



A Novel Approach to Holistic Education: Creating *Learning Together*

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Abstract

This paper is an applied research study conducted within the private educational sector, focusing on both theoretical and practical applications of holistic education principles. In today's era, where social media and technology have revolutionized every aspect of life, there is a pressing need for a paradigm shift in education and learning. Education, often conflated solely with schooling, encompasses a broader spectrum, including essential life skills. Parents, teachers, and employers frequently express concerns that the young generation lacks these skills, expecting schools to cultivate strong, healthy, and capable individuals through comprehensive learning and training.

Holistic education, as noted by John P. Miller [1]), aligns with our brains' natural inclination towards holism, fostering an environment where individuals develop not only academically but also mentally, intellectually, and spiritually. This study focuses on Learning Together, an educational center in Arad, Romania, established in 2017, which uses a transdisciplinary methodology to teach English and Romanian.

For seven consecutive years, this center has hosted a summer school that serves as an educational and holistic event. The research highlights the development of an educational community through a holistic approach, demonstrating its effectiveness, complexity, and integrative nature. Each summer, over ten weeks, participants engage in simulated real-life scenarios, fostering acceptance, learning, and development across multiple dimensions. The findings suggest that the concept of an educational community is crucial, not only in Romania but globally, supporting the idea that “when one teaches, two learn” (Robert Heinlein).

Keywords: *educational community, holistic education, life skills development, private educational sector, transdisciplinary methodology*

1. Introduction

Currently, the world is experiencing tremendous challenges in education, often conflated solely with schooling. While these terms are interrelated, it is important to note that they have distinct meanings and complement each other. In today's era, where social media and technology have revolutionized every aspect of life, there is a pressing need for a paradigm shift in education and learning. Parents, teachers, and employers frequently express concerns that the young generation lacks essential life skills, expecting schools to produce strong, healthy, and capable individuals through comprehensive learning and training. In this context, holistic education warrants reconsideration. As John P. Miller points out, “because our brains are hardwired to holism” [1], holistic education fosters an environment where individuals develop not only academically but also mentally, intellectually, and spiritually.

This paper presents a theoretical and empirical study conducted within the private educational sector. Drawing on both conceptual frameworks and practical observations, the study investigates the implementation of holistic education. *Learning Together*, an educational center established in 2017 in Arad, Romania, embodies the principles of holistic education, as suggested by its name. Its primary objective is to teach English and Romanian using a transdisciplinary methodology. For seven consecutive years, it has hosted a vibrant summer school that serves as an educational and holistic event. This paper highlights the development of an educational community through a holistic approach, demonstrating its effectiveness, complexity, and integrative nature. Each summer, over ten weeks, children, students,



teachers, and volunteers engage in simulated real-life scenarios, fostering acceptance, learning, and development across multiple dimensions. The concept of an educational community is a significant need, not only in Romania but across the world. Our system is proof that “when one teaches, two learn” (Robert Heinlein).

2. Theoretical Framework: Holistic Education and the Digital Era

2.1. Globalization and Technology’s Role in Education

The internet became widely accessible to the public in 1991, when Tim Berners-Lee launched the World Wide Web. By that time, humanity had already witnessed numerous transformative discoveries, but the internet brought about a monumental shift, particularly in education. Unlike previous media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, the internet allows real-time, global connectivity, fundamentally changing how we access and share knowledge [2]. As global connectivity increased, education needed to adapt to a world where knowledge could be shared across borders.

Throughout the years, it has been observed that the Digital Era, the launch of the Internet, and the rise of holistic education are interconnected, with holistic education flourishing within the context of globalization. Holistic education emphasizes the full development of the individual, treating the human being as a balanced and harmonious whole. Similarly, globalization fosters interconnectivity across economies, cultures, and societies, creating a global whole. The shared link between holistic education and globalization lies in their mutual focus on the concept of the “whole.”

