

IMTN A conversation of trainers that leads to action

Bulletin 1

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Equipping the whole person

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Welcome to our first IMTN bulletin

The aim of the bulletin is to stimulate conversation between mission trainers around the world. It is an urgent - and massive - task today to equip the church for mission. Today the global church is sending out unprecedented numbers of its members across the cultures to bear witness to Jesus Christ. Yet what kind of preparation is given and what kind of impact is this mass movement having on receiving churches, on sending churches and on those who are going?

The scale of the challenge can result in expedient training solutions. We have to do something so let's do what we can (pragmatic) with the resources we have (feasibility). But expedient solutions may not be the most fruitful. Mission trainers need to think critically – and we need to think together- about best practices in preparing men and women for crossing the cultures.

To start our engagement in critical reflection this bulletin will focus on the issue of equipping the *whole person*. Effective ministry requires more than knowing information and more than knowing how to apply that information in other contexts. Effective ministry also requires mature and godly emotions and the ability to relate to God, to self and to others in ways that are healthy and resilient.

Examining the 'head-heart-hands' of mission training

For several decades the popular mission training slogan, 'head-heart-hands' with its alternative 'knowing-being-doing' has been used to summarise whole person learning. Take a look at the websites and brochures of many mission training institutions around the world and they will present this slogan as their ethos for training.¹ But what does head-heart-hands really mean and is this triplet a useful or adequate description for the kind of whole person learning so essential in Christian mission training?

The 'head-heart-hands/know-be-do' motif neatly signifies three domains of learning that were described in the 1950s and 1960s by Benjamin Bloom. He conceived learning in three domains that he described as cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The cognitive domain refers to developing knowledge, the affective domain refers to attitudes and psychomotor refers to skills. Importantly, Bloom's taxonomy was developed in the context of Western academic institutions.²

Mission trainers recognise that preparation for mission is not solely a cognitive process leading to knowledge acquisition but must also include the development of right attitudes and appropriate skills. So the 'head-heart-hand/ know-be-do' appears to be a helpful way for mission trainers to design

¹ For example, see All Nations website: www.allnations.ac.uk

² Today we better understand ways in which Bloom's three domains are culturally shaped.

training that equips people with appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills. However, there are two significant problems with this understanding of learning.

Firstly, the ‘head-heart-hand/ know-be-do’ motif ignores a crucial social dimension of learning. Understanding about learning has developed since the 1950s and 60s and educators now recognise that all learning is both situated (cannot take place in a vacuum) and a social process. The social dimension of learning is essential not only to understand whole person learning but also, in the context of Christian discipleship and mission training because missionaries ability to relate is crucial.

Secondly, the ‘head-heart-hands/ know-be-do’ over emphasises the cognitive (thinking) dimension of learning. Knowledge and skills are essentially both cognitive processes. Therefore, if educators use the ‘head-heart-hands/ know-be-do’ slogan to guide their training design they are likely to emphasis the cognitive. It is also much easier to measure and test the cognitive (knowledge development and skills abilities) so training is skewed towards ‘knowing and doing’ with less attention to emotions and no explicit attention to the social dimension.

Reconceptualising whole person learning: H^3

Therefore, I suggest that ‘head- heart-hands/know-be-do’ as it has been understood is not an adequate description of whole person learning and needs to be reconceptualised if it is to be helpful in informing mission training.

We need to move on from Bloom and find alternative ways to conceive learning. Knud Illeris is a Danish professor of adult educator. He defines learning as: ‘*an entity which unites a cognitive, an emotional and a social dimension into one whole*’³ (Illeris, 2002, p.227).

Using this view of learning I offer a reconceptualization of ‘head-heart-hands’ where ‘head’ signifies cognition/thinking (knowing and doing), ‘heart’ signifies emotion (feeling/attitudes), and ‘hand’ signifies relating. This is shown in figure 1 below.

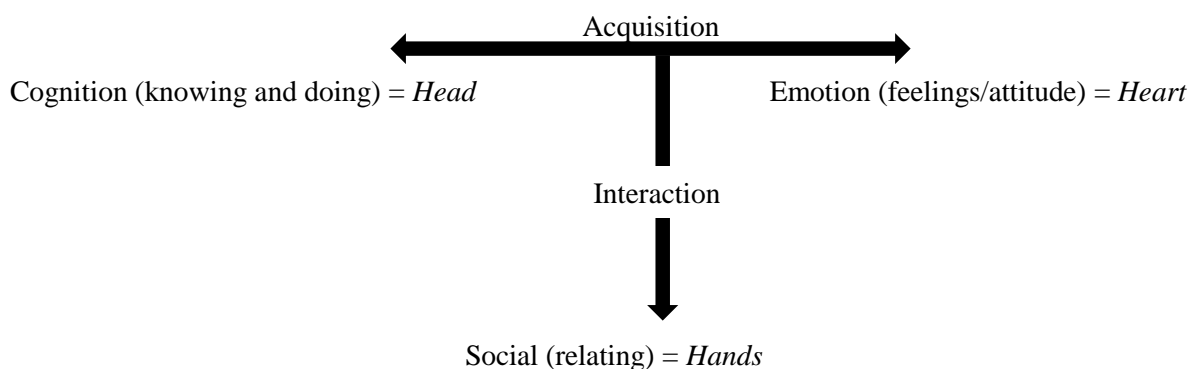


Figure 1: Reconceptualising head-heart-hands, adapted from Illeris, 2002

Furthermore, Illeris⁴ conceives learning as a two-dimensional process of acquisition and interaction. The three dimensions of learning: cognitive, emotional and social, are developed through an

³ Illeris, K. 2002. *The Three Dimensions of Learning. Contemporary Learning Theory in the Tension Field between the Cognitive, the Emotional and the Social.* (D. Reader and M. Malone, Trans.): Roskilde University Press. p227

acquisition process interacting with others. These ideas of learning have informed my research in mission training and shaped the way I think about course designs.⁵

Over the last decade I have introduced the symbol H^3 to represent whole person learning. In this symbol the H signifies head-heart-hands (thinking-emotions-relating) and the superscripted ³ denotes the possibility of whole person learning (holistic learning) when these three dimensions are addressed together. My research has found that transformation may be possible when there is integration of our thinking, our emotions and our relationships.

H^3 and its implications for mission training

Adopting the ideas of H^3 may helpfully inform how we design mission training. Firstly it can enable trainers to give attention to nurturing the learners' emotional and relational development. Trainers mostly focus on the information content of the curriculum but to foster whole person learning trainers will need to consider different kinds of questions. For example, How will the learners' emotions be engaged in the learning? What kinds of learning tasks connect thinking and emotions? How will emotions be challenged? How will emotions be supported? How will relationships be nurtured? How will learning strengthen relating with God, with self and with others? What kind of learning tasks foster relationships?

Finally, Illeris's two learning processes of *acquisition* and *interaction* are a helpful way for us to talk about two crucial aspects of mission training namely, learning to learn and learning to relate. The acquisition process concerns how we learn and the interaction process concerns how we relate. Being able to learn and being able to relate are essential in Christian mission. Being able to learn and being able to relate are indivisible and together represent the process of *whole person* learning.

Now let's share ideas! How can we design training that will address these and other questions arising from the whole person learning?

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⁴ Illeris, K. 2014. *Transformative Learning and Identity*. Abingdon: Routledge

⁵ Wall, R. 2015. *Preparing adults for crossing cultures*. PhD Thesis. London, p.171