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Educating the Whole Person: Creativity, Holism and the Future of Learning

Educar a la persona en su totalidad: creatividad,
holismo y el futuro del aprendizaje

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ABSTRACT



Educating the whole person has become a central priority in contemporary educational reform, emphasizing creativity, holistic development, and the cultivation of competencies for an uncertain and challenging future. Rather than focusing exclusively on standardized knowledge acquisition, holistic education integrates cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, and cultural dimensions of learning. Creativity plays a pivotal role in this vision, fostering adaptability, problem-solving, and innovation across disciplines. There is a need to align curriculum, assessment, and quality assurance with broader educational purposes. Such alignment requires innovative assessment practices—performance tasks and reflective activities that capture process, originality, and collaboration. It also demands policies that promote individual equity, digital competence, and fair inclusion, ensuring that all learners benefit from creative opportunities. Educating the whole person is therefore both a pedagogical and societal imperative, preparing individuals not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in civic, cultural, and global communities.

Keywords: assessment, creativity, curriculum, digital competence, equity, holistic education, inclusion, quality assurance



RESUMEN

Educar a la persona, en su totalidad, se ha convertido en una prioridad central en la reforma educativa contemporánea, en la cual se da énfasis a la creatividad, al desarrollo holístico y a la formación de competencias para un futuro incierto y desafiante. En lugar de centrarse exclusivamente en la adquisición estandarizada de conocimientos, la educación holística integra las dimensiones cognitivas, emocionales, sociales, éticas y culturales del aprendizaje. La creatividad desempeña un papel fundamental en esta visión, al fomentar la adaptabilidad, la resolución de problemas y la innovación a través de las disciplinas. Existe la necesidad de alinear el currículo, la evaluación y la garantía de calidad con fines educativos más amplios. Tal alineación requiere de prácticas de evaluación innovadoras —tareas de desempeño y actividades reflexivas—, que capturen el proceso, la originalidad y la colaboración. Asimismo, exige políticas que promuevan la equidad individual, la competencia digital y una inclusión justa, para garantizar que todos los estudiantes se beneficien de las oportunidades creativas. Educar a la persona en su totalidad es, por ende, tanto un imperativo pedagógico como social, que prepara a los individuos no solo para el éxito académico, sino, también, para una participación significativa en las comunidades cívicas, culturales y globales.

Palabras clave: calidad educativa, competencias digitales, creatividad, currículo, educación holística, equidad, evaluación, inclusión



Introduction

Human life is a continuous journey fueled by the pursuit of knowledge. From our first breath to our last, life unfolds as an endless exploration of learning. Every human story is written along the winding path of discovery. Throughout history, cultural inheritances have shaped our intellectual evolution. Life is inherently holistic—powered by our innate yearning to learn and grow into rational, creative, and active beings. Cultural knowledge transmitted across generations shapes human capacities and life itself embodies a kind of holism: a constant desire to learn, judge, imagine, and act. This perspective foregrounds learning as an ontological human activity rather than a mere accumulation of discrete facts.

Contemporary international policy echoes this orientation. The Delors Commission framed four pillars of learning—*learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be*—as a holistic vision for education for the 21st century (Delors *et al.*, 1996). These pillars reappear in modern frameworks that emphasize competencies, agency, and wellbeing as twin goals of schooling. Holistic education reframes schooling from discrete disciplinary goals to integrated human development: cognition, affection, sociality, and meaning.

In modern educational thinking, four core learning dimensions stand out: learning to learn, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Gallegos, 2001). The holistic educator sees the student as a

being of boundless inner potential, spiritual depth, aesthetic sensitivity, and innovative capacity.

Education in the twenty-first century faces profound challenges and opportunities that demand a rethinking of its purpose and scope. Traditional models, which often emphasize standardized outcomes and fragmented subject knowledge, are increasingly insufficient to prepare learners for the complexity of contemporary life. Instead, educators and researchers are calling for approaches that address the learner as a whole person—integrating cognitive, emotional, social, and creative dimensions into the learning process. This vision draws on holistic education traditions while aligning with contemporary concerns about creativity, innovation, and human flourishing in a rapidly changing world.

Holistic education stresses the interconnections between intellectual, emotional, physical, and ethical development. It rejects the reduction of learners to test scores and instead cultivates their capacities for spontaneity, resilience, and empathy. Creativity, as a central element, empowers learners not only to solve problems but also to imagine new possibilities and construct identities that are adaptive and authentic. In this sense, creativity is not a peripheral skill; nonetheless, it is a foundational competence for lifelong learning, professional adaptability, and democratic citizenship. *Craft (2022)* highlights how schools and universities can cultivate creativity by fostering open inquiry, interdisciplinary practices, and learner agency.