The evolution of education is closely tied to technology. Examining the G.I. Generation through to Generation Alpha reveals the profound impact of the internet. Generation Z, the first with full internet access, focuses on practical skills and global connections, often influenced by social media. The Alpha Generation is even more digitally immersed, with education centered around play and engagement through online platforms [3]. Educators, mostly from Generation X and Millennials, must bridge the gap in understanding these new digital-native generations.

The internet offers numerous advantages, but in education, it has also introduced significant disadvantages that affect younger generations. Although “every technology is an expression of human will,” as Nicholas Carr points out in his book *The Shallows* [4, p. 49], we did not foresee the major disadvantages it would impose on education: addiction, distraction, misinformation, anxiety, depression, lack of face-to-face human connection, cyberbullying, diminished creativity, privacy concerns, loss of oral communication skills, and even a sense of being overwhelmed, along with the high costs.

Holistic education, however, does not aim to eliminate technology and the Internet, but rather to create a balance between the virtual world and real-world development. It focuses on nurturing a child’s independence and building strong character, enabling them to use technology wisely without ignoring its downsides. Holistic education emphasizes real communication, creative thinking, cooperation, and emotional intelligence, fostering a well-rounded approach to learning in the digital age.

2.2. Holistic and Transdisciplinary Education

The term *holistic* has Greek roots, meaning “entire” or “whole.” Words shape our understanding and perception of the world, and in this case, *wholeness* reminds us that it is impossible to fragment the human being into isolated parts and attempt to develop each separately. Traditional education often



focuses on specific parts or sectors, but as we observe in today's society, this approach results in a lack of balance.

Holistic education, on the other hand, seeks to develop the human being as a whole. It is difficult to credit a single individual for the philosophy of holistic education, as it emerged from the contributions of many thinkers across time. Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and John Dewey all recognized that education extends far beyond subjects like math and sports. Holistic education aims to cultivate both cognitive and affective aspects of the individual [5]. Rather than removing the student from the complexity of the world, it integrates them into it [6].

As technology advances rapidly, holistic education evolves alongside globalization. This philosophy embraces *transdisciplinarity*, a concept initially introduced by Jean Piaget and later explored by Basarab Nicolaescu, who described it as going "beyond disciplines" [7]. Modern society cannot afford to separate domains and subjects in education. In understanding the Learning Together Community, it becomes clear that holism, transdisciplinarity, and globalization are inseparable concepts.

2.3. Practical Application: *Learning Together*

These models are not only important for education in general but are also crucial for the approach used at *Learning Together* and the summer school it hosts. The program is designed to develop students' emotional, social and intellectual capacities, preparing them to thrive in a globalized and digitalized world. *Learning Together* was born from the understanding of its founder that education needs a paradigm shift, one that supports children's development in a more holistic way. This new approach aims to address the challenges posed by the digital world by focusing on transdisciplinary and personalized education, tailored to the needs of today's Generation Z and Alpha.

Learning Together follows a holistic paradigm that integrates both a transdisciplinary vision and a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach. Teachers, volunteers, and students study English, and through English, explore broader aspects of life and the surrounding world. This method not only enhances language acquisition but also provides a meaningful context for students to connect language learning with real-world experiences and knowledge across disciplines. This paper presents an exploratory study, supported by seven consecutive years of research, conducted within *Learning Together* to evaluate the effectiveness of this holistic and transdisciplinary approach.

3. The Structure of the Program

3.1. Annual Themes and Modules

The program runs for 10 to 12 weeks each summer, with a specific transdisciplinary theme each year. Every activity is designed to align with the overall theme, taking into consideration CLIL aspects (Content and language integrated learning). For a 10-week program, we have five modules, each lasting two weeks. If the program extends to 12 weeks, six modules are offered, depending on the school calendar.

