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Panchakosha: Foundations for Holistic Child Development

Purushottam Chapagain*

Training Institute for Technical Instruction (TITI),

Abstract

The Panchakosha theory, a cornerstone of ancient wisdom, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of human beings emphasizing the nurturing of all five layers of being. This theory's application in education can revolutionize the way we approach child development, integrating the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. By incorporating elements such as Yoga Nidra, meditation, yoga philosophy, and mindful nutrition, educators can foster holistic growth in children and instill valuable social and personal disciplines promoting better concentration, calmness, and improved learning and memory. Educational philosophies from both Eastern and Western traditions, including contributions from notable thinkers, shape diverse and effective teaching methods. This article delves into the practical ways in which the Panchakosha Theory can be applied to education, offering insights into yogic practices, storytelling, and pedagogical strategies that align with both Eastern and Western educational philosophies.

Keywords: Yoga Nidra, Yamas, Niyamas, Yoga

Introduction

Panchakosha is a concept rooted in ancient Hindu philosophy and Ayurveda that describes the five layers or sheaths of the human being. When it comes to holistic child development, understanding and nurturing each of these layers is essential for the overall well-being and growth of a child. By addressing the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a child through education, nutrition, emotional support, and opportunities for creative expression, we can help children develop into well-rounded individuals. Holistic child development focuses on nurturing a child's

physical health, emotional intelligence, cognitive abilities, social skills, and spiritual growth to support their overall development and well-being.

Exploring the Five Layers of Being in Panchakosha Theory

The Panchakosha theory presents a comprehensive model of the human being, delineating five distinct layers (oneyogathailand, n.d.) or 'sheaths' that encompass our existence. The journey through these koshas moves from the gross to the subtle, starting with the physical body and extending to

* Corresponding email: puruchapagain90@gmail.com

the realm of bliss.

- **Annamaya Kosha (अन्नमय कोष):** This is the physical layer, made up of the food we consume and representing our tangible body. It means 'matter' (earth, water, fire, air, and space). We perceive shabda (शब्द), sparsha (स्पर्श), roopa (रूप) ras (रस) and gandha (गन्ध).
- **Pranamaya Kosha (प्राणमय कोष):** The energetic layer, governed by the life force or prana, which regulates vital physiological functions. It balances health and addresses diseases.
- **Manomaya Kosha (मनोमय कोष):** The mental body, where thoughts and emotions reside, influencing our psychological state, "conglomeration of thoughts and moments of feelings".
- **Vigyanamaya Kosha (विज्ञानमय कोष):** The wisdom body, associated with intellect and discernment, allowing us to make conscious decisions. It is the inner voice guiding us to do or not to do, right or wrong, useful or not useful.
- **Anandamaya Kosha (आनन्दमय कोष):** The bliss body, a state of joy and spiritual fulfillment, representing our innermost essence. A state of total silence, a complete harmony and perfect health.

(Vikaspedia.in/health/ayush/yoga-1/pancha-kosha)

Each layer is not isolated; they interpenetrate and influence one another, creating a holistic system that is dynamic and interconnected. (Mishra, 2024). The understanding of these koshas is crucial for nurturing all dimensions of a child's development in educational settings.

By integrating the Panchakosha model into educational practices, we can address the multifaceted nature of child development, ensuring that each layer is acknowledged and nurtured. Swami Sharvananda (1921) has paraphrased the verse in *Taittiriya Upanishad* as all beings are born of food as *Anna*, 'food body' concerned with our physical existence: birth, growth, change, death and decay qualities. Similarly, *prana*, manifested in the form of the breath (Feuerstein, 2001) to raise consciousness from the body to a higher level of the life force. *Man* concerned with "everyday creativity" (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Richards, 2007), which tends to be linear and logical. *Vigyan* orients life towards either unreflective bodily experience or enhanced awareness and spiritual realization (Feuerstein, Kak, & Frawely, 1995). Meanwhile *anand* that dissolves the veil of the mind leading to ecstasy, bliss and what Maslow calls "integrated-creativity" from which "comes the great work of art, or philosophy or science" (Maslow, 1968, p. 142). Hence it is concluded that this approach fosters a balanced growth, preparing children not just academically, but also physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