At the same time, the future of learning requires an integration of holistic and creative approaches with technological and social innovations. Digital learning environments, Project-Based Education, and collaborative networks provide opportunities to rethink curricula so that they transmit knowledge and nurture the whole person. As *Miller (2021)* argues, holistic education encourages learners to connect their inner lives with the outer



world, developing both critical awareness and compassion. Preparing students for such futures involves equipping them with intellectual skills and ethical dispositions to address global challenges—climate change, inequality, cultural diversity—through imagination, empathy, and collective problem-solving.

Hence, this paper pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. To examine the concept of educating the whole person through a holistic framework that integrates creativity, emotional intelligence, and ethical responsibility.
2. To analyze the role of creativity as a vital component of future-oriented learning that enables adaptability, innovation, and personal growth.
3. To explore pedagogical pathways for the future of learning, focusing on how holistic and creative practices can be fostered within diverse educational settings to prepare learners for global complexity.

By addressing these objectives, the discussion seeks to show how educating the whole person provides a foundation for resilient, compassionate, and imaginative societies.

Pedagogy, Andragogy, and the Educator's Vocation

Pedagogy serves as the bridge between educators and learners—supporting spiritual growth by enabling discovery, creation, construction, continuous learning, and knowledge transmission. *Gutiérrez and Prado* describe pedagogy as “abrir caminos nuevos, dinámicos, inéditos, irrepetibles, sentidos y espirituales” (2001, p. 54) [opening new, dynamic, unknown, unrepeatable, sensed, and spiritual ways] that embrace holism and lived reality.

Contemporary debates about teaching often pivot on two complementary ranks: pedagogy—concerned broadly with upbringing and education—and andragogy—focused on how adults learn. Pedagogy is not as a mere toolbox of classroom techniques, yet it is an ethically charged practice that orients an adult toward the growth of a learner. Friesen and Su (2023) argue that pedagogy is structured by irreducible tensions (e. g., proximity vs. distance; freedom vs. constraint) and thus exceeds any single method; it is an independent but ethically informed practical perspective. This wider view matters because it anchors teaching in judgments about what is good for a learner in concrete situations, not just in efficiencies of instruction.

On the other hand, andragogy names a set of assumptions about adult learners that guide design and facilitation: adults are self-directed, bring prior experience, are ready to learn things relevant to their roles, are problem-centered, want to understand “why,” and are often intrinsically motivated. Empirical and review work in the past few years has reaffirmed these principles while urging more careful application. Tezcan (2022) underscores that adult learners’ autonomy and rich experience base call for dialogic, practice-linked tasks rather than transmission-heavy lessons. These interpretations go against treating andragogy as a rigid recipe; rather, the principles are design heuristics to be weighed against context and goals.

When the two ranks meet practice, useful distinctions emerge. In settings with adults (e. g., workforce development or higher education), andragogical design rightly privileges problem-based, experience-leveraging activities. Contrary, the pedagogical posture still matters: educators must adjudicate tensions (challenge vs. care; independence vs. guidance) in ways that honor learners’ dignity and development (Friesen & Su, 2023). In other words, pedagogy supplies the ethical horizon within which andragogical choices acquire purpose. Thoughtful implementation studies echo this



synthesis: adult-learning designs work best when they connect learning tasks to real problems and when the teacher's stance intentionally negotiates care, responsibility, and freedom (Tezcan, 2022).

Both pedagogical and andragogical practices must be lived and felt by educators. Teaching thrives on vocation, driven by love and intention. Creativity, imagination, intuition, and emotion inspire learners to construct their personal and creative journeys. Gutiérrez and Prado further assert that learning transcends understanding and theorizing—it encompasses desire, sharing, meaning-making, interpretation, expression, and living (2001). Teaching becomes a symbiotic journey where both mentor and learner enrich one another, a sentiment echoed by Ginsberge (as cited in Gutiérrez & Prado, 2001).

This brings us to the educator's vocation, the sense that teaching is more than a job; it is a calling enacted through care and judgment. Hansen and Quek (2023) interlace “teaching as a calling” with the ethics of care, arguing that adequate accounts of teaching must include both dimensions: answering a call to serve and exercising relational care in concrete contexts. Framed this way, vocation is not romanticism; it is a disciplined responsiveness to the needs of learners that guides how one resolves the very tensions that define pedagogy and how one selects and adapts andragogical strategies. The educator's vocation, therefore, is the moral through-line connecting pedagogical purpose to andragogical design.

