

# Introduction

*Holistic Learning*

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The vision of human wholeness is an ancient one. It can be found in the cultures of indigenous peoples as well as in the ancient cultures of Greece, India, and China. It is a different story today. Our culture and education systems have become obsessed with acquisition and achievement. In schools the move to high-stakes testing has narrowed the focus of teaching and learning to “standards” that are easily measurable. Our present culture is not interested in educating the whole person but rather in what James Hillman (1999) has called the “objective observer”:

Mr. Objective Observer. This characterless abstraction runs corporations, constructs the International Style of architecture, writes the language of official reports. He enforces the methods of scientific research, prefers systems to people, numbers to images. He defines the educational programs and the standards for testing them. He has also succeeded in separating the practices of law, science, medicine and commerce from the character of the practitioner. . . . The same characterless abstraction made possible the gulag and the KZ lager. The one death that has caused so much death in the past century is the death of character. (pp. 238–239)

As Hillman points out, education has been an integral part of this process.

In contrast, there are people who have a different vision of education: a holistic view. They still hold to the ancient perspective of educating the whole person and not just training students to compete in a global economy. Some of

these people have been participating in conferences held on holistic education in Toronto over the past six years and this book contains some of the work done at those gatherings.

## HOLISTIC EDUCATION

What is holistic education? First, holistic education attempts to nurture the development of the whole person. This includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual. Perhaps the defining aspect of holistic education is the spiritual. Progressive education and humanistic education dealt with the first five factors but generally ignored the spiritual dimension. Recently we have seen a rapidly expanding interest in this last dimension with the publication of several books (Glazer, 1999; Kessler, 2000; Lantieri, 2001; J. Miller 2000; J. Miller and Nakagawa, 2002). Addressing spirituality in the curriculum can mean reawakening students to a sense of awe and wonder. This can involve deepening a sense of connection to the cosmos.

Ron Miller (2000) believes that there are levels of wholeness that are important to holistic education. Besides the whole person there needs to be wholeness in the *community*. People need to be able to relate to one another openly and directly and to foster a sense of care. Communities need to operate on democratic principles and support pluralism. There also should be holism in society that allows for more local control and citizen participation. Holistic educators are concerned that the ideology of the marketplace dominates society and they call for more humane approaches to our social structures. Another level of wholeness is the *planet*. Holistic educators generally look at the planet in terms of ecological interdependence. Finally, there is the wholeness of the *cosmos*. This again involves the spiritual dimension that I referred to earlier.

Elsewhere I have described three basic principles of holistic education: *connectedness*, *inclusion*, and *balance* (Miller, 2001). Connectedness refers to moving away from a fragmented approach to curriculum toward an approach that attempts to facilitate connections at every level of learning. Some of these connections include integrating analytic and intuitive thinking, linking body and mind, integrating subjects, connecting to the community, providing links to the earth, and connecting to soul and spirit. Inclusion refers to including all types of students and providing a broad range of learning approaches to reach these students. Finally, balance is based on the concepts of the Tao and yin/yang which suggest that at every level of the universe there are complementary forces and energies (e.g., the rational and the intuitive) that need to be recognized and nurtured. In terms of education this means recognizing these complementary energies in the classroom. Generally our education has been dominated by yang energies such as a focus on rationality and individual com-

petition, and has ignored yin energies such as fostering intuition and cooperative approaches to learning.

Ramon Gallegos Nava (2001), a holistic educator from Mexico, has made several distinctions between mechanistic approaches to teaching and holistic education. These are shown in the table below:

It is important to recognize that holistic education cannot be reduced to a set of techniques or ideologies. Ultimately holistic education rests in the hearts and minds of the teachers and students. Education has tended to focus on the head to the exclusion of the rest of our being. Holistic education attempts to provide learnings that are much more broadly conceived.

### THEORY, PRACTICES, AND POETICS

Educators sharing in the vision of wholeness have gathered every other year in Toronto since 1997 for a conference on holistic learning. These conferences have included educators from Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They have been hosted and sponsored by the Holistic and Aesthetic Education Graduate Focus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (hereafter referred to as OISE/UT). This collection of readings includes papers submitted by keynote speakers and workshop presenters at these conferences.

#### *Theory*

The editors of this volume have placed the chapters into three different categories: theory, practices, and the poetic. The first chapters include those that focus on theories and perspectives related to holistic learning. Thomas Moore, author of several books on the soul, begins the book with a paper on "Educating for the Soul." According to Moore, education for the soul can begin with teaching people "how to live poetically and aesthetically, how to step into eternity." Anna F. Lemkow was one of the keynote speakers at our first conference in 1997 and here outlines the main features of a holistic perspective. Another theoretical piece comes from Douglas Sloan, who writes about the "Modern Assault on Being Human" and then discusses ways to nurture body, soul, and spirit in our children.

