Mainstreaming Whole-Person Approach in SPUP's Transformative Education

Allan Peejay M. Lappay, PhD
St. Paul University Philippines

ABSTRACT: The whole-person approach in transformative education sets a paradigm in integrating facets of human existence in the teaching-learning process. It advances personal growth, consciousness, and societal change through a holistic learning experience. This research paper delves into ascertaining the whole-person approach along the transformative education of St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP). It explores the practices, relates the experiences, and describes the opportunities espoused by the University in fostering transformative learning outcomes. Using the qualitative research design, particularly focus group discussion, the study brings to light various perspectives that illustrate SPUP's whole-person approach relevant to its mission towards transformative learning. The findings from this study highlight SPUP's endeavours in cultivating a positive convergence of the dimensions of human life, namely: physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing; social engagement; intellectual, moral and ethical, career development; cultural competence; environmental sustainability; and personal agency and resilience, in the University's educational process to advance transformative learning.

KEYWORDS: Whole-person approach, Transformative education, Human existence, Positive convergence, St. Paul University Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

Transformative education focuses on developing individuals holistically. It considers education as a means for personal growth, empowerment, and social change. In the recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of a whole-person approach in transformative education. This paradigm shift in education significantly contributes to the well-being and success of students, ultimately leading to the transformation of societies.

The whole-person approach in education aims to nurture the overall growth and well-being of learners. It acknowledges that education transcends beyond the transmission of knowledge and encompasses the development of skills, attitudes, and values that enable individuals to thrive in all aspects of life. According to Johnson (2016), this approach ponders education as a transformative process that empowers individuals to become active participants in society, aware of their strengths and values.

By embracing a whole-person approach, education supports the development of the essential life skills of students (UNESCO, 2017). It recognizes that aside from the classroom, learning also occurs within various contexts, including the family, community, and the natural environment. Transformative education values the importance of engaging with the social and ecological systems, promoting sustainable development and social justice (Feldman & Conti, 2013; UNESCO, 2017). By fostering an understanding of interconnectedness and promoting sustainable values, this approach contributes to creating a more equitable and environmentally conscious society.

The journey of St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) in implementing the whole-person approach in its transformative education focused on facilitating the transformational journey of its students by adopting learner-centered approaches that consider their diverse needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds (UNESCO, 2017). It is advanced through the collaboration of SPUP stakeholders composed of university administrators, teachers, parents, alumni, and members of partner-communities by providing students with opportunities for experiential learning and engagement in real-life problem situations (Beeson, & Powell, 2015; Keis, 2017). It created holistic learning experiences as SPUP fostered safe spaces for students to express their thoughts and emotions, promoting a positive and inclusive learning environment (Patterson, 2017).

In advancing the whole-person approach in its transformative education, SPUP empowered its students to take ownership of their learning journey, equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate possibilities and become lifelong learners (Fox et al., 2016). SPUP's mainstreaming of the whole-person approach in its transformative education is essential for nurturing the holistic development of students and preparing them for the challenges of the modern world. By embracing this paradigm, SPUP enabled its students to develop essential life skills, promote sustainability and be of service to society.

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II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Transformative education transcends the traditional focus of conveying information and developing skills. It aims to facilitate holistic personal growth and social change (Cranton, 2022). By integrating cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions, the whole-person approach to transformative education can facilitate deep and lasting personal and social transformation (Stanton, 2016). Consequently, this study aimed to identify the attributes and to ascertain the different indicators of SPUP's whole-person approach relevant to its transformative education.

III. METHODOLOGY

Mainstreaming the whole-person approach in SPUP's transformative education emphasizes the holistic development of students, encompassing their cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022). To explore this approach, focus group discussion (FGD) is employed as a research method. It allowed the researcher to engage directly with the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and insights regarding the whole-person approach. Three groups, each with six participants, composed of university administrators, teachers, parents, alumni, students, and members of partner-communities are involved in the study. Through a series of questions and prompts, themes are deduced from the responses of participants relevant to the characteristics of SPUP's whole-person approach.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mainstreaming the whole-person approach in SPUP's transformative education fosters the positive convergence of multiple dimensions of human existence into the teaching-learning process. It seeks to develop knowledgeable, compassionate, empathetic, self-aware, and equipped individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern world (Nipple, 2018). The following were identified by the participants through the focus group discussion (FGD) as attributes of SPUP's whole-person approach:

1. **Physical well-being** is a vital component of the overall development and success of students (Gunnlaugson et al., 2021). In SPUP, maintaining optimal physical well-being is crucial for the learners' overall quality of life and ability to engage in meaningful activities, relationships, and pursuits. The participants agreed that through the whole-person approach, SPUP emphasizes the importance of addressing the physical needs and challenges of students, as these can significantly impact their cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. By incorporating physical well-being into its educational framework, SPUP created a more holistic and supportive learning environment (Ackerman et al., 2022).