Teaching is an inner life. The four foundational “pillars” of education—*learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be*—continue to underpin any truly holistic curriculum design (Delors *et al.*, 1996). A good educator has an enormous passion for teaching, which gives them the necessary tools to innovate in their classes in function of the students' needs. Vocation is the key to do a very good job and for giving

the instructor the ability to plan creative lessons instead of remaining in the orthodox styles that used to be in the old school. These are core ingredients for good pedagogical quality.

Holistic education requires moving beyond the traditional ways of teaching. **Nicolescu** stresses the integration of scientific, artistic, spiritual, and cultural knowledge to address complex, real-world problems, such as climate change or social cohesion (2011). Holism is conceived as the “integration of science, art, spirituality and traditions”—a truly transdisciplinary posture.

In a model of transdisciplinary, it is important to cultivate reflective practice. Students can work with their classmates to create a nice environment for peer reflection groups. It is necessary to prioritize relational pedagogy in order for instructors to pay special attention to the student’s voice and encourage empathy training. We need to focus on good relationships with their peers to provide the pupil with a good learning atmosphere. It is a good idea to promote project-based units around community challenges so that the learners can get more involved in issues such as climate change, local history, migration conflicts, water pollution, to create awareness and better sense of responsibility within society.

In sum, pedagogy provides the ethical and conceptual terrain of education; andragogy offers design heuristics for adult contexts; and vocation ties both to the educator’s moral commitments. Effective educators keep all three in view: they read the situation pedagogically, design andragogically where appropriate, and act vocationally—with care, judgment, and a sense of purpose oriented to learners’ flourishing.



Art, Aesthetics, and Spirituality in Learning

The new vision of education highlights four fundamental forms of learning that must be cultivated in 21st-century communities: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Gallegos, 2001). Personal knowledge construction becomes deeply meaningful when understood not as a linear or predictable progression but as an authentic process, rooted in the learner's personal and social purposes. From a holistic perspective, the educator perceives the learner as a multidimensional human being endowed with an unlimited inner potential, a sensitive and curious individual, a spiritual seeker of meaning, an aesthetic being capable of perceiving beauty, and a person whose experience unfolds across multiple dimensions of human life.

Holistic methodology requires teachers to act as mediators between education and learners, expanding the range of activities and adopting creative, flexible strategies that integrate cultural values and personal meaning. This approach emphasizes the unveiling of each learner's inner beauty as a way of embracing uncertainty and growth. In this sense, time in holistic education is not measured quantitatively, however, rather in terms of lived experiences and transformative learning moments.

Art plays a vital and ancient role in both human life and holistic education. As one of humanity's deepest cultural expressions, it not only reflects civilization; on the contrary, it also shapes moral and aesthetic sensibilities. Stolovich (1987) notes that art's transformative influence—recognized since Aristotle—lies in its power to imitate reality while shaping character and emotion. Art constitutes a complex universe, universally present in all cultures, enabling people to perceive, love, live, and above all, enjoy it. As Stolovich further explains, “Las fuentes del arte se encuentran

en la realidad, pero la obra artística representa un mundo particular, que supone una percepción distinta de la comprensión de la vida real” (1987, p. 10) [The sources of art lie in reality, yet every artwork creates its own unique world, offering a perception distinct from the direct understanding of life].

The holistic dimension is inseparable from imagination and creativity. Developing creative imagination is essential for nurturing a culture rooted in artistic and innovative values. To imagine is to create, and human beings possess the extraordinary capacity to bring forth wonders from thought and inspiration. For Gallegos (1999), we are moving from education as technology to education as art. He views reality as a vast network of interrelations, where life, knowledge, and human development are all interconnected. Thus, education itself must be understood as part of this intricate web of relationships that sustain both individual growth and collective flourishing.

Holistic education embodies spirituality though it is not linked to institutional religions or dogma. Its primary goal, like that of ancient doctrine, is to support individuals in developing the knowledge necessary for life. It cultivates spiritual intelligence, sustained inquiry, and creative reflection, integrating human knowledge into a culture of wisdom. Holistic principles invite educators to envision schools not as rigid institutions though as living systems—sensitive, adaptive, and ever-changing learning communities.

