A Volume in **Current Perspectives in Holistic Education**

Series Editor: Kelli Nigh

Holistic Education, Part 1

Enduring Principles and Practices

Edited by
Kelli Nigh
Duyen Can



Holistic Education, Part 1

In contemporary educational discourse, the language of holism and whole-person teaching has become increasingly widespread. Yet the deeper principles and practices that ground holistic education are often obscured or simplified. This volume returns to those foundational understandings, engaging critically with the theoretical and practical dimensions that have shaped the field.

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—*Marni J. Binder*, EdD, Associate Professor Emeritus,
Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Canada

Current Perspectives in Holistic Education

Series Editor
Kelli Nigh
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto, Canada

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Edited by

Kelli Nigh

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada

And

Duyen Can

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Kelli Nigh, PhD, began her professional career in social work, contributing to initiatives like Voices and Images of Hope: A Conversation with Archbishop Desmond Tutu. She co-chaired Voices for the Luminous Veil committee, which raised awareness for Toronto's suicide barrier. Her theater training led to over 60 student productions in schools and communities. Holding a PhD in holistic education, Kelli continues to serve as editor for the *Current Perspectives in Holistic Education* series with Emerald Publishing. She has dedicated years to researching the impact of nature and spirituality on consciousness, culminating in her book *Learning in Nature* (2021). *Learning in Nature* is a phenomenological inquiry that delves into the mind-body relationship and seeks to address the powerful relationship between nature, spirituality, and learning. Currently, Kelli is a Sessional Lecturer at the University of Toronto, OISE, where she teaches courses such as Spirituality in Education and Nature and Learning in the Wellbeing Emphasis.

Duyen Can, EdD, is an experienced educator with over 16 years of teaching English for Specific Purposes at Vietnam National University. Holding a doctorate in teacher training, she has dedicated her career to fostering professional development in both language education and teacher training. Recently, her focus has shifted to holistic education, where she integrates mind-body-soul practices into the learning experience. She is passionate about nurturing not only the academic growth of students and teachers but also their emotional and personal wellbeing. By incorporating mindfulness, emotional awareness, and personal development into the classroom, she aims to create environments that support both students and teachers in their growth. She believes that education should nurture the whole person, fostering resilience, fulfillment, and a lifelong love of learning.

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Pascal Pax Andebo is a PhD student in the International Education Policy program at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is interested in researching topics related to education for peace, education in conflict zones, and emergency education, particularly in Africa. With over a decade of experience in educational leadership and development in Africa, he is also a dedicated teacher and peace advocate. Additionally, he has worked and researched in the areas of good governance and climate change.

Chenkai Chi holds a PhD in Education from the University of Windsor and currently serves as a Postdoctoral Fellow and sessional instructor in the Faculty of Education. He is also the Book Review Editor for the *Canadian Journal of Education (CJE)*. Dr Chi has received several academic awards, including the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and the Mitacs Globalink Research Award. His dissertation investigates the strengths of the Canadian generalist teaching model and the Chinese specialist teaching model, exploring their reciprocal contributions within the context of Xu and Connelly's large-scale, multidimensional SSHRC Partnership Grant Project. His research interests include cross-cultural and comparative education, West-East Reciprocal Learning, interdisciplinary education for sustainability, and language and literacy education.

Alan Cockerill, PhD, lives in Brisbane, Australia, and is an affiliate researcher at Monash University in Melbourne. He was awarded a PhD at the University of Queensland for his study of the educational legacy of Vasyl Sukhomlynsky (Vasily Sukhomlinsky). He has degrees in Russian language and literature and in translatorship, as well as degrees in education, with specializations in primary teaching, teacher librarianship and the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. For most of his working life he has taught in primary schools, though he also has experience teaching Russian at the

University of Queensland, and early in his life worked as a baker, farm laborer and solicitor's clerk.

Sam Crowell, EdD, is professor emeritus from California State University where he received the Outstanding Teaching Award and founded the MA in Holistic and Integrative Education. He teaches courses for Earth Charter International, the Institute for Educational Studies, and the Foundation for Transformative Learning. Sam is an imagineer for a heart-centered, Earth-affirming consciousness. His books include *Mindshifts*, *The Re-Enchantment of Learning*, *Emergent Teaching*, and as one of the editors for *International Handbook on Holistic Education*. Sam's most recent is *The Tao of Spiritual Development*. He lives in Winooski, Vermont.

Renata Cueto de Souza has received her PhD in Educational Theory and Practice: Philosophy of Education stream from Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada (2025), and both her M.A. in Culture, Philosophy and History of Education (2020) and Bachelor of Law degree (2000) from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. She has taught courses in peace, conflict, non-violence, and dialogue studies. At Simon Fraser University, she assists courses and programs on philosophy of education, ethical issues in education and contemplative inquiry and approaches in education. Her current research interests include spirituality in education, contemplative education and mindfulness in education; philosophy and psychology of meaning, purpose and wisdom; phenomenology, existentialism, and existential analysis; and philosophy as a way of life.

Ellen Doris, EdD, directs the Nature-based Early Childhood Program at Antioch University. Her doctorate and master's degree are from the Harvard Graduate School of Education; her bachelor's degree is from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University. Ellen has encouraged nature-study and outdoor learning while serving as an early childhood and elementary school teacher and administrator, museum instructor, environmental educator, and consultant. She is the author of *Doing What Scientists Do: Children Learn to Investigate Their World*, the *Real Kids/Real Science* series, and *Life at the Top: Discoveries in a Tropical Forest Canopy*. She serves on the advisory board of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Library, and contributed to *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives and Practices* (1993).

Susan M. Drake, PhD, is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Brock University, Ontario. After teaching high school English, science, and physical education, she found her home in holistic education in higher education. This philosophy matched what she passionately believed should

happen in all classrooms if teachers only knew implement it. She began her career with several co-authored publications with John P. Miller. She published two chapters in the original Carol Flake version of *Education 2000: A holistic perspective: Living our vision* (1993). Her published research is largely in the areas of integrated and transdisciplinary curriculum, learning and assessment.

Melissa Drobish is a Master's student in the International Education Policy program at the University of Maryland. In her research, she hopes to better understand how a holistic view of identity contributes to learning, particularly in the context of education in emergencies.

Yvonne Germaine Dufault, PhD candidate and lifelong educator-researcher, taught in Canada's two official languages from grade 1 to college level, first in Quebec, then in Ontario. Her 42 year career across all subjects focussed on enhancing student awareness and skills in character education, community service leadership, positive race relations, public speaking, debating, drama, dance, environmental activism, plus practicing lovingkindness in action through volunteerism. Dufault mentored and empowered students to perform successfully with informed voice and vision through multiple venues offered by community service organizations, professional, provincial and national associations. Students became confident community oriented changemakers authentically modeling living respectfully as Human Tribe on Mother Earth. A visionary in Indigenous Education, Dufault (2003) completed her MA titled *A Quest for Character, Exploring the Relationship between First Nations Teaching and Character Education.* A provincial professional development workshop leader, Dufault retired from teaching in 2020. Recipient of numerous awards and recognitions since 1979, this