   As identified by the participants, the following endeavors indicate the advancement of physical well-being in SPUP: promotion of regular exercises, balanced nutrition and diet, adequate sleep, stress management, (mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation exercises), and practicing self-care, self-acceptance and body image positivity. Furthermore, SPUP's whole-person approach recognizes the importance of creating a safe and inclusive physical learning environment. This involves ensuring that the physical spaces within the educational institution are accessible and accommodating to students with diverse needs and abilities (Traxler et al., 2023). By fostering a physically supportive and inclusive learning environment, SPUP empowered its students to engage more fully in the educational process and develop a deeper sense of connection and belonging (Lowe et al., 2022).

2. **Emotional well-being** along transformative education encompasses the students' ability to recognize, understand, and regulate their feelings, as well as their capacity to build meaningful relationships with peers and teachers (Nguyen & Zuckerman, 2020). In SPUP, by incorporating strategies to support emotional well-being, it created a learning environment that fosters holistic growth and transformation (Seaborn & Milliken, 2021). This involved the integration of social-emotional learning curricula, the provision of counseling services, and the creation of a supportive and empathetic classroom climate.

   As characterized by the participants, SPUP's warrants the following relevant to emotional well-being: self-awareness, self-esteem and self-reflection, development of emotional intelligence, empathy and compassion towards oneself and others, building resilience and coping skills, and practice of self-empowerment. SPUP's whole-person approach to transformative education aims to form academically proficient and emotionally equipped students who are ready to navigate the challenges of personal growth and societal transformation (Kapur et al., 2022). This approach recognizes that emotional health is a critical component of the overall well-being of learners in the educational process (Bauer & Bauer, 2020).

3. **Intellectual well-being** emphasizes the importance of nurturing students' cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills, and intellectual curiosity. In SPUP, intellectual well-being attribute is nurtured through active and engaged learning. This involves incorporating diverse pedagogical approaches, such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and Socratic discussions, which encourage students to actively participate in the learning process and develop their intellectual capacities (Brookfield, 2021).

   With its provision of quality education, the participants are in unison in characterizing that SPUP endeavors the following to foster intellectual well-being: development and application of critical thinking skills (analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make well-reasoned judgments), nurturing students' creativity and innovative thinking, development of profound

understanding of subject matter, promotion of metacognitive skills (self-reflection and self-regulation), and building connections and integrating knowledge across different disciplines. Additionally, SPUP also provides opportunities for research, independent study, and interdisciplinary collaboration that further enhance students' intellectual well-being and prepare them for the demands of the 21st-century workforce (Mezirow, 2021). SPUP's whole-person approach to transformative education promotes an environment that encourages intellectual engagement and growth. It also advances opportunities where teachers help students develop the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of the modern world (Brookfield, 2021).

4. **Social engagement** recognizes that education is also about cultivating healthy relationships, social connections, and a sense of belonging within the learning community (Cranton, 2021). By addressing the social well-being of students, SPUP aims to create an environment that supports their personal growth, emotional intelligence, and ability to navigate diverse social contexts (Taylor, 2021). By advancing social connections, SPUP students develop essential interpersonal skills, such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are crucial for their personal and professional success.

The participants highlighted that in SPUP, the cultivation of a sense of community and social support within the learning environment (Mezirow, 2021) is vigorous. This involves leading students to engage in collaborative learning activities, participate in extracurricular programs, and build meaningful relationships with their peers and other members of the community (Cranton, 2021). Moreover, SPUP's social engagement also hones intercultural competence, ethical awareness, and compassion. Through its whole-person approach to transformative education, SPUP encourages students to critically examine societal norms, challenge biases, and develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences (Cranton, 2021). In SPUP, students are empowered to become active and engaged citizens, capable of contributing to the betterment of their communities and the world at large (Taylor, 2021).