Riane Eisler, who has written several books on the theme of partnership, discusses specifically how we can approach partnership education in our schools and classrooms. Edmund O'Sullivan discusses the concept of "strange attractors," which are those systems, or people, that hold the creative edge to change.

Professor Bok Young Kim from Korea writes about Teilhard de Chardin. South Korea has become one of the centers of activity for holistic education in

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Comparison of Educational Paradigms**

<i>Mechanistic Education</i>	<i>Holistic Education</i>
Guiding metaphor: the 19th-century machine	Guiding metaphor: 21st-century network organizations
Interdisciplinarity	Transdisciplinarity
Fragmentation of knowledge	Integration of knowledge
Systemic	Holistic
Empirical-analytical	Empirical-analytical-holistic
Development of thought	Development of intelligence
Scientistic-dogmatic	Secular-spiritual
Reductionist	Integral
Focused on teaching	Focused on learning
Static, predetermined curriculum	Open, dynamic curriculum
Curriculum focused on disciplines	Curriculum focused on human knowledge
Superficial changes in behavior	Profound changes in awareness
Academic disciplines	Inquiry based
Mechanistic psychology	Perennial psychology
Explores the external quantitative dimension of the universe	Explores the external/internal and quantitative/qualitative dimensions of the universe
We can know the planet without knowing ourselves	Only by knowing ourselves can we know the planet
There exists only one intelligence: logical-mathematical	There are at least seven equally valid intelligences
Based on bureaucratic organizations	Based on communities of learning
Based on the mechanistic science of Descartes-Newton-Bacon	Based on the cutting-edge science of Bohm-Prigogine-Pribram
Paradigm of simplification	Paradigm of complexity
Predatory conscience	Ecological conscience

SOURCE: Gallegos Nava 2001, pp. 35–36. (Reprinted with permission.)

Asia and Professor Kim is one of leaders of the holistic education movement there. Working from her background in philosophy, Deborah Orr discusses the work of Wittgenstein and Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna to develop the notion of a holistic embodied spirituality found in such feminist works as Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic*.

Rachael Kessler also contributes a chapter on soulful education. Kessler has worked for many years with adolescents and from this work has identified seven gateways to soul that are based on essential yearnings of young people. Finally, Young Mann Park and Min Young Song have written about Won Hyo, a Korean Buddhist scholar who lived in the 7th century. Park and Song are also very active in the holistic education movement in Korea.

### *Practices*

Several chapters in this book focus on practices. Some of these are classroom practices while other chapters focus on practices and learning strategies that the authors used in their workshop at the conference at OISE/UT.

Gary Babiuk has contributed a chapter on the work he did as principal of a school in a small community in Alberta. He describes how the school staff helped create a holistic learning community. Care was a primary value in the school.

Atsuhiko Yoshida has contributed a chapter about how Waldorf schooling is being introduced in Japan. Professor Yoshida is one of the leaders of the holistic education movement in Japan and has written and translated several books on the topic. Marni Binder has written about the work she does in her school. Specifically, she describes a project on storytelling at Lord Dufferin Public School in Toronto.

Rina Cohen has written about a holistic approach to teaching in mathematics. In particular she describes the work of a grade 7 teacher who has students keep math journals. David Forbes has written about a project he initiated with twelve members of a high school football team. He introduced these young men to meditation practice.

Some of the contributors have described their work with adults. Susan A. Schiller has contributed a chapter describing a holistic process that she uses in her workshops and teaching. This process includes writing a poem, meditating, and contemplating place.

Leslie Owen Wilson writes about how we can create rites of passage for children in our schools. She describes programs that are already being used in some schools.

### Poetics

In the final section of this collection, the chapters have a poetic focus. Diana Denton has described a “pedagogy of compassion” that is based on a phenomenology of the heart, which she has used in her workshops. Isabella Colalillo Kates has written a chapter describing how she teaches creative writing in her classes and workshops. Isabella sees creativity as spiritual activity that involves the soul in holistic learning.

Christopher Reynolds states that conferences have been a gathering of orphans. He suggests that the voice of the orphan can be deeply healing and thus needs to be heard. Celeste Snowber has written about the eros of teaching as she focuses on the importance of embodied learning and knowing.

Finally, Ayako Nozawa describes the workshops that she has done on art and meditation, in which she presents drawing and painting as contemplative activities.

This book provides an alternative to the narrow vision of education that we are confronted with today. The vision presented here focuses on how human beings can reclaim meaning, purpose, and wholeness. It involves a remembering, or recalling of, the visions given to us by the shamans, ancients, sages, and saints over the centuries. Yet we must find a way to make the vision of wholeness a reality in today’s world. This book can help us create that reality.

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