

## **HOLISTIC APPROACH AND EXPERIENTIAL FAITH FORMATION**

### **Abstract**

A modern man increasingly recognises that the scientific progress and the material prosperity without manners of the heart does not make a man happy and does not give meaning to his life as the man may have expected. Young people in particular are increasingly longing for “a different world”. This also requires different approaches in the domain of education and teaching. In any case, there is a need for a more holistic education, which also includes a spiritual and religious dimension of life. Young people feel that cognitive learning, which provides them with skills for everyday life and “survival”, is not enough. In their distress, young people yearn for values and visions that relate to the question of “the last sense” that often goes beyond the concern for “this world”, while at the same time it gives meaning to it. Thereby, the religious education is also faced with challenges that require holistic, experiential and foremost integrated educational approaches. In doing so, the religious education is being searched for, not outside of their lives, but inside them and it will create a vision related to the meaning of life and salvation.

*Key words: holistic education, integrated education, experiential faith formation, religious education, emotional intelligence.*

### **Introduction**

When Jesus, after the resurrection, revealed himself to the seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, he found them concerned about the “daily life”. They were fishing but failed to catch anything. When they returned in the morning, he asked them for food: “Children, have you any food?” (Jn 21:5).

It is interesting that Jesus addresses them as “children” – as if he had already had bad experience with adults. Perhaps he thought of the known multiplication of the loaves, when he found out that a child (boy) has some bread and two fish (Jn 6:9). It is not excluded that someone else in the crowd also had “a little something”. However, adults are opportun-

istic and do not like to share – we first take care of ourselves. Children, however, are more naive and tell everything and do not hide anything. Perhaps Jesus is trying to turn them away from pragmatism and opportunism with this name. But disciples do not allow themselves to do so and respond convincingly: “Nothing.” (Jn 21:5). Jesus advises them to cast the net “on the right side of the boat” (Jn 21:6). When they do so, they catch a lot of fish. At that time, they also recognise him. When they return to the coast, they discover Jesus has already prepared the food.

Several examples can be found in the Bible and in the Christian tradition, in which the “right side” is exposed as the better one and “closer to God”. Interestingly, the human cognitive system is built the same way. The right side of the brain is used for more holistic thinking, while the left side is more pragmatic and opportunistic.<sup>1</sup> Holistic thinking is considered to be less pragmatic, and more emotional and empathic.

### **1. Basis of education**

The well-known researcher of emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman notes that “at the beginning of humanity”, hippocampus and amygdala have been combined in the brain centre for the sense of smell. On this basis, during the course of evolution, cortex and neocortex have been developed, which are in our brain responsible for learning and memory.<sup>2</sup>

This exciting hypothesis can take us straight to the biblical Garden of Eden, to Adam and Eve before the Tree of Knowledge: “The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9).

According to the Goleman’s hypothesis that the first roots of cognitive abilities lie in the “smell”, it is interesting that the paradise trees – including the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil – are described as “pleasing to the eye and good for food”. Sight and taste are therefore taken into account; however, the Bible does not mention anything about smell. The smell is also not mentioned not even in relation to the description of the original sin: “The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eye and desirable, because it makes one wise” (Gen 3:6).

Thus, when the man ate the “forbidden fruit”, we can intuit that the sight, touch and taste are older and more primary senses than smell. A man was therefore able to react sooner based on taste, sight, probably hearing and certainly touch than based on smell. At that time, the man did not have the acquired and in this sense preventive knowledge of the “good and evil”.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, ASCD, Alexandria, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> D. Goleman, *Emotionale Intelligenz*, DTB, München, 1997, p. 33.

In Paradise, the first man learns from experience, directly from the consequences of the acts committed, which is ultimately the fundamental dimension of biblical pedagogy. With taste and touch we have accepted the consequences of the acts, because the taste of food is already within us; the touch can also hurt at the very first moment. In both cases, there is no time for preventive learning; therefore these two senses symbolize “reckless reactions”, in which we cannot foresee the consequences, at least not formally. Thus, with the taste and touch we accept the consequences at the time of perception. In communication with God, symbolized by the Creator’s “life breath” (Gen 2:7), God, in principle, explains and alerts the first man of the danger and consequences of enjoying the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge, but a mere theory apparently is not enough. Let’s face it; a man becomes “wise” only on the basis of “taste” or experiential learning from his own mistakes.