5. **Moral and Ethical development** recognizes that education is also about shaping the character and values of the individual (Sternberg, 2021). By engaging students in discussions and activities that foster moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and a sense of social responsibility, SPUP imbibes in them a strong moral compass and a commitment to doing what is right (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022). By encouraging students to question assumptions, analyze information, and consider multiple viewpoints, SPUP helps students become more discerning and engaged citizens (Mezirow, 2021). This empowers them to think critically about social, political, and environmental issues, and to take informed action to address them.

According to the participants, SPUP inculcates morals and ethics through various activities that enhance a deeper understanding and appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of others, a sense of social responsibility and a desire to contribute positively to their communities and the world at large (Hoare et al., 2021). By also exposing students to the realities of life, SPUP engages them in value-based decisions (Astin et al., 2022). Through its whole-person approach to transformative education, SPUP cultivates responsible citizens and competent leaders who are not only knowledgeable, but also compassionate, ethical, and committed to making a positive difference in the world (Cranton, 2022).

6. **Spiritual well-being** in education is the development of the inner self and the connection to something greater than the individual (Astin et al., 2022). SPUP's education incorporates practices and discussions that promote self-reflection, meaning making, and a sense of purpose, where students cultivate a deeper understanding of their own values, beliefs, and spiritual needs (Cranton, 2022).

While it is true that SPUP students are engaged in religious education courses, spiritual activities also develop in them a sense of mindfulness and openness to interfaith understanding. The participants identified recollection, retreats, meditation, journaling, ecumenical prayers, and reflective dialogue as relevant strategies towards development of the spiritual well-being of students (Dirkx, 2020). Moreover, in SPUP, students are exposed to diverse spiritual and religious traditions. This develops in them a greater understanding and respect for the diverse cultural and spiritual perspectives that exist in the world (Tisdell, 2021). It inspires them to reflect on their own spirituality and how it shapes their values, decision-making, and engagement with the world around them (Mezirow, 2020). Through its whole-person approach to transformative education, SPUP nurtures the inner lives of students, empowering them to lead more fulfilling and purposeful lives (Sternberg, 2021).

7. **Career development** prepares students for their future professions and personal fulfillment (Sternberg, 2021). In SPUP, this is furthered by leading students to explore their interests, values, aspirations, and connecting these to potential career paths (Cranton, 2022). By engaging its students in self-reflection, career exploration, and experiential learning opportunities, SPUP supports them in developing a deeper understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, and motivations, and how these might align with various career options (Astin et al., 2022).

In the discussion with the participants, they underscored the integration of career planning and exploration in SPUP's curriculum. This involved activities such as informational interviews, job shadowing, and internships, which allow students to gain first-hand experience in different work environments and gain a better understanding of the skills and qualifications

required for various professions (Mezirow, 2021). In addition, they also recognized that SPUP provides support and guidance to its students and alumni through the conduct of career counseling, mentorship programs, and professional development workshops. These help them navigate the complexities of the job market, develop essential job-seeking skills, and build professional networks (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022). By fostering a career development path, SPUP's whole-person approach to its transformative education, equips its learners with the knowledge, skills, and self-awareness needed to pursue fulfilling and meaningful work that aligns with their unique strengths and aspirations (Dirkx, 2020).

8. **Cultural competence** acknowledges the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds that students bring to the learning environment (Cranton, 2022). In SPUP, this helps learners develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to navigate and engage in cultural diversity. Additionally, it also encourages students to reflect on their own cultural identities, shape their perspectives and interactions, develop greater self-awareness, and communicate effectively and respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds (Mezirow, 2021).

    The discussion among the participants affirmed that there is an inclusive and welcoming learning environment in SPUP. This involves adopting teaching practices and classroom policies that acknowledge and accommodate the diverse needs and learning styles of students, as well as building a sense of belonging and community within the classroom (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022). By creating spaces where students feel safe to share their experiences, challenge their assumptions, and engage in meaningful dialogue, SPUP cultivates a culture of mutual understanding, respect, and appreciation for diversity (Dirkx, 2020). The cultivation of cultural competence in SPUP's whole-person approach to its transformative education empowers students to become global citizens who are equipped to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and diverse world (Sternberg, 2021).