The Kosha and their Characteristics (Satpathy, 2018)

Kosha	Annamaya Kosha	Pranamaya Kosha	Manomaya Kosha	Vigyanamaya Kosha	Anandamaya Kosha
Characteristics	Inertia	Movement	Passive Knowledge	Acquisition of Knowledge, Decision Making	Intuition, Idea generation
Quality	Passivity	Activity	Knowledge	Intellect, Ego	Happiness
Shakti (शक्ति)	Avarana Shakti (आवरण)	Kriya (क्रिया) Shakti	Iccha (इच्छा) Shakti	Gyana (ज्ञान) Shakti	Bhoga (भोग) Shakti
Power, Energy	Unconsciousness	Activity	Will power	Wisdom	Joy, Pleasure, Blissful

Integrating Panchakosha in Educational Settings

The integration of Panchakosha theory into educational settings is a transformative approach that aligns with the holistic development of children. It recognizes the value of nurturing not just the intellectual, but also the emotional, physical, energetic, and spiritual layers of a child's being.

To effectively incorporate Panchakosha, schools can adopt a multi-dimensional strategy:

- **Curriculum Design:** Embedding Panchakosha principles into the curriculum to foster a well-rounded education.
- **Teacher Training:** Equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to apply Panchakosha in their teaching methods.
- **Environment:** Creating a learning environment that supports all five koshas, from the physical space to the emotional climate.

By embracing Panchakosha, educational institutions can create a nurturing space that promotes the growth of each child in a comprehensive manner, addressing their needs at every level of their being.

This approach not only benefits the individual child but also cultivates a more empathetic and connected classroom community. As children learn to recognize and respect the different layers within themselves and others, they develop a deeper sense of self-awareness and compassion which allows an individual to reflect on their hidden features of self-thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (DaSilveira et al., 2015)

Yogic Practices for the Young Mind: Yoga Nidra and Meditation

Designing Age-Appropriate Yoga Nidra Sessions for Children

Yoga Nidra, developed by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1976 is an ancient practice of deep relaxation, also known as "yogic sleep" or 'effortless relaxation', holds significant benefits for children, offering a way to cultivate

mindfulness and a deep connection with their inner selves. Designing age-appropriate *Yoga Nidra* sessions requires an understanding of children's anatomy and physiology to address their functional developmental differences. Here, our body finds its natural equilibrium and we fall into an innate state of deep, blissful awareness (Reeves, 2019).

Many children have difficulty "sitting still". But in Yoga Nidra is done while you are lying down, so it is very comfortable promoting relaxation and also enhancing memory, concentration, and emotional management (littlefloweryoga, n.d.)

Understanding the unique needs of each age group is crucial. For instance, younger children may respond well to shorter sessions with playful storytelling, while older children might appreciate a more structured approach that includes breathing exercises and body awareness techniques (kidsyogafun, n.d.). The goal is to create a nurturing environment that supports holistic development and well-being.

The Role of Guided Meditation in Enhancing Concentration and Calmness

Guided meditation is a powerful tool in the educational sphere, fostering a sense of calm and improving students' ability to concentrate. (Notion4Teachers, n.d.). This practice follows a structured approach, often beginning with relaxation techniques that pave the way for deeper mental focus.

Through guided meditation, children learn to navigate their thoughts and emotions, leading to a more harmonious classroom environment.

The Relax-Resolve-Reform method first propounded by Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist, and editor of the Harvard Medical School Special Health Report, is a prime example of how guided meditation can be systematically introduced to students. It emphasizes the importance of relaxation as the first step towards personal change and better focus.

- **Relaxation:** Initiating the state of calm
- **Resolve:** Setting intentions for personal growth

- Reform: Implementing changes for improved well-being

Incorporating these practices into the curriculum obviously may help to reduce stress, build emotional resilience, and enhance overall focus among students.