Hearing and sight offer a bit more time to prepare for the proper reaction compared to taste, but in terms of learning, probably even these two senses did not represent sufficiently large mental effort to initiate the cortex development. According to the Goleman’s theory, the smell is certainly that particular sense which has, in the early stages of evolution, mostly affected the concepts of good and evil and choosing between good and evil and has thus mostly promoted the development of mental (moral and religious) capabilities. If it’s indeed true that the cortex centres of human cognition evolved from the brain centre for smell, then, obviously, this particular form of perception gave the man the most of his “thinking” or the maximum incentives and the motivation for learning. From this perspective, it is also logical that the Bible fails to mention the sense of smell in connection to the Tree of Knowledge, since Adam and Eve did not consider it. If they did, they would “realize” in time that something “stinks” in the snake challenge. But the eyes were too “hungry” and have deceived them into skipping the learning process of “smell” and have thus immediately moved on to tasting or enjoying the (forbidden) fruits. The sin was – recklessly – committed sooner than they realized the “smell” of the complex situation. God, however, has a much better “smell” and he realized immediately after the sin that something “stinks” in the human paradise. Therefore, he searched for the man, taught him and corrected his religiously estranged and immoral stance. So God sets the religious and moral learning as the foundation of any learning.

From the perspective of learning, Adam’ and Eve’s avoiding to communicate with God after the sin (Gen 3:8) and shifting the responsibility to another is interesting and at the same time understandable. On one hand, their reactions illustrate how challenging the religious and moral learning in fact is, while on the other hand, the fact that Adam and Eve accept the consequences of their actions without any objection leads us to recognize the holistic and experiential learning ability of the first peo-

ple. This God's "psychology of learning" that takes into account a man's freedom, but at the same time assumes that he will accept the consequences of his actions –while in doing so, God helps him to endure them mercifully and generously – is intertwined throughout the whole Bible and the Christian religious education also derives from it.

The fact that Adam and Eve hid themselves before God after the sin reveals that the moral recognitions are rooted in the religious education. Morally, they were not healed by the intelligent insight and not even by the independent decision, but they reached both of that based on the religious communication with God. Moral learning is actually nourished from religious communication.

Thus, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and drifted away from the heavenly life with God, they also had to "eat" the consequences of this reckless act. Even the Bible therefore teaches us that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach". What stinks and not out of love, is not good and is not "wise". This logic leads us to the "recognition" that the religious and moral dimensions are "teachers" of all other forms and methods of education. A man began to learn and became an intelligent creature only upon facing the challenges of smells and making good decisions against evil.

## **2. Emotional intelligence and religious education**

Motivation, emotion and cognition are three basic mental operations.<sup>3</sup> In some contexts, emotionality is also mentioned as the opposite of "cognition", as being something incompatible with clear and prudent thinking. In recent decades, emotionality plays a vital role in human life and is becoming an increasingly important dimension of education. Stronger and more comfortable expressing feelings, of course, does not guarantee greater emotional intelligence or a higher emotional quotient (EQ). In contrast, uncontrolled emotions are still detrimental to life and emotional self-control is no less important today than it was in the past. However, modern education is not limited to concealing feelings, and in particular does not use methods of repressing emotional life and expression. Modern education builds upon the concept of emotional intelligence which can be defined as "the ability to accept and express emotions, processing emotions into thoughts and understanding and taking into account emotions both in ourselves as in our fellow man".<sup>4</sup> These abilities name-

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<sup>3</sup> Some psychologists mention four main forms of mental functioning, adding conscience to the above listed three (J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, What Is emotional intelligence?, in: P. Salovey, D. Sluyter (ed.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Implications for educators*, Basic Books, New York, 2000, p. 397).