9. **Environmental sustainability** equips students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address the pressing environmental challenges facing the world (Cranton, 2022). As SPUP promotes a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between human systems and natural ecosystems (Astin et al., 2022), it also promotes environmental sustainability as integrated into its teaching-learning process. Moreover, SPUP also highlights the cultivation of an ethical and values-based approach to environmental decision-making. By encouraging students to explore the moral and ethical implications of their actions and choices, SPUP helps them develop a strong environmental ethic and a commitment to making decisions that prioritize the long-term well-being of the planet (Hoare et al., 2021). This includes discussions around topics such as environmental justice, the rights of nature, and the ethical obligations of individuals and societies to protect, conserve and restore the natural world (Dirkx, 2020).

    The participants pointed out that through its environmental sustainability advocacy, SPUP nurtures systems thinking and holistic problem-solving. This is evident in the teaching-learning strategies such as case studies, simulations, and collaborative projects that require them to analyze the root causes of environmental problems, consider multiple stakeholder perspectives, and develop innovative and sustainable solutions (Mezirow, 2021). Additionally, by incorporating experiential learning opportunities, such as field trips, eco-restoration projects, and community-based initiatives, SPUP helps students develop a deeper connection to the natural world and a greater sense of personal responsibility for its stewardship (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022).Through its whole-person approach to transformative education, SPUP leads its students to become informed, engaged, and proactive advocates for a more sustainable future (Tisdell, 2021).

10. **Personal agency and resilience** emphasize the development of skills and mindsets that empower students to take an active role in their own learning and personal growth, and to navigate the challenges and setbacks they may encounter along the way (Sternberg, 2021). This is fostered as students become more proactive, adaptable, and persistent in the face of adversity as SPUP continuously impressed in them the sense of self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy, (Astin et al., 2022). Moreover, SPUP is consistent in the incorporation of goal setting, problem-solving, and decision-making activities into the teaching-learning process. Through these activities, students learn to identify their own needs and aspirations, develop strategies for achieving their goals, and make informed choices that align with their values and priorities (Mezirow, 2021).

    The participants indicated that in SPUP, the development of personal agency and resilience takes place as it provides opportunities for students to take on leadership roles, engage in community service, and participate in extracurricular activities (Aina & Abjorsen, 2022). These experiences not only foster a sense of personal agency and responsibility, but also help students develop essential life skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving (Dirkx, 2020). By empowering students to take an active role in shaping their own lives and contributing to their communities, SPUP's whole-person approach to its transformative education cultivates individuals who are capable, confident, and resilient in the face of life's challenges (Tisdell, 2021).

    The above discussion illustrates SPUP's steadfast commitment to cultivating a holistic educational experience for its students. By intentionally integrating the multifaceted dimensions of human development - physical, spiritual, emotional, social, intellectual, moral, cultural, environmental, and personal - into its curricular and co-curricular programs, SPUP demonstrates

its resolve to sustain transformative learning. This whole-person approach empowers students to grow not merely in knowledge and skills, but in their ability to lead meaningful, purposeful, and sustainable lives.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As the world grows increasingly complex, graduates will require a dynamic blend of competencies to navigate the challenges of the modern age. SPUP's transformative education, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of human flourishing, equips students with intellectual, practical, and socioemotional capacities to positively contribute to their communities and the global community. This study highlights visionary approach of SPUP, one that holistically cultivates the growth and transformation of the whole person.

Ultimately, SPUP's mainstreaming of the whole-person approach represents a pioneering model of education, one that could serve as a guiding framework for higher education institutions seeking to prepare students for the demands of the rapidly evolving world. By seamlessly integrating the multidimensional aspects of human development, SPUP empowers students to reach their fullest potential, emerging as compassionate, ethical, and resilient leaders dedicated to the betterment of society.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

By implementing the following recommendations, SPUP may further solidify its position as a leader in whole-person, transformative education, empowering students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex world:

1. Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and curriculum integration: To further enhance the whole-person approach, SPUP may foster greater collaboration between academic departments and administrative units. This will facilitate the seamless integration of the multiple dimensions of human development across the curriculum and co-curricular activities.

2. Advance faculty development and support: The successful implementation of the whole-person approach requires a well-equipped and committed faculty. SPUP may invest in comprehensive faculty development programs that equip educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, and pedagogical tools to effectively deliver transformative, holistic education. This could include training on interdisciplinary teaching, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive practices, and student-centered learning methodologies.

3. Enhance data-driven assessment and continuous improvement: To ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the whole-person approach, SPUP may establish robust assessment frameworks that capture the multidimensional outcomes of its transformative education. This involves developing comprehensive rubrics, qualitative and quantitative metrics, and feedback mechanisms to continuously evaluate the impact on student learning, development, and well-being.

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