Evaluating the Impact of Yogic Sleep on Learning and Memory

The practice of Yoga Nidra, often referred to as yogic sleep, has been increasingly recognized for its potential to enhance learning and memory in children. Studies (Kumari & Tripathi, 2018) suggest that the deep relaxation state induced by Yoga Nidra can improve concentration and information retention.

Recent educational programs have begun to integrate Yoga Nidra sessions into their curriculum, observing notable improvements in students' academic performance. The following table summarizes key findings from an experimental study on effectiveness of Yoga Nidra (YN) on school children of age group 14-16 (10th grade students) for consecutive 21 days conducted in Mangalore, Karnataka, India (D'souza et al., 2021).

Effectiveness of Yoga Nidra (YN)

Stress level	Performing YN	Not performing YN
Low Stress level	98.15%	58.06%
Moderate stress level	3.85%	41.93 %

The relaxation and mindfulness based cognitive therapy (Kuyken et al., 2010) cultivated through Yoga Nidra not only support cognitive functions, but also contribute to the overall well-being of children, fostering a conducive environment for learning.

Educators and parents alike are encouraged to consider the inclusion of yogic practices such as Yoga Nidra in the educational journey of children, recognizing its role in developing a balanced and focused mind.

Incorporating Yoga Philosophy and Stories in Child Education

Teaching Yamas and Niyamas: Fostering Social and Personal Discipline

Incorporating the Yamas and Niyamas the yoga's ethical guidelines propounded by Patanjali may have lived between the 2nd century, into educational curricula is essential for nurturing a child's ethical and moral development. These foundational principles (Hocheiser, 2024) of yoga philosophy offer a framework for children to understand and practice social and personal discipline. Educators can creatively introduce these concepts through interactive activities, ensuring that the lessons are both engaging and impactful.

- **Yamas** - Ethical standards that include non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-covetousness.
- **Niyamas** - Personal observances comprising purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study, and surrender to a higher power.

By integrating the Yamas and Niyamas, into daily learning, children can develop a sense of responsibility and respect for themselves and others. This approach fosters a supportive and compassionate classroom environment.

The practical application of these principles can be seen in various classroom activities. For instance, storytelling and role-playing can be used to illustrate the importance of honesty and non-violence. Additionally, incorporating mindfulness and reflection exercises helps children internalize the values of self-discipline and contentment.

Yoga Stories as Educational Tools: Lessons in Values and Virtues

Yoga stories are a treasure trove of values and virtues, serving as a powerful medium to impart ethical and moral principles to children. Through captivating narratives, these stories introduce concepts of truth, discipline, and compassion (patanjaleeyoga, 2024). They are not just tales but life lessons wrapped in the

guise of adventures and quests, making the learning process engaging and memorable.

Incorporating yoga stories into education can be done effectively by:

- Selecting stories that align with the age and understanding of the children
- Encouraging interactive discussions to reflect on the morals of the story
- Using role-play to bring the characters and their virtues to life
- Providing creative activities related to the story, such as drawing or writing

By weaving yoga stories into the fabric of education, we nurture a child's ability to discern right from wrong and cultivate a sense of empathy and responsibility towards others (Harper, 2013).

Yoga stories are not only about the physical postures or asanas; they are about the journey of the soul towards enlightenment. They teach children to see beyond the surface, to understand the depth of their actions and their consequences (Basavaraddi, 2023).

Creative Approaches to Introducing Yoga Philosophy to Children

Introducing yoga philosophy (Wile, 2015) to children can be a transformative experience, fostering not only physical well-being but also instilling values and virtues. Innovative methods such as storytelling, music, and dance (Harper, 2013) make the teachings accessible and engaging for young minds.

To effectively convey the essence of yoga philosophy, educators can utilize a variety of creative tools:

- **Storytelling** that incorporates yoga principles
- **Music and songs** that reflect yogic themes
- **Dance and movement** to express the Yamas and Niyamas
- **Games and activities** that reinforce the lessons learned

These methods not only make learning enjoyable but also cater to the diverse learning styles of children. By integrating these approaches, educators can create a rich and multi-sensory learning environment.