<sup>4</sup> J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, What Is emotional intelligence?, in: P. Salovey, D. Sluyter (ed.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Implications for educators*, Basic Books, New York, 2000, p. 397.

ly significantly impact the attitudes and actions of a man in the process of education.

Neuropsychology teaches us that emotional functioning uses at least five brain centres. Particularly important are the following three: the thalamus, which is considered as the “reception centre” of the perceived information; the cortex, which sends the information to the brain centres that process it and are “specialized” for this purpose; the amygdala, which directs all our reactions.

Information or perception firstly reaches the thalamus, which “translates” it into the brain language and sends it forward towards the cortex which disperses it through all further interested centres. Especially most of the information related to emotional perceptions ends up in the amygdala, the centre and also a kind of an emotional storage facility. If the visual perception is emotionally strong and under the pressure of stress tends to rapid reaction, then a part of perceptual information uses a shortcut for reaching amygdala from thalamus,<sup>5</sup> which means that this information bypasses the cortex. In this case, the amygdala received unprocessed information, thereby sensing a “state of emergency” or an extraordinary threat. In such a case, a man reacts quickly, before he knows “why and how” is best to act. The information received by the amygdala via a shortcut cause a kind of an obsessive state and these pre-cognitive emotions force a man to an immediate reaction. Since the information is not processed, he is fast, but reckless and often inaccurate. Sometimes such emotions overwhelm us and lead to a situation, for example when we react quickly and recklessly, without knowing what we are doing.

The amygdala is also a storage of emotional memories. When we learn about reasonable behaviour, the amygdala sends emotional signals to the front cortex, where the two brain centres of two lobes are located, which serve for further processing of emotional experiences. On the basis of such processed emotional signals we make decisions and form our emotional experiences. The right anterior lobe collects signals of negative emotions, while the left frontal lobe is intended to control the negative emotions and manage and prevent their “outbursts”.<sup>6</sup> Cooperation of these two centres thus assumes the role of a “coordinator” of emotional feelings and behaviours. Thus, the left and the right cerebral hemisphere cooperate, which is relevant to holistic learning.<sup>7</sup>

As a kind of storage facility of emotional memory, the amygdala often uses the experiences of the past, especially from childhood. The latter were so strongly imprinted on the mind, because they were experienced sooner

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> D. Goleman, *Emotionale Intelligenz*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, p. 14.

than we were able to speak. Thus, they remained “unprocessed” because they were never verbalized and have a stronger effect as a “defence mechanism” compared to the processed and expressed emotions.<sup>8</sup> We might react extremely aggressively in slightly dangerous situations, because these experiences may remind us of an unprocessed and unarticulated fear from the early childhood. The reason for over-aggressiveness is therefore not an irrational assessment of the current situation, but rather the sense that due to the possible resemblance to the negative feelings from the early childhood, we are unable to express the present emotions and neither accept nor change the current situation. In such situations we therefore react similarly as we reacted in dangerous circumstances when we were babies and when we were not yet able to speak. The only difference is that in the adolescent and adult life a man has much greater power and has more resources available during the same emotional tension.

If we connect the possibility of uncontrolled emotional outbursts as a result of short-time travel of information from the thalamus to the amygdala with the role of unprocessed and unexpressed emotional experiences from the early childhood, many of the catastrophic violent behaviours of a child, an adolescent or an adult will become more clear. It is simply the moment when the unprocessed negative emotional information overwhelms the amygdala and then – in a kind of intertwining between fear of a baby, bestial strength and cognitive as well as technical skills – we do not know what we are doing.

