**A Further Explanation of the Key, First Principle or Organizing Principle**

**of The Wholistic Educational System** **and Examples of Classroom Applications**

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In The Wholistic Educational System (WES) there are several first principles that cannot be derived from one another and there are several corollary principles that have been derived from the first principles. Of all the first principles there is a key first principle or organizing principle.[[1]](#footnote-1) A **first principle** in any scheme of thought is that principle that sets forth the ultimate proposition beyond which nothing is more fundamental. The following is an explanation of such a principle that undergirds WES.

The key, first principle or organizing principle of The Wholistic Educational System is: “The potentiality of an entity is translated into actuality via purpose-guided interaction with and positive and/or negative prehension of its environment.” This can be expressed succinctly as: **Po🡪A🡨 +p PuI -p🡪E** which can be read as, “**P**otentiality is **translated** (**🡪**) into **A**ctuality via **Pu**rpose-guided **I**nteraction with and positive(**+**) prehension(**p**)and/or negative (**-**) prehension **(p)** of the **E**nvironment.” This principle describes the process of creativity that can be considered as the most fundamental and universal process underlying all of creation. It is the foundation upon which this system of education was built.

A **potentiality** is an unexpressed, latent, patterned use of energy. For humans, there are four basic categories of potentiality: physical, social, psychological, and spiritual.

An **actuality** is a potentiality that has entered the contingent world that is perceivable, directly via the human senses or indirectly via instruments such as microscopes, telescopes, sensors; or indirectly via symbol systems, e.g., written achievement tests in educational institutions.

*In the classroom*:[[2]](#footnote-2) Via a classroom discussion, after the teacher explains what a potentiality is and offers and example, students can generate a list of potentialities. Depending on the age, these can then be categorized and jotted down using a large, blank, Life in Dynamic Harmony (LDH) Medicine Wheel template with its four quadrants—physical, social, psychological, and spiritual. The potentialities can eventually be related to the 36 basic life processes identified on the LDH Medicine Wheel.

The initial phase of **creativity**, that is, the creative advance into novelty, is interaction, the second phase is prehension, and the third phase is the outcome—actualization of potential.

The first phase—**interaction**--is based on what is called “the interactionist viewpoint”[[3]](#footnote-3) which emphasizes the complexity of phenomena and suggests that understanding them requires considering the dynamic interactions between various entities rather than focusing on isolated causes. This perspective acknowledges the interconnectedness and mutual influence (reciprocal causality) of all things in determining the actualization of potential in the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual domains of reality. The “purpose” in the term “**purpose-guided interaction**” can be the purpose of the learning entity or that of the Creator Who is also an Educator Who arranges environments and guides His/Her creatures’ interactions with them.

The two-way arrow between the actual entity (A) and the environment (E) signifies the reciprocal influence, impact, or change of both the entity and the environment with which it is interacting (I). For example, when a hammer interacts with the head of a nail there is an exchange of energy. Not only is the nail driven into the wood, the once-cool surface of the head of the hammer can become quite hot. It too is impacted, not just the nail.

*In the classroom*: The above example of hammer and nail could be demonstrated. The following situation could also be discussed. When someone speaks bad about another person behind her/his back, that victim’s reputation is damaged, but, simultaneously, the backbiter’s reputation (and spiritual progress) is also damaged.

The **environment** is that which exists, i.e., the actual or non-actual entities; e.g., physical objects, relationships, feelings, ideas, intentions, and souls; that “environ” or “surround” the learner and with which the learner interacts. These entities have been classified into four, basic, sub-environments: physical, social, psychological, and spiritual, each of which has three aspects: that which is known to the learner; that which, for the learner, is unknown but knowable, and that which, for all humans, is ultimately unknowable. All of these are contained in the learner’s self which is referred to as “the environment of the self.”

The second phase of creativity is **prehension**. The etymological root of this term is related to the word “grasp.” Prehension occurs when, via interaction with an environment, an entity or an actual occasion includes (positive prehension) or excludes (negative prehension) another entity or occasion in its own process of becoming. In other words, prehension is the decision to incorporate (+ prehension) or not to incorporate (- prehension) certain aspects of reality into the entity’s own experience of becoming. Negative prehensions are just as important as positive prehensions in defining the character of the subject because they determine what is not shaping its identity. For example, at the mineral level, a black rock has the potential of becoming very hot when it interacts with sunlight because it absorbs the sun’s rays. A white rock has the potential of remaining cooler than the black rock when receiving the same amount of sunlight because the nature of its whiteness is to reflect more of the sun’s rays than the black rock.