A holistic learning community resembles a harmonious family more than a factory of linear processes. As Gallegos (2001) observes, a holistic school is a place where students are genuinely happy to learn about life as they live it. In such communities, individuals flourish freely, constructing transdisciplinary knowledge and moving beyond mechanistic, dogmatic, or behaviorist models. Learning becomes a creative and artistic process that is spontaneous, meaningful, and life-affirming.



Technology, when thoughtfully integrated, can support holistic learning by expanding interconnected environments for inquiry and creativity. Sensitivity—both aesthetic and human—is central to the success of such communities, and through art, learners can cultivate spontaneity and imagination. Learning, therefore, contributes to personal development by awakening intrinsic motivation and the joy of discovery. It must never be imposed or restrictive; rather, it should embrace pleasure, curiosity, and freedom. When learners find satisfaction in the process, they develop a lasting appreciation for learning as a vital element of personal growth and as an essential part of life itself.

The arts positively influence cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes. A recent systematic review of arts interventions finds significant evidence that arts engagement supports physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development. It develops creative thinking across childhood: “Participatory arts activities with children improve their cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development and enhance school readiness” (*All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017, p. 6*).

For the reasons previously mentioned, the implementation of art in school curricula is significant. Learning mathematics, science, history, and languages is important, yet art and creativity are also important as part of the learner’s development as a world citizen. It is a good idea to promote regular study time and community exhibitions. We can use arts for social-emotional learning, by using models such as drama for perspective-talking or visual arts for identity exploration. These practices support both academic and well-being outcomes when implemented with fidelity.

Creativity and Cognitive Mechanisms

Creativity is the capacity to produce ideas or products that are both new and useful. It emerges from the interaction of multiple cognitive mechanisms and large-scale brain networks. According to [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), “persons or processes are creative to the extent that they produce creative products, and a product is creative if it meets two conditions: in addition to being new it must also be valuable” (2024, para. 10). At the cognitive level, creativity involves associative thinking (generating remote ideas), cognitive control (evaluating and refining those ideas), working memory, and attentional flexibility to shift between divergent (idea-generation) and convergent (idea-evaluation) modes.

Neuroscientific findings increasingly emphasize the role of large-scale brain networks—particularly the Default Mode Network (DMN), Executive Control/Frontoparietal Network (ECN/FPN), and salience network—in enabling creative thought. These networks support spontaneous idea generation (DMN), goal-directed evaluation (ECN/FPN), and switching between modes (salience network) ([Beatty et al., 2016](#)). However, a recent large-scale empirical study by [Orwig et al. \(2023\)](#) provides explicit evidence regarding functional connectivity at rest: “In a comparison between creative experts and control participants, creative individuals consistently showed reduced connectivity in the visual cortex. Moreover, vivid imaginative simulation negatively correlated with visual cortex connectivity—highlighting a neural signature tied to creativity” (pp. 1022-1033). This research reveals how specific patterns of intrinsic brain connectivity—especially reduced coupling in visual areas—may underpin richer internal imagination and creative capacity.



Furthermore, creativity is not merely a static trait; on the contrary, it emerges from dynamic network reconfiguration. Flexibly toggling between DMN and ECN activity appears central to creative performance. Creativity is rooted in the brain's capacity to integrate spontaneous associative processes with evaluative control, facilitated by dynamic functional connectivity. Cognitive mechanisms such as associative extensiveness, memory access, cognitive control, and attentional flexibility align with these neural dynamics. The neuroscientific perspective thus reframes creative thinking not as the output of a single region, but as an emergent property of network-level coordination.

In practical terms, this suggests that creativity can be nurtured by activities that foster flexible thinking, imaginative simulation, and balanced evaluative feedback—mirroring the brain's own mechanisms. Educational programs might incorporate alternating phases of free ideation and structured critique, guided visualization, or tasks encouraging vivid internal simulation to tap into those intrinsic connectivity patterns. It is necessary to evaluate creativity with rubrics that balance novelty and relevance rather than only standardized test scores. These approaches reflect the cognitive style of creative thought and are supported by both behavioral and neuroimaging research.

Multiple Intelligences and Personalized Learning

Thought is a valuable tool inherent to humans, enabling us to be both rational and creatively active. As Gallegos (1999) notes, thought serves as the instrument through which we learn a language, acquire driving skills, master technology, develop specific techniques, and gain practical skills relevant to the world around us. These abilities are essential for learners to navigate the pragmatic aspects of life toward which education is guiding

them. What is learned today in the educational center or learning community will have a lasting impact on the individual and their future. Each person's intelligence is not fixed or constrained; rather, it is spontaneous and creatively active. Intelligence develops through stimulation.