The religious education, particularly regarding the emotional intelligence, has roots in the primary relationship with the mother leading back to the prenatal period. Positive self-image, which is based on pre-confidence and on a feeling that a man, even as a baby is able – not in the form of aggression, but based on the basic confidence – to overcome fears and other barriers, is a fundamental category of religious and moral education. When a mother prays for her unborn child, the baby in her womb intuitively feels her closeness and organic connection. When in her prayer she talks to God, the baby also feels her security and a feeling that she is not alone when facing problems. When in terms of love and confidence she communicates with her husband or the baby’s father, the baby already feels the sense of belonging and develops a collective (family) identity. A mother, who is “all alone” for everything and feels abandoned and lonely, provides the baby inside her with different signals as a mother who feels safe, accepted and loved – both by her husband and by God. The baby senses similarly enhanced security also when the whole family cultivates a confidential relationship with God, because this religious communication gives a greater psychological stability and safety to both the baby as

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. Goleman, *Emotionale Intelligenz*, p. 42.

well as the parents.<sup>9</sup> Thus healthy and profound religious communication provides a significant contribution to the better “equipment” for life.

When we teach a child about the first prayers, he or she will sense that even when parents are not around, he or she is not all alone. In this sense it is not about the fact that a child should understand everything, but rather about the fact that a child, experientially and holistically, i.e. comprehensively experiences the sense of belonging, acceptance, security and love. This way religious education at the experiential level falls within the most fundamental stones of developing a healthy self-image, providing the man throughout his whole life with proper psychological stability and necessary support in overcoming hardships and obstacles.<sup>10</sup>

Modern findings encourage that emotional stability is not so dependent on early childhood, as was long thought, although it is true that in particular some of the consequences of poor parenting and upbringing require complex processing.<sup>11</sup> But “the thematic approach and intensive work on oneself makes a man, even in adulthood, capable of repairing the relationship towards themselves and to rearrange life”.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, it is possible to work deeply on ourselves even without the religious dimension. However, modern scientists increasingly point out that religious and moral education represents important factors in all this as they encourage reflection on life through the glasses of “last sense”<sup>13</sup> which enables a person to regulate his/her everyday life in a reasonable manner.

Cooperation between the left and the right frontal cortex forms a specific intersection, a meeting place between sensation and cognitive thinking.<sup>14</sup> Emotion-related decisions are formed here. It is this “balancing” between the left and the right cerebral hemisphere that permanently transforms a man into a personality who is capable of a better and, above all, more real and meaningful living and working.<sup>15</sup> In the existential openness to God the holistic religious education does not require to hide the defects and inculpatory characteristics, but assumes that we express and show them in a pedagogical process, because only then we are able to also

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Musek, Psihološki, nevroznanstveni in evolucijski vidiki verskega doživljanja, in: *Informacijska družba IS 2005: Zbornik 8. mednarodne multikonference*. Inštitut Jožef Stefan, Ljubljana, 2005, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Gams, Znanost o verovanju, in: *Informacijska družba IS 2005: Zbornik 8. mednarodne multikonference*, Inštitut Jožef Stefan, Ljubljana, 2005, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> C. J. Showers, Self-Organisation in Emotional Contexts, in: Joseph P. Forges (ed.), *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*, University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 284.

<sup>13</sup> R. Coles, *The Secular Mind*, University Press, Princeton, 1999, p. 148-149.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. D. Goleman, *Emotionale Intelligenz*, p. 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. W. Firestone, *The Ethics of Interpersonal Relationships*, Karnac, London, 2009, p. 74.

accept, process and change them constructively.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the educational process, we all become pupils and teachers. In this sense it is not about learning with the intention to “learn something” and then “know it”, but is rather a lifestyle, which is constant and continuous learning.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The need for new “philosophy of education”

