are depicted in a wheel with spokes that are interrelated and interconnected. The five tasks are: (1) Spirituality, (2) Self-direction, (3) Work and Leisure, (4) Friendship, and (5) Love. The life tasks of self direction includes 12 additional components: sense of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, emotional awareness and coping, problem solving and creativity, sense of humor, physical fitness, nutrition, self care, stress management, gender identity, and cultural identity. The modal is ecological in nature, the life tasks interact dynamically with a variety of life forces including, but not limited to, family, community, religion, education, government, media, and the business/ industry. Global events, whether of natural (e.g., floods, famines) or human origin (e.g., wars) have an impact on the life forces and life tasks depicted in the modal. The modal is shown in Figure -1.

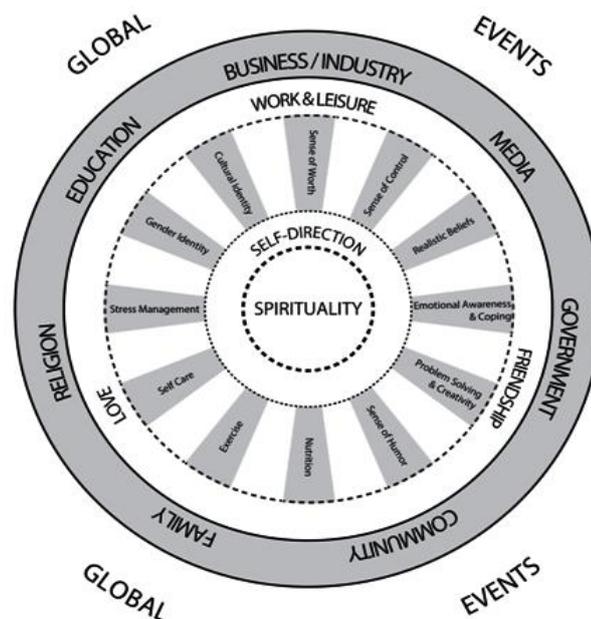


Figure-1. The Wheel of Wellness

Changes in one area of wellness affect other areas in both positive and negative directions. Components of Wheel of Wellness modal are as follows:

Life Task-1: Spirituality

Spirituality is defined as an awareness of being or force that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe. Recent studies suggest that there is a significant positive relationship among spirituality (of which

religion is only one part), mental health, physical health, life satisfaction, and wellness (Lindgreen & Coursey, 1995; Westgate, 1996; Oman & Thoresen, 2009).

Life Task-2: Self –Direction

Self –direction is the manner in which an individual regulates, disciplines, and directs the self in daily activities and in a pursuit of long – range goals. It refers to a sense of mindfulness, and intentionality in meeting the major tasks of life. It includes:

Sense of worth- Sense of worth is variously referred to in the literature as self –concept, self esteem, and self-worth. High self –esteem results when “we consider aspects of our life as important and..... we have the confidence to fulfill our expectations” (Hattie, 1992).

*Sense of control-*The results of numerous studies (Beckingham & Watt; Daniels & Guppy,1994; Feldman & Snyder, 2005) indicate that perceived control is associated with emotional well- being, successful coping with stress, better physical health, and better mental health over the life span.

Realistic Beliefs- Healthy people are able to process information accurately and perceive reality as it is rather than as they wish it to be.

Emotional awareness and coping- Self- actualizing people have been described as spontaneous in their behavior and emotions and are able to experience a range of both positive and negative affect such as anger, anxiety, and happiness.

Problem solving and creativity- Intellectual Stimulation, including problem solving and creativity, is necessary for healthy brain functioning and hence, quality of life across the life span.

Sense of humor- Humor, a cognitive and emotional process causes the skeletal muscles to relax, boosts to immune system, increase heart rate, stimulates circulation, oxygenates the blood, massages the vital organs, aids digestion, and releases chemicals (endorphins) into the brain that enhance a sense of well being. Humor facilitates the enjoyment of positive life experiences.

Nutrition- There is clear relationship between what we eat and our health, moods, performance, and longevity.

*Exercise-*Exercise increases physical strength as well as self–confidence and self-esteem.