Among the influential figures in this educational tradition are notable authors such as Freinet, Piaget, Vygotsky, Krishnamurti, Clark, and Lee, among others. These pedagogues have contributed to the emergence of a holistic vision of education. According to Nava (2009), holism offers tools for classroom practice through approaches such as silence, storytelling, meditation, imagination, art, dreams, and dialogue, among many others. These artistic and cultural elements facilitate the development of a more integral, humanistic, and high-quality education for learners, whether children or adults.

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), introduced in 1983, posits that intelligence is not a singular, fixed attribute, yet it is a collection of distinct modalities. These include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. Gardner's framework challenges traditional notions of intelligence, emphasizing a more holistic understanding of human cognitive abilities (Cherry, 2025). According to this author, all children are potentially geniuses (Gardner, 1983). Unfortunately, under the traditional educational system, their intelligence is often underdeveloped, leaving much talent untapped. The conventional idea that students who excel in mathematics are the most intelligent restricts the intellectual development of learners. This notion is not necessarily accurate; according to Gardner (1983), all human beings are capable of developing multiple intelligences. The key lies in stimulating learners to engage in creative, spontaneous, and original learning.



MI theory remains influential in practice but contested in research. Recent critiques argue that MI has been over-applied as a pedagogical prescription and sometimes recast as a neuromyth; empirical support for the MI model as distinct neural/psychometric constructs is mixed (some studies find supportive neural correlates, others caution about operationalization). MI theory is pedagogically useful as a heuristic element for recognizing the learner's diversity; nonetheless, it should not replace evidence-based instructional strategies or be treated as a strict diagnostic taxonomy.

In recent years, the integration of MI theory into educational practices has been further enriched by the advent of personalized learning. Personalized learning refers to instructional strategies that cater to the individual learning needs, preferences, and paces of students. By aligning MI theory with personalized learning, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that recognize and nurture the varied strengths of each student.

Recent studies have highlighted the efficacy of combining MI theory with personalized learning frameworks. For instance, a systematic review published in 2024 found that integrating MI theory with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles allows for the customization of learning experiences, addressing the diverse styles and needs of students. This approach enhances engagement and promotes a deeper understanding of content by leveraging students' inherent strengths (Wu *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, the application of MI theory in personalized learning settings has been shown to improve student motivation and achievement. By providing opportunities for students to engage with content through their dominant intelligences—be it through musical compositions, spatial representations, or interpersonal collaborations—educators can foster a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience (McCall, 2023).

Despite the promising benefits, the implementation of MI theory in personalized learning is not without challenges. One significant barrier is the lack of adequate teacher training. Educators may be unfamiliar with MI theory or lack the resources to effectively integrate it into their teaching practices. Additionally, there may be resistance to adopting new instructional strategies, especially in traditional educational settings (Barrera *et al.*, 2024). To overcome these challenges, it is essential to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to apply MI theory in the classroom. Moreover, fostering a school culture that values diversity and innovation can encourage the adoption of personalized learning approaches that align with MI theory (Barrera *et al.*, 2024).

Our educational system should strive to make learning processes more personalized, allowing learners to discover their personal talents, identify the fields of knowledge where they feel most comfortable, engage in activities with greater ease and enjoyment, and develop their potential. Everyone has capabilities in different areas, some more pronounced than others. Some have an exceptional ear for music, others possess outstanding coordination for dance, and others exhibit excellent diction for acting, for example. Here, the instructor's creative capacity plays a crucial role in motivating learners to develop these potential skills.

The ultimate goal within the educational system is to foster learning activities that encompass the full range of human capacities—physical, intellectual, emotional, artistic, and scientific—allowing learners to explore a broad spectrum of interests. Education should be holistic and creatively active to enable each learner to develop what makes them happiest and most competent in their professional, social, and personal lives. Education must prepare learners for life in a creative and enjoyable way, rather than through



orthodox or imposed methods. Individuals, from childhood to adulthood, should recognize learning as a lifelong process; the more one learns, the more one grows as a human being and develops spiritually and professionally within society. Learning should be an integral part of daily life.