- Summer of 2018 - the main theme was *The world around me* - with 5 modules: *My family, My Town, My friends, My holiday, My school*;
- Summer of 2019 - the main theme was - *Travel around the world* - with 6 modules: *Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, Antarctica, America*
- Summer of 2020 - the main theme was - *Colors* - with 6 modules: *Yellow module, Green module, Blue module, Red module, Grey module, Rainbow module*



- Summer of 2021 - the main theme was *The Time Machine* - with 6 modules - *The Stone Age, Antiquity, The Middle Ages, The Renaissance, The Modern Age*
- Summer of 2022 - 5th year - the main theme was *My library*- with 6 modules - *Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Alice in Wonderland, The Little Prince, The Wizard of Oz, The Iliad and The Odyssey*
- Summer of 2023 - 6th year - the main theme was *The cabinet of curiosities* - with 6 modules - *Shelf 1 - The human body, Shelf 2 - Under Earth, Shelf 3 - Great Scientific discoveries, Shelf 4 - Underwater, Shelf 5 - Special Gardens , Shelf 6 - Visual Arts*
- Summer of 2024 - 7th year - the main theme was *The adventure chest* - with 5 modules: *The Gems of Imagination, The Pearls of Knowledge, The Diamonds of Communication, The Talismans of Movement, The Amulets of Friendship*

Each summer, the activities are closely tied to the overarching theme. The program incorporates structured frontal activities, group tasks, and individual work, all carefully planned to balance academic rigor with creativity and fun. Focusing on holistic development, neither teachers nor volunteers are left aside. The system is inspired by nature, drawing from the image and structure of a tree—each element has its own role and cannot function independently: the roots, the trunk, the branches, and the leaves. **Teachers** teach, foster, and empower; **volunteers** learn and inspire by engaging in real work and social situations; and **students** absorb from both teachers and volunteers. However, students also create context and meaning for the teachers and volunteers.

4. Key-elements of the Program

In order to fully understand why the program deserves attention, the paper will emphasize the most important aspects:

A. Syllabus and Structure

- From a holistic perspective, the syllabus fosters not only academic progress but also emotional and personal development. It emphasizes creativity, empathy, collaboration, focus, and overall well-being, ensuring balanced student growth.
- The transdisciplinary syllabus integrates language, arts, science, religion, philosophy, mathematics, and social studies, encouraging students to connect knowledge across disciplines for a deeper understanding of the world.
- Through the CLIL methodology, English serves as both the subject and the medium to teach all other topics, ensuring that students develop language skills while mastering complex concepts in various disciplines.

B. Teachers

- Teachers in the program focus not only on academic development but also on students' emotional growth. They foster patience, assertive communication, and a conflict-free environment to support well-rounded development.
- Transdisciplinarily, teachers collaborate across subjects to highlight the connections between disciplines, offering a holistic educational experience.
- In terms of CLIL, teachers are skilled in delivering subject content in English, enhancing both content learning and language acquisition, preparing students for global academic and professional environments.



C. Volunteers

- Volunteering offers personal growth and the chance to build meaningful connections with students, fostering empathy and a sense of community.
- Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, bringing unique perspectives and skills, enriching the transdisciplinary learning environment through teaching, assisting, and engaging students in various activities.
- Many volunteers are proficient in English, contributing to the CLIL approach by supporting language immersion, enhancing both students' language skills and their overall educational experience.

5. Daily Schedule and Core Activities

The schedule is key to maintaining structure and control. Below are details of the core classes and their holistic impact:

Games Time is a crucial element from a holistic perspective, as it focuses on physical activity, nature, teamwork, coordination, and enjoyment. Held in the morning at 9:00, the teacher leads all activities, with support from volunteers. The games play a vital role in encouraging children to run, communicate, and think critically, offering teachers a valuable opportunity to observe them. However, many children initially struggled with group play, understanding rules, accepting peers, and listening actively to instructions. Some became emotional when unable to win, but the majority were eager to attend, even persuading their parents to arrive on time to avoid missing the session.

Example of a Game: Cats and Mice

Story: In a pantry full of cheese, the cats are asleep, while numerous hungry mice collaborate to steal the cheese. The mice must remain silent, but if the cats wake up, the mice must strategize on how to continue stealing the cheese.