The art of teaching yoga to children lies in making the practice relatable and fun. It is about connecting with the child's innate curiosity and guiding them towards self-awareness and discipline through interactive and imaginative experiences (Harper, 2013)

Nutrition and Well-being: Engaging Children with Healthy Snacks

Kid-Friendly Recipes that Promote Balanced Eating

Introducing children to the joy of cooking can be a delightful way to encourage healthy eating habits. Kid-friendly recipes not only provide a fun activity but also teach valuable nutritional lessons. Energy balls (Flaherty, 2024), for example, are a simple no-bake option that can be packed with nutrients to bust those low-energy moments. They are delicious, easy to make, and perfect for storing for later consumption.

Involving children in the kitchen can lead to a greater interest in the food they eat and a better understanding of balanced diets. Here's a quick list of ingredients for a basic energy ball recipe:

- Oats
- Honey or maple syrup
- Peanut butter or any nut butter
- Flax seeds
- Chocolate chips or dried fruit

By experimenting with these ingredients, children can learn about the importance of each component in their diet. For instance, oats provide fiber, nut butter offer healthy fats, and flax seeds are a source of omega-3 fatty acids (Hjalmarsdottir, 2024).

Encouraging children to be hands-on with their food choices fosters a sense of autonomy and decision-making about their health. It is a step towards holistic education that aligns with the principles of Panchakosha, nurturing the

physical layer of being through conscious eating.

Connection between Nutrition and Cognitive Development

The intricate relationship between dietary habits and cognitive performance in children is increasingly evident. Proper nutrition is crucial for the healthy development of a child's brain. Nutritional deficiencies, particularly in the early years, can lead to cognitive impairments, while a balanced diet supports mental acuity and learning capabilities.

- Macronutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, and fats provide the energy necessary for brain function and development.
- Micronutrients, including vitamins and minerals, play key roles in neural processes.
- Antioxidants protect brain tissue from oxidative stress, supporting cognitive health.

Ensuring that children receive a diet rich in essential nutrients is fundamental to fostering their cognitive growth and educational success (Nelson & Luciana, 2008).

The evidence suggests that malnutrition can impair cognitive development, whereas practices like breastfeeding are beneficial for cognition. It is imperative to understand the nutritional needs at various stages of a child's growth to optimize their cognitive potential (Nyaradi et.al., 2013).

Culinary Activities as a Medium for Holistic Education

Engaging children in culinary activities serves as a powerful tool for holistic education, fostering not only an appreciation for healthy eating but also imparting valuable life skills. Through hands-on experiences such as menu planning, cooking, and tasting, children learn about nutrition, teamwork, and the cultural significance of food.

Incorporating culinary activities into the curriculum can be both fun and educational. Here's a simple framework for educators to

follow:

1. Introduction to basic nutrition and food groups
2. Hands-on cooking sessions with simple, healthy recipes
3. Exploring cultural dishes and their history
4. Understanding the farm-to-table process
5. Reflecting on the experience and sharing with peers

By integrating these activities, children not only learn how to prepare food but also develop a sense of responsibility and self-sufficiency. They connect with the process of creating a meal from start to finish, which can have a lasting impact on their relationship with food and eating habits.

Educators can draw inspiration from various sources, including Ayurvedic cooking workshops, visits to temple kitchens, or even yoga for digestion, to create a diverse and enriching culinary curriculum. The goal is to create a joyful learning environment where the act of cooking becomes a gateway to a deeper understanding of health, community, and the environment.

Educational Philosophies and their Influence on Teaching Methods

Comparative Analysis of Eastern and Western Educational Ideals

The educational landscapes of the East and West are often viewed through the lens of their philosophical underpinnings (Spizzica, 1997). Eastern educational ideals are deeply rooted in philosophies such as Sankhya Yoga, Vedanta, Buddhism, and Jainism, which emphasize holistic development and the pursuit of wisdom. In contrast, Western education has been shaped by schools of thought like idealism, realism, naturalism, pragmatism, and existentialism, focusing on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills.