Self-care- Choosing to develop safety habits (e.g. exercising, avoiding harmful substances including those in the environment) improves quality of life and extends longevity.

Stress Management- Stress affects both psychological and physiological functioning and has a specific depressant effect on immune system functioning. Persons who are stress

resistant experience more positive and beneficial immune system responses, greater resistance to psychosocial stressors, a more internal locus of control, more positive mental health, and greater physical health.

Gender identity- Gender identity refers to subjective feelings of maleness and femaleness and is culturally constructed or defined. Gender differences in gender –role behavior have been linked to both wellness and illness in adulthood.

Cultural identity- Culture may be broadly defined as “a multidimensional concept that encompasses the collective reality of a group of people (Lee, 1996; Cheavens, 2006).” Cultural identity affects self –perceived health and wellness given that concepts of health differ according to culture.

Life Task-3: Work & Leisure

Adler defined work as any activity that is useful to the community, whether for monetary gain or otherwise. Work satisfaction comprised of challenge, financial reward, co-worker relations, and working conditions of longevity and perceived-is one of the best predictors of longevity and perceived quality of life. Leisure activities (e.g., physical, social, intellectual, volunteer, and creative) have a positive effect on self-esteem and perceived wellness.

Life Task-4: Friendship

Adler (1927/1954) considered social interest as innate to human nature. There is strong positive connection between friendship quality and sense of well- being including both physical and mental health.

Life Task-5: Love

Characteristics of healthy love relationships include the ability to be intimate, trusting and self-disclosing with another person. The life task of love also necessitates having a family or family like support system that has the following nine characteristics: shared coping and problem solving skills; commitment to the family; good communication; encouragement of individuals; expression of appreciation ; religious/ spiritual orientation; social connectedness; clear roles; shared interests, values, and time.

Applying the Wheel of Wellness Modal in Higher Education

Today, millions of young minds leaving the portals of higher education institutions turn out to be a burden on society as their potential remains untapped, their vision proves to be myopic, capabilities remain unutilized, and attitudes are found to be self- centered. In such a scenario, reengineering of education system is imperative. Clearly, there is a need for wellness- oriented paradigms to emerge as alternatives for the present education system.

Swami Ramakrishna paramahansa has also laid great emphasis on real education with a view to making oneself as well as the entire world happy.

Promotion of wellness approach in higher education requires strong will and commitment on the part of teachers. It is only the teacher who can play the catalytic role. He must understand the psychology of students, learn about the advancement in teaching pedagogy, and develop the students as enlightened and self-reliant citizens. He should update his knowledge, skills and equip himself for adapting to changing needs of the society. Teacher must learn to assess the societal needs and acquire new knowledge without any resistance. Lovi says we need to love our content and love our students.

Lectures the widely used method for teaching in higher education can easily be adapted to become wellness oriented. Lively, participative and interactive lectures encouraged students to challenge ideas, views and beliefs. Lectures are effective for teaching but not for everything. Teachers should avoid lecturing on boring facts. Instead of lecturing on such facts, students should ask to learn them outside the class. Teacher can give students a list of clear objectives and source of tools to meet those objectives. Teacher can test students on these concepts. This type of learning saves class time, reduces boredom and enhances student learning ability. Nurick and Carhart (2005) finds that class examples/activities, writing assignments, emphasis on core concepts, and providing a copy of lecture outline improves student's creativity and performance.

Active learning is another important factor for maximizing students functioning. The recent findings of cognitive psychology (Grunert, 1997; Keith & Stewart, 2008; Coon, & Mitterer, 2014) emphasize the tremendous potential of the new technologies in active learning. Through multimedia technologies, computers are now powerful enough to place new knowledge within a proper context for learning. The range of experience made possible by digital technologies allows us to take advantage of each student's individual strength.

Sound steps are needed to be devised in higher education to promote programs of self development, personality development and value education. These programs can bring positive change in the nature, vision thoughts, character and conduct of students and ultimately the wellness of students can bring change in the society and nation.

From the above views it is self evident that the vision of higher education needs to be expanded. Promotion of wellness in higher education can become effective mean of student enrichment, societal enhancement and nation uprising.

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