During the educational process, all intelligences must be cultivated to their fullest potential. Each individual is unique and may have more developed aptitudes in certain areas than in others. As previously explained, humans possess a full spectrum of intelligences; however, as individuals they identify the aptitudes most suited to them; they should be supported in developing and constructing knowledge in which they excel. **Gardner's theory (1983)** provides a valuable framework for observing individuals in detail, identifying areas of difficulty, and reinforcing strengths. It enables us to understand human potential —not only for those who will dedicate themselves to a specific social or professional field, such as musicians or writers— but also to appreciate the broad possibilities offered by diverse intelligences and to cultivate each of them. Every human being can develop and maximize these intelligences.

As a result, the integration of MI theory with personalized learning represents a forward-thinking approach to education that recognizes and celebrates the diverse cognitive profiles of students. By tailoring instruction to align with students' strengths, educators can create more engaging and effective learning experiences. While challenges exist, with proper support and resources, the potential benefits of this integration can lead to more inclusive and successful educational outcomes (**Wu et al., 2024**).

From Community of Learners to Digital Tools

In the evolving landscape of education, the transition from traditional communities of learners to the integration of digital tools marks a significant shift in pedagogical approaches. Historically, the concept of a community of learners has been central to educational practices. This approach emphasizes collaborative learning, where students engage actively with peers and instructors to construct knowledge collectively. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory underscores the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, suggesting that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning (McLeod, 2025). In this context, classrooms function as communities where dialogue, shared experiences, and mutual support facilitate deeper understanding and critical thinking.

The community of learners' model promotes inclusivity and personalized learning, allowing students to contribute with diverse perspectives and learn from one another. This environment nurtures skills such as communication, empathy, and problem-solving, which are essential in the 21st-century knowledge economy.

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized educational methodologies. Tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), digital assessment platforms, and collaborative software have transformed traditional classrooms into dynamic, interactive learning environments. According to the *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2023*, countries are increasingly leveraging digital ecosystems to enhance educational outcomes, with technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing a pivotal role in personalizing learning experiences (OECD, 2023a). Digital tools facilitate access to a wealth of information and resources, enabling students to learn at their own pace and according to their individual needs. Platforms



like Google Classroom and Zoom have become integral in facilitating synchronous and asynchronous learning, allowing for greater flexibility and accessibility (*European School Education Platform, 2021*).

Moreover, the integration of AI in education has opened new avenues for personalized learning. AI-driven applications can adapt content to suit the learning styles and paces of individual students, providing tailored educational experiences that were previously unattainable in traditional settings (*UNESCO, 2023*).

Despite the advantages, the integration of digital tools in education presents several challenges. One significant concern is the digital divide, where disparities in access to technology can exacerbate existing inequalities in education. *UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report* highlights that while digital technologies have the potential to enhance learning, unequal access can hinder their effectiveness, particularly in low-income regions. Additionally, the over-reliance on digital tools raises questions about data privacy and the potential for algorithmic biases in AI applications. Ensuring that digital platforms are secure, transparent, and equitable is crucial to maintaining trust and efficacy in educational settings (*UNESCO, 2023*).

The transition from traditional communities of learners to digitally enhanced educational environments represents a paradigm shift in pedagogy. While digital tools offer unprecedented opportunities for personalized, flexible, and inclusive learning, it is imperative to address the challenges they present. Ensuring equitable access, safeguarding data privacy, and maintaining the human element in education are essential aspects to harnessing the full potential of digital technologies. As education continues to evolve, a balanced approach that integrates the strengths of both traditional and digital learning communities will be key to fostering an inclusive and effective educational landscape.

Assessment, Curriculum, and Quality

Contemporary educational goals increasingly emphasize the development of the whole learner and the promotion of creative and critical thinking alongside disciplinary knowledge. This shift calls for an integrated view of curriculum design, assessment practice, and quality assurance that recognizes both measurable outcomes and broader developmental aims — social, emotional, ethical, and creative. To align assessment with holistic and creative education, policy and practice must reframe what counts as valid evidence of learning and how quality is judged across contexts (OECD, 2023a; UNESCO, 2024).

A starting point is curricular intent. Holistic curricula foreground a broad conception of learning that includes cognitive, affective, social, and cultural dimensions and that situates disciplinary content within meaningful, real-world tasks. UNESCO's recent *Framework for Culture and Arts Education* highlights curriculum as an ecosystem that should integrate culture, arts, and lifelong learning goals to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and social responsibility. It argues that curricula should be designed to promote inclusion, co-creation, and multiple modalities of learning (formal, non-formal, blended), thereby expanding how learning quality is conceived beyond narrow testable knowledge (UNESCO, 2024).