The interplay between these diverse educational philosophies reveals a rich tapestry

of approaches to learning, each with its unique contributions and limitations.

Eastern traditions value the integration of spiritual and moral dimensions within education, while Western models often prioritize empirical inquiry and the scientific method. This dichotomy presents opportunities for a more enriched educational paradigm when elements from both systems are thoughtfully integrated.

- **Eastern Approaches:**
 - Emphasis on spiritual growth
 - Moral and ethical education
 - Teacher as a guide and mentor
- **Western Approaches:**
 - Focus on empirical evidence
 - Development of analytical skills
 - Teacher as a facilitator of knowledge

Understanding these differences is crucial for educators aiming to foster environments that nurture both the intellectual and personal growth of students.

Sociological Approaches to Education: Theories and Applications

The sociological approach to education delves into how societal structures and cultural norms shape the educational landscape. Through the study of sociology of education, (Satapathy, 2021) teachers are exposed to micro and macro theories that explain factors affecting academic performance. These theories include symbolic interactionism, structural functionalism, and conflict theory, each offering a unique lens through which to view the classroom and its dynamics.

The interplay between educational institutions and social institutions such as family and society are crucial. It highlights the role of socialization in shaping both educational outcomes and cultural transmission.

Understanding these sociological concepts is essential for educators to create learning environments that are both inclusive and

effective.

Sociological approach, focus and implications

Approach	Focus	Educational Implications
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro-level interactions	Personalized learning experiences
Structural Functionalism	Social stability and cohesion	Emphasis on social norms in curriculum
Conflict Theory	Inequality and power dynamics	Critical thinking and social justice education

Pedagogical Strategies for Reflective and Autonomous Learning

In the realm of education, fostering reflective and autonomous learning is paramount. Moon (1999, p. 63) defined the reflective practice as “a set of abilities and skills, to indicate the taking of a critical stance, an orientation to problem-solving or state of mind”. So, educators need to cultivate a deeper level of understanding and self-awareness in their students. These strategies encourage learners to think critically about their own learning processes and outcomes.

The dynamic model of learner autonomy, as proposed by Knowles (1975), emphasizes the importance of self-directed learning. This approach to pedagogy aligns with the theory of andragogy, which is particularly relevant for adolescent and adult learners. It underscores the significance of tailoring educational experiences to the unique characteristics and needs of learners.

Assessment plays a critical role in reflective and autonomous learning (Hay & Mathers, 2012). It is not just about measuring outcomes, but also about providing feedback that can guide further learning. Effective assessment

practices encompass a range of types, including formative, summative, and diagnostic assessments.

To implement these pedagogical strategies effectively, educators must consider various factors such as the learner's characteristics, the learning environment, and the available instructional facilities. The table below outlines the levels of teaching and their corresponding requirements (Bloom et al., 1994).

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Level of Teaching	Characteristics	Basic Requirements
Memory Level	Repetition and recall	Structured environment, clear instructions
Understanding Level	Comprehension and application	Interactive sessions, problem-solving tasks
Reflective Level	Critical thinking and self-assessment	Opportunities for reflection, feedback mechanisms

Conclusion

The exploration of Panchakosha theory within the context of education reveals a profound connection between ancient wisdom and modern pedagogical practices. By integrating the holistic approach of Panchakosha, which encompasses the physical, energetic, mental, intellectual, and blissful layers of being, educators can foster a more comprehensive development in children. This article has highlighted the significance of incorporating elements such as kid-friendly yoga philosophy, Yog Nidra, and guided meditation into educational curricula to support the well-being and growth of young minds. Moreover, the insights from various schools of philosophy, both Eastern and Western, underscore the

importance of a well-rounded educational experience that balances academic rigor with the cultivation of moral and spiritual values. As we strive to prepare children for the complexities of the modern world, the Panchakosha theory serves as a reminder of the timeless principles that can guide their journey towards becoming balanced, and enlightened individuals.

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