

II. NEW INTEGRAL EDUCATION: BASIC PRINCIPLES

In response to the needs of our time and to the longstanding challenges that traditional forms of education have faced, the integral education our institute promotes has impactful and guiding principles that can be applied to a variety of contexts. These principles are:

- we are shaped by our environment and the people around us
- nature has things to teach us and we are embedded in nature
- everything is interconnected in nature and therefore “content areas” are interconnected
- we all have purpose
- we each have important roles to play in society
- positive connections with others are vital in our lives
- we learn by example
- play and games are important for our development at all ages
- we learn through imitating the higher level we are seeking
- a good future requires us to treat others as we wish to be treated (IHUD, n.d.).

When looking at these guidelines, it is clear that life is a web of interconnections and we, as humans, do not operate in a vacuum. Everything we do, every choice we make has a ripple effect on our world. When good connections are disrupted, for example in a family where children, adolescents, and adults are preoccupied with electronic devices, isolation and loneliness can occur. When parents are egoistic with no intention of adopting altruistic approaches, children lose precious opportunities for sharing ideas, discussing problems, finding solutions, and sensing the spiritual and physical well-being of a tightly knit environment. As such, education needs to mold people in a way that allows them to appreciate and embrace the interconnections and to see that we all have important and impactful roles to play in our lives. Education needs to help us develop all aspects of the individual to achieve a full development of the personality so that we can participate effectively in social and civic life. When people understand that they can take greater responsibility for what they put out into the world and they can also see that as a part of this interconnected web, we are all important in our own ways and have mutual responsibility to put out good into our world, we can have a good future. A society and humanity can only rise by taking responsibility for finding solutions to societal and individual problems.

All of the above can be learned through example, through cooperative play and games, and through circles that emphasize the importance of every person's contribution in the circle. We all learn from each other, and teachers are examples and guides to help us grow. In fact, it is important for the guide (i.e., teacher or parent) to allow everyone to benefit from the variety of opinions and contributions to the circle, even ones that may seem to challenge the group. This practice cultivates our ability to perceive and empathize with the views of others and it allows everyone to broaden the pool of collective wisdom that can only be achieved together. These are the tried-and-true methods and principles for implementing integral education in not only formal education settings (e.g., schools), but in informal settings (e.g., families). The principle of circles, especially, represents the idea that we are all connected and no one is better than another. We're all equal and we all have something important to contribute to the circle. Circles are used to build connection, promote inquiry, and give people the opportunity to learn from others through workshopping (everyone respectfully contributing equally to a discussion), play (i.e., games, gamification, stories), and other cooperative activities.

Other important staples of integral education methods are the use of nature for inspiration, embracing holistic learning, fostering the care of others, fostering a sense of purpose and roles, and creating a supportive environment. These are all done through creating a culture where everyone feels valued and has a contribution to make, and everyone values others and their contributions. By everyone buying into this way of being, integral education settings (formal and informal) perpetuate a sense of harmony, synergy, and a symbiotic community where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Imagine if our whole world would buy into this way of being. How different it would look.

If all of this sounds like it is too good to be true, please know that it is not. The coming sections will show what integral education looks like in action, in a variety of contexts. Integral education, based on its integral nature, is an approach to education that can be used in a variety of settings (both formal and informal), with a variety of ages (birth through the end of one's lifetime), and in a variety of ways. The guiding principles are integral to life itself, making it a style of education that can be applied universally. In fact, just look at nature - animals for example. They do not have "school" but they develop and thrive through synergy and through the principles mentioned. Because of its successful template in nature, integral education can be used in early childhood (i.e., daycare, preschool, in families), childhood education, adolescence education, higher education, adult education, with elders, in community education, in family life, in community life, and beyond. In the next section we will expand on exciting uses for integral education at all levels of human existence.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

a. Early Childhood

A new generation of children is coming into the world with open eyes and sensitive hearts. They are perceptive, questioning, and unwilling to accept answers that feel empty or mechanical. Although many are born into comfort, they often sense an inner void, a quiet but persistent wondering about why they are here, what their life is meant for, and what it truly means to be human. These questions are not taught to them, but arise naturally from within. Today's children feel life as something interconnected. Their inner worlds are rich, nuanced, and deeply sensitive, and because of this, traditional methods of parenting and education often fail to reach them. Approaches built on routine, authority, and external pressure feel hollow. What they need instead is guidance that recognizes their inner hunger for meaning, honors their individuality, and prepares them to live in a world that is increasingly connected and interdependent. Raising and educating this generation requires adults to grow alongside them. It asks parents and educators to look more closely at how children truly learn, and to shape families and schools into nurturing environments that cultivate compassion, wisdom, and inner motivation. Children today carry an inner spark that resists being dimmed. They long for authenticity and are keenly sensitive to insincerity. They question assumptions that once went unchallenged, not out of defiance, but out of a genuine desire to understand. Even when surrounded by entertainment and material ease, many feel restless, not because they want more stimulation, but because they are searching for something deeper. They intuitively experience the world as one system. Because of this, educational approaches based on command, conformity, or fear rarely touch them. They respond instead to relevance, honesty, and a sense that what they are learning truly matters. To guide them well, we must first understand who they are: emotionally perceptive, inwardly searching, and oriented toward a truth they cannot yet fully articulate. They are ready to grow. The question is whether we are ready to meet them.