On many scientific discoveries the developed world recognizes that the 20th century was not only the century of progress, but also contains decades of moral decay.<sup>18</sup> Psychological profiles of criminals dramatically point to the fact that the vast majority of cases is about a classical moral and religious deficit, a lack of moral and religious sense and responsibility. In this sense, the future, despite constantly new scientific discoveries, is unable to avoid moral and religious challenges, but the latter will be receiving increasingly greater prominence.<sup>19</sup> A man is in fact already cognitively and secularly too intelligent to be able to survive without “heart intelligence”, which includes moral and religious education. Only a man with manners of the heart may day after day be accompanied by the feeling well, “it was good” and only a morally responsible man is able to conclude his life with a feeling well, “it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Thus it is not surprising that young people call for a redefinition of education, in fact the new “philosophy of education”, in which we “are the way we are” towards one another, without any concealment and deception, while in our mutual education, each of us accepts his/her part of responsibility. Young people do not want guidance from the adults on how to live, but they long for good examples of adult life.<sup>20</sup> When they feel that adults are able to solve their own problems and are able to cope with own challenges, they will find the ways to solve their problems.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, the “new philosophy of education” assumes sensible, thorough, positive and creative communication. Neurobiology notes that every communication converts into signals in the brain,<sup>22</sup> which affect the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. I. Boban, A. Hinz, Schlüsselemente inklusiver Pädagogik: Orientierungen zur Beantwortung der Fragen des Index für Inklusion, in: H. Knauder, et al. (ed.), *Jede/r ist willkommen! Die inklusive Schule – Theoretische Perspektiven und praktische Beispiele*, KPH, Graz, 2008, p. 60; V. Šćuka, *Šolar na poti do sebe: Oblikovanje osebnosti, Didakta*, Radovljica, 2007, p. 334-335.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. V. Šćuka, *Šolar na poti do sebe*, p. 370.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M. Borba, *Building Moral Intelligence*, Jossey Bas, San Francisco, 2001, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. Coles, *The Secular Mind*, p. 188-189.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. K. M. Adams, *Po tihem zapeljani: Ko so starši otroke naredijo za partnerje*, Modrijan, Ljubljana, 2013, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> One nine-grader gave the following answer to the question what does he expect from his parents for Confirmation: “If they will manage to solve their own problems and will stop with their constant bothering me about how hard it is for them, it will be just fine”.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. W. Firestone, *The Ethics of Interpersonal Relationships*, p. 78.

behaviour, which in turn initiates our communication.<sup>23</sup> This means that positive communication trains us for better relations, while negative and aggressive communication deprives us of those sensible communication skills, we may have already had.<sup>24</sup> In this context the following words of Jesus are particularly true: “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Mt 13:12).

#### 4. Holistic integrated pedagogy

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi is considered one of the pioneers of holistic pedagogy, who has both in organizational as well as in methodological approaches fought very hard for teaching that will satisfy the “child’s needs”.<sup>25</sup> His work represents the roots of all subsequent disciplines, which are associated with the concept of holistic and integrated pedagogy and is in particular in the German speaking area related to the formula “3H = good parenting and upbringing”.<sup>26</sup>

Integrated holistic pedagogy includes temporal and qualitative aspect of upbringing and education. In temporal sense, it provides a lifelong upbringing and education. The quality integrated pedagogy is often mentioned in connection with some disciplines that build upon the tradition of humanistic pedagogies and psychologies and use their pedagogical principles to enforce holistic education in such a way, in which a man through a compatible intertwining and upgrading of physical, mental and spiritual dimension grows an integrative personality.<sup>27</sup> With the help of creative media and its methods the holistic integrated pedagogy strives towards an activation of all human senses and intelligences, while exceeding methodological techniques and working towards an enhanced restructuring of an integrated personality.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Bauer, *Lob der Schule: Sieben Perspektiven für Schüler, Lehrer und Eltern*, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg, 2007, p. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Bauer, *Lob der Schule*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> M. Liedtke, J. Heinrich Pestalozzi, in: H. Scheuberl (ed.), *Klassiker der Pädagogik*, Beck, München, 1991, p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> It refers to the three German terms: **H**and + **H**erz + **H**irn (hand + heart + mind) = good education.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. V. Šćuka, *Šolar na poti do sebe*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Thus, for example gestalt pedagogy as one of the disciplines of the development of the integrated pedagogy is often encountered in contexts with integrative and inclusive pedagogy (F. Feiner, H. Knauder, *Gestaltpädagogik als inklusive Pädagogik*, Zeitschrift für Integrative Gestaltpädagogik und Seelsorge, 44 (2008) p. 6-7), as well as with experiential pedagogy and biographical education (A. O. Burow, *Gestaltpädagogik: Trainingskonzepte und Wirkungen*, Junfermann, Paderborn, 1993, p. 394-395), while its educative functioning also includes the known H. Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (S. Gerjolj, *Howard Gardners Theorie über multiple Intelligenz und ihre praktische Appli-*