The life of a cell can also be used as an example and as a metaphor to help understand the philosophy of organism in general, i.e., seeing entities as organisms, and the concept of prehension in particular. Like cells, entities—physical entities, e.g. animals; social entities, e.g., families; psychological entities, e.g., concepts (which can also evolve over time); and spiritual entities, e.g., souls—have an “inside,” an “outside,” a “boundary,” such as a cell wall, separating them, and “channels” across the boundary that connect the interior with the exterior of the entity and which can be opened or closed. The “cell wall” or boundary “feels” (prehends) both what it wants to absorb *and* what it wants to reject. Positive prehension is absorption or inclusion of an external entity, e.g., eating food. Negative prehension is the decision to exclude an external entity. For example, if a food is first smelled (felt), or even ingested, and found to be spoiled, it is not eaten or digested, that is, it is negatively prehended, rejected, or ejected! Entities with health “cell walls” allow passage to only those entities that are "in tune" with their nature or purposes. They do not allow the passage of entities that are harmful to these purposes. Therefore, weak "cell walls," barriers, shields, or boundaries jeopardize the true nature, purposes, and lives of entities at all ontological levels whether individual or collective.

Malcolm D. Evans, a Whiteheadian scholar and educator, at the end of an afternoon conversation with Charles Hartshorne, considered to be “the father of process theology,” asked him which concept of Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy would be most helpful for education. Hartshorne answered unhesitatingly and “with great conviction... Prehension, above all prehension.”[[4]](#footnote-4) I would go further and emphasize “negative prehension” for the following reason. Positive prehension is related to the concepts of “absorption” or “infusion.” Education has done a pretty good job of organizing the knowledge, skills, values, etc. that we want learners to “acquire.” However, now, at this time in human history, due to the disintegration of society (and its metaphorical “cell walls”) at all levels, learners also need to learn what knowledge, skills, values, and ideals should not be “acquired” and how to go about keeping them out of their life or removing them if they have already been positively prehended. For example, learners need the “tools” which will enable them to keep out of their life opiates; people that are a negative influence; deleterious habits of mockery, deceit and thievery; unwholesome thoughts, media, ideas, goals, ideals, etc. If these have already become a habit or addiction, learners need other “tools” to replace them with healthy habits and patterns of life.

*In the classroom*: Using the example above about black and white rocks, a teacher can set up an experience of prehension by activating students’ background knowledge about black and white objects in the sun; making predictions [hypotheses] about white and black rocks in the sun, designing and setting up an experiment to test the predictions by measuring their temperature, and using their interpretation of the data to judge the validity of their predictions. Once this knowledge is attained it can be applied to a wide variety of life situations: what color of clothing to wear in hot or cold weather; the color of cars; the choice of house color and roof tops, etc. The lesson can then be extended to other things that should be positively or negatively prehended, beginning with the physical domain, e.g., healthy and unhealthy food, and then working up to the social domain, e.g., good and bad friends, the psychological domain, e.g., appropriate and inappropriate feelings, and the spiritual domain, e.g., godly and ungodly people, intentions, and values.

*In the classroom*: The potential of reading can be actualized by interacting with the shapes and sounds of letters. Correct letter and sound matches must be positively prehended (acquired or learned) and mismatches must be negatively prehended (corrected, not repeated, not learned). Cognitive skills are needed to understand the rules of acceptable and unacceptable interpretation of shapes into letters and from letters into sounds (and then into words and meanings). The teacher's role is to help the student construct these cognitive "cell walls" of rules that determine permissible and inadmissible correspondence, decoding, and comprehension.

In summary, the first principle describes the phases of the process of creativity in the largest sense of the word. Out of this organizing principle, the theories and praxis of The Wholistic Educational System were generated.

*In the classroom*: Discussions need to include the phases of creativity and becoming, for example, “What do you want to learn, to know, to be able to do?” “What have you always dreamt about learning how to do?” (That is, “What potentialities do you want to actualize?”) -- “How will we learn it?” “What learning materials do we need? (That is, “With what learning environments to we need to interact in order to positively prehend them?” or “What experiences do we need to acquire the object of learning?”) -- “What do we need to keep out of our learning experience?” (An example could “interruptions.”) Later, during a reflection gathering, “What do we now know about or know how to do that we did not know or were not able to do at the beginning of the class, the school day, the week, the month, the grading period, or the school year?” (That is, “What potentialities have we actualized?”) -- “What new learning, knowledge, and/or abilities (of an individual or the entire class) shall we celebrate?” “How do we want to celebrate these achievements?”[[5]](#footnote-5) (That is, the actualization of potentialities, regardless of their degree of uniqueness in the history of human experience, need to be recognized and honored because they are manifestations of the most fundamental process in life.)

1. See the handout, “First Principles and Corollary Principles.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “In the classroom” applications, depending on the age group from preschool through university and beyond, can be simplified or complexified and presented in ways that range from more concrete to more abstract. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion of the interactionist viewpoint, see: William Keith Bookwalter, *The Development of Logical Thinking in Children* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013) 33-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Malcolm D. Evans, *Whitehead and Philosophy of Education: The Seamless Coat of Learning* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 67-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For Bahá’í readers, at the spiritual level, from a Bahá’í point of view, one can view the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, His laws, ordinances, counsels, vision of a future World Order, and warnings, as God’s wisdom regarding our God-given individual and collective potentialities, how we should interact with various environmental entities, what to positively and/or negatively prehend from the environment, and, in some cases, even the frequency that certain prehensions should be carried out, all for the purpose of actualizing those potentialities. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)