Assessment must follow curriculum logic: if the curriculum values integrative competencies and creative problem solving, assessment techniques must capture those competencies. Large-scale efforts to measure creativity and higher-order thinking (for example, the OECD's PISA 2022 creative-thinking framework) demonstrate that complex skills can be operationalized and assessed, but they require carefully defined constructs, multi-domain tasks, and rubrics that reward originality, diversity of ideas, and iterative improvement



rather than only single correct answers (OECD, 2023b). These frameworks show that assessment can be broadened without abandoning reliability. However, doing so requires investment in task design, scorer training, and adequate time for students to demonstrate processual, creative thinking.

At the classroom and institutional levels, assessments suited to holistic and creative aims often rely on performance tasks, portfolios, project-based rubrics, reflective journals, and peer/self assessment. The OECD review of higher-education practices argues that quality assurance mechanisms and policies can encourage the adoption of such assessment innovations — through funding pilots, issuing guidance, and aligning accreditation standards with competence-based outcomes — also cautions that system-level measures often lag behind curricular reforms and that decentralized implementation creates variability in practice and documentation (Bouckaert & Vincent-Lancrin, 2023). In short, policy levers matter, and it must be sensitive to institutional autonomy and pedagogical contexts.

Digital tools and large-scale assessments focused on competence illustrate another dimension of quality for holistic education: the capacity to participate effectively in a digitally mediated world. The *ICILS 2023* assessment framework shows how literacies can be defined, taught, and assessed in ways that connect to problem solving, creativity and communication; it stresses that valid assessment of digital competences requires realistic tasks and contextual data about learning environments and teacher practices (Fraillon & Rožman, 2023). This bridges curriculum, assessment, and quality by anchoring judgments about learning in authentic performance and contextual evidence.

Quality assurance systems need to adapt accordingly. Traditional Quality Assurance (QA) emphasizes input and process indicators (resources, staffing) and output measures (graduation rates, standardized test scores). To align QA with holistic aims, external evaluation must include evidence

of the breadth and coherence of curricula, the presence of formative assessment and feedback loops, demonstrable learning progressions in transversal skills, and mechanisms for inclusive practice and wellbeing. The OECD working papers and project materials on assessing creativity recommend a mix of internal QA (institutional self-study, peer review) and external incentives (pilot funding, reporting expectations) to support sustained change (Bouckaert & Vincent-Lancrin, 2023).

Implementing assessment for holistic and creative education raises practical challenges: assessor training, standardization of scoring for open tasks, resource intensity of performance assessments, and equity concerns in access to learning experiences that foster creativity. Addressing these requires targeted professional development, investment in assessment infrastructure, and careful design to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities (OECD, 2023a; UNESCO, 2024). When curriculum, assessment, and quality assurance are designed coherently around holistic learning goals, they create an ecosystem where creative capacities are taught, assessed, and recognized as central outcomes — not add-ons to “real” learning. Adopting holistic curricula at scale requires teacher professional learning, time for collaborative planning, flexible assessment policies, and equity measures to ensure that all students have access to arts and experiential learning opportunities.

Thus, shifting from traditional, narrowly measured aims to holistic and creative education requires rethinking curriculum design, aligning assessment to processual and performance-based evidence, and reforming quality assurance to value breadth, inclusion, and creativity. International frameworks and large-scale assessment projects (OECD, 2023a), together with policy reviews, provide practical roadmaps showing that this realignment is feasible — it depends on sustained policy support, resources, and attention to equity in implementation.



Recommendations for Educators, Schools, and Policymakers

For classroom teachers

1. Design weekly arts-infused projects and reflective journals.
2. Use formative rubrics that capture novelty + relevance with creativity rubrics.
3. Offer multimodal entry points to content (MI heuristic) and test impact.

For school leaders

1. Create protected professional time for co-planning (trans-disciplinary teams).
2. Adopt “happy and good schools” criteria for well-being and belonging.

For policymakers

1. Fund arts and experiential programs equitably; measure outcomes beyond standardized scores.
2. Support research-in-practice partnerships to monitor the effects of holistic interventions.

Conclusion

In charting a path toward educating the whole person, it becomes clear that creativity and holism are not peripheral aspirations; conversely, they are central imperatives in preparing learners for an uncertain, interconnected future. The shift from narrowly defined outcomes—dominated by standardized tests and discrete knowledge domains—to an integrated, human-centered vision of learning marks both a pedagogical renaissance and a systemic challenge.

Holistic education prioritizes the growth of cognitive, emotional, ethical, and social dimensions, inviting educators, policymakers, and communities to reconceive what it means to learn, to assess, and to flourish.