Integrated pedagogy, which also includes experiential dimension of education and learning, was developed in the mid-seventies, drawing from the humanistic pedagogy.<sup>29</sup> In relation to the school systems and the teacher education, the educators took the integrated character education and teaching into consideration which was inadequate. The educators, who have had good experience with some psychotherapeutic approaches, began to think about how these concepts and methods could be applied to their profession. They thought it was a pity to use them only for treatment, but not for the development of personality and personal competences in education.<sup>30</sup> It is a fundamental recognition that pupils and students are not “untarnished” with negative and painful experience and sentient curative processes are therefore desirable, in conjunction with the established methods of preventive education, which on one hand “clean” the past, while seeking the necessary resources for motivated learning and education in the present and for the future. Thus, the entire pedagogy is based on the belief that a man by nature tends to overstep or expand his existing boundaries (internally and externally) to be able to grow personally and to be able to realize himself in a reasonable way<sup>31</sup>. It is therefore a pedagogy that arises from a person, so the learning content is only meaningful in contact with the pupil, taking into account his biography and integrated image.<sup>32</sup> The role of the teacher is not so much in “teaching” as it is in the empathic and sensible monitoring of the pupil and the related ability of arousing the interest or activating the intrinsic motivation.<sup>33</sup> This is especially true in modern times when a load of information is available to the educands, while the problems arise in their integration and making sense of it. Thus, integrated pedagogy is not targeted in terms of conventional teaching methods, but it is a process-oriented educational activity that awakens the teaching impulses and educationally reacts to them.<sup>34</sup> A teacher, a pupil, the content, the objectives and the methods shape a specific didactic or pedagogical square, in which the roles of individual elements are equally divided, while the teacher sensitively monitors the teaching process and runs a learning dynamics of the

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kation: Ein Weg des ganzheitlichen Lernens im Sinne der inklusiven Pädagogik, in: H. Knauder, et al. (ed.), *Jede/r ist willkommen! Die inklusive Schule: Theoretische Perspektiven und praktische Beispiele*, KPH, Graz, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. G. Fatzer, *Ganzheitliches Lernen: Humanistische Pädagogik und Organisationsentwicklung*, Junfermann, Paderborn, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. C. Hofmann, *Gestaltpädagogik*, in: O. A. Burow, H. Gudjons (ed.), *Gestaltpädagogik in der Schule*, Bergmann und Helbig, Hamburg, 1998, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. V. Ščuka, *Šolar na poti do sebe*, p. 111-112.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. S. Gerjolj, *Gešalt pedagogika kot celostna pedagogika*, in: P. Javrh (ed.), *Vseživljenjsko učenje in strokovno izražje*, Pedagoški inštitut, Ljubljana, 2008, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. V. Ščuka, *Šolar na poti do sebe*, p. 274.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. A. Höfer, *Heile unsere Liebe: Ein gestaltpädagogisches Lese- und Arbeitsbuch*. Don Bosco, München, 1997, p. 90.

group.<sup>35</sup> Personality defects and vulnerabilities are therefore more a help than an obstacle for the teacher. It is important, however, that during the educational process we awake the resources of power (pedagogical eros) in ourselves and educands which are necessary for optimal education.<sup>36</sup>

Integrated education is also holistic because it does not end with the end of formal learning process, but continues spontaneously and profoundly. In particular, actualization of emotional experience continues its path of processing at the conscious and unconscious level, and also often especially in sleep.<sup>37</sup> Thus, learning processes of integrated pedagogy systematically also include rest and dreams, which serve as consolidation of emotional memories.<sup>38</sup> In this context, holistic education also comprises both conscious as well as unconscious level of processing of information and experience, while regularly involving both brain hemispheres into its processes.

The learning process is therefore often interwoven between “feeling” and “knowing” in the cognitive sense. The art of religious education certainly has – especially in the period of adolescents growing up – its roots in “feeling”. Right after children and adolescents “feel themselves”, they are also willing to listen. Therefore, the experiential pedagogy is of key importance for the religious formation. It may consist of several levels and several didactic approaches.