Materials:

- 6 large bowls
- Numerous yellow plastic balls (representing the cheese)

How to Play:

- Six bowls are placed around, and six students take the role of the cats, tasked with protecting the cheese.
- The mice, divided into six teams, must attempt to steal the cheese from the bowls without being touched by the cats.
- If a cat touches a mouse, the mouse is "frozen," and another team member must unfreeze them by touching them.
- The team that manages to steal the most cheese wins the game.
- The teacher and volunteers tally the balls (cheese) collected from each bowl.

This game is highly engaging, and both the students and volunteers are enthusiastic about playing it continuously.



Holistic Analysis: From a holistic perspective, the game encourages outdoor play in nature from 9:00 AM, where children must run, crawl, communicate, collaborate, remain focused, and strategize. The game also challenges them to manage time, accept failure, and celebrate success.

Art Attack, inspired by the well-known British show (credits to Disney), is one of the most significant activities of the day. Functioning as a form of occupational therapy, this class nurtures creativity, patience, and critical thinking. Each craft aligns with the theme of the week and serves as a springboard for daily discussions. Children are provided with all necessary materials, enabling each to create their own projects. During the crafting process, the teacher facilitates discussions, drawing connections between the craft and the overarching theme. Teachers deliver presentations, volunteers share readings or visuals, and students engage in questioning and debates. This process fosters excitement and interest. Furthermore, students are encouraged to take their creations home, a key motivator. From a holistic perspective, the class integrates several essential educational components: creative hands-on work, imagination, attentive listening, active questioning, and the support of volunteers in guiding the children.

Example of a craft

Craft: Imagination Suitcase

Materials:

- Paper, Scissors, Crayons, Glue
- Printed materials (cut-outs, stickers)

Goal: Students create a personalized suitcase representing their imaginative ideas. This visual craft helps them understand imagination as something they can carry and explore through creativity.

Process:

1. **Creating the Suitcase:** Students cut out and assemble a paper suitcase.
2. **Filling the Suitcase:** Using crayons and printed materials, students fill their suitcase with drawings and symbols of their imagination.
3. **Sharing:** Students present their suitcases, explaining their chosen items and their imaginative significance.

The *Imagination Suitcase* activity supports students' holistic development by integrating cognitive, emotional, and social skills. By personalizing their suitcase with imaginative symbols, students exercise creativity and self-expression while improving fine motor skills and vocabulary. Presenting their creations fosters self-confidence and communication within a transdisciplinary context that encourages collaboration and the exploration of diverse perspectives.

The English class was meticulously organized, as students were numerous and varied in language proficiency. Groupings were based on age and English level, with volunteers playing a crucial role in managing small groups under the teachers' close supervision. All worksheets and activities were carefully prepared by the teacher, with volunteer assistance. The class focused on vocabulary building, poems, and songs, with advanced groups also working on grammar, creative writing, and listening exercises. It was fascinating to observe the enthusiasm of both volunteers in teaching and students in participating, fostering a dynamic learning environment.



Throughout the day, children have limited spare time, with breaks lasting 15 minutes. After lunch, from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM, students enjoy supervised free time, during which they can rest or play together.

6. Conclusion

Holistic education offers a new and necessary perspective in an increasingly complex and digitalized world. By integrating this approach, the *Learning Together* center has demonstrated that the development of a child is not limited to the accumulation of academic knowledge but also involves emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions. The center's seven-year experience in organizing the summer school shows that transdisciplinary and learning through real-life experiences contribute to forming balanced individuals who are prepared for global challenges.

The approach proposed by *Learning Together*, which combines holistic education with modern techniques like CLIL, offers a practical way to blend personal development with academic education, preparing new generations for life in a globalized and interconnected society. Through this methodology, the center demonstrates that education must be a continuous process of discovery and integration across multiple dimensions of knowledge. In this sense, *Learning Together* can serve as a model for other educational centers, showing that it is possible to respond to the challenges of the 21st century through truly integrated and humanistic education.

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