First, it is essential to reaffirm the foundational premise: creativity is neither optional nor extravagant in modern learning ecosystems—it is indispensable. International frameworks such as PISA’s creative-thinking assessments have demonstrated that creative capacities can be defined, observed, and measured when assessment is reconstructed with appropriate task design and scoring rubrics (OECD, 2023a). Learners equipped with creative confidence and adaptive thinking are better positioned to navigate complex global challenges ranging from technological disruption to climate uncertainty. Educating the whole person must therefore foreground creativity not just as an add-on. It must be a threaded principle across disciplines, experiences, and learning environments.

Holistic education also requires that curricula be reoriented toward integrative, life-relevant learning. According to *UNESCO’s Framework for Culture and Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2024), a curriculum that integrates cultural, arts-based, ethical, and social dimensions fosters inclusion, co-creation, and multiple modes of learning (formal, informal, blended). This approach acknowledges learners as complete beings whose understanding develops through relationships, experiences, and self-expression—not merely through content absorption. By weaving creativity, reflection, and agency into the construction of curriculum, education systems can nurture knowledge, identity, purpose, and civic engagement.

Yet, innovation in curriculum must be matched by innovation in assessment. Traditional assessments, often narrow in scope and temporally confined, fail to capture the depth of holistic learning. In contrast, performance tasks, portfolios, peer feedback, and reflective artifacts provide richer,



more authentic evidence of growth—when supported by well-designed rubrics and assessor training (Bouckaert & Vincent-Lancrin, 2023). These methods allow students to demonstrate a creative process, metacognition, collaboration, and resilience—qualities essential to the whole-person vision.

Moreover, quality assurance frameworks must evolve to evaluate academic outcomes as well as the quality of holistic experiences. This demands a shift from predominant input/output metrics (e. g., graduation rates, test scores) toward indicators that reflect developmental breadth—such as coherence of integrative curricula, the presence of formative feedback loops, opportunities for creative expression, and attention to learner well-being. OECD’s work suggests combining institutional self-study with peer review and external supports (such as pilot funding and reporting incentives) to encourage deeper transformation (Bouckaert & Vincent-Lancrin, 2023). Such multi-layered approaches can promote contextually sensitive quality improvements while building practitioner capacity and accountability.

Furthermore, in an increasingly digital world, holistic learning must include digital literacies that are creative, ethical, and critical. The ICILS 2023 framework outlines how assessments of digital competence can be designed to emphasize problem-solving, communication, and creative uses of technology—grounded in realistic, contextual tasks (Fraillon & Rožman, 2023). By layering digital fluency onto the broader competency set of the whole person, education can empower learners to become active, responsible participants in a digital society.

However, moving toward this vision is not without challenges. Creative and holistic approaches demand substantial resources: time for task completion, assessor training, development of high-quality materials, and ongoing professional learning for educators. There is also a risk that, without careful design, such innovations exacerbate inequities—if underserved students lack

access to creative-rich learning environments or if scoring systems inadvertently privilege those already advantaged (OECD, 2023a; UNESCO, 2024). Thus, equity must be intent-driven within holistic reform: investing in inclusive curricula, providing technological access, and scaffolding learning experiences so that all students can participate meaningfully.

Educating the whole person invites a reimagined partnership among all stakeholders—teachers, students, families, communities, and policymakers—working collaboratively across levels to co-create meaningful learning ecosystems. Practically, this can take the form of community-based projects, arts-integrated initiatives, mentorship networks, and student-centered learning design. Systemically, it calls for policies that embed holistic and creative metrics into accountability structures, funding formulas, and educator’s preparation programs.

Furthermore, research and continuous learning must guide implementation. Longitudinal studies, mixed-methods research, and practitioner inquiry can document how whole-person education impacts academic, social, and emotional outcomes over time. The international frameworks (e.g., UNESCO’s culture+arts educational guidelines, PISA’s creative-thinking assessments, and ICILS’s digital-creative measures) provide valuable platforms for cross-national learning and norm-setting.

In conclusion, educating the whole person is not a utopian ideal; it is a compelling, necessary, and increasingly actionable direction for education globally. By realigning curriculum, assessment, and quality assurance systems to recognize creative thinking, integration, personal growth, and digital agility, educators can prepare learners to succeed at work or school so that they will be able to thrive as individuals and as members of civic and global communities. This way, educators will be encouraging creative learners, not only knowledgeable, but imaginative, resilient, empathetic, and ready for an ever-changing world.



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