Various forms of meditation and imaginative visualizations are very suitable as points of entry, which relate to the lives of children or adolescents. These enable them to “watch” themselves in concrete situations of life, where at a later time unobtrusively comes God as their companion and Saviour.

The next level of experiential pedagogic communication represents non-verbal confession of a heard content where drawing is one of the most effective methods of teaching. The images of a man are the most attractive and a man is the most comprehensively expressed through them. “Human thinking loves patterns, images, colours. Thus, a person can, from the seeming chaos, create wonderful connections and forms in his imagination and intuitively create and express a new reality”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. A. Höfer, K. Steiner, *Handbuch der Integrativen Gestaltpädagogik und Seelsorge, Beratung und Supervision*, Werdenfels, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. A. Höfer, K. Steiner, *Handbuch der Integrativen Gestaltpädagogik und Seelsorge*, p. 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. D. J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, The Guilford Press, New York – London, 1999, p. 332.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. L. McHaugh, *Memory and Emotion: The Making of Lasting Memories*. University Press, New York – Columbia, 2003, p. 80; S. Gerjolj, *Živeti, delati, ljubiti*, Mohorjeva družba, Celje, 2009, p. 128-129.

<sup>39</sup> D. Lazear, *Seven ways of knowing: Teaching for Multiple Inteligences*, IRI, Arlington Heights/Illinois, 1991, p. 52.

Only then verbalized confession comes in. While drawing predominantly activates the right hemispheric centres, a verbal interpretation of a drawing and confession takes place via the left half of the brain.<sup>40</sup> The climate of a prayer is almost automatically created in the verbalization of the “products”. With a little skill we create an environment where young people feel the need for prayer. Thus, each verbalized confession can be concluded with spontaneous requests or acknowledgements, to which we add the usual call “please hear our prayers” or “Thank God”. However, very often the author of a confession wishes for a certain common final prayer or a song.

The experiential dimension of religious learning and teaching can first be seen in the confession, and then also in the emotional solidarity that is built upon a positive religious communication. Only after such an adventurous and narrative unit and positive communication a theological proclamation comes in. Informally, it was already received by the adolescents, while its formalization serves to form it and forward it by integrating it into their own experiences. In these cases they often come to the traditional “aha-knowledge”. We often meet some kind of an “ambivalent tension” in young people, in which young people sometimes consciously love and unconsciously hate God, but sometimes the opposite, they unconsciously or intuitively love and “consciously hate”.<sup>41</sup> The mentioned “aha - knowledge” comes in moments when, in connection to the concrete events, they unconsciously or intuitively fall in love with God. In connection to the emotional intelligence where young people reflect their problems and challenges under the aspect of the “last sense”, precisely religious intelligence puts life upon “new foundations”.

The holistic, integrated and experiential pedagogy represents a point of entry for the Christian proclamation, as on this basis it functions concretely and redemptive. It is not necessary that every religious learning process is designed highly experientially, since children and young people will know how to place the announcement into their own experience through occasional but sufficiently intense and profound holistic approaches. But it is of course a good thing that the communication announcement is intertwined with teaching methods that go beyond the cognitive learning. Dramatization, role playing, use of manual skills, drawing and sculpting and expressive dances, especially body language, are excellent opportunities to exercise the holistic elements in the religious education which addresses a young man incomparably deeper and more existentially than cognitive learning and teaching.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. K. Hadolt, Risanje kot pomoč pri reševanju konfliktov v skupini, in: S. Gerjolj, M. Stanonik, M. Kastelec (ed.), *Geštaltna pedagogika nekoč in danes*, Društvo za krščansko gestalt pedagogiko, Ljubljana, 2011, p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> E. Ringel, A. Kirchmayr, *Religionsverlust durch religiöse Erziehung: Tiefenpsychologische Ursachen und Folgerungen*, Herder, Wien – Freiburg – Basel, 1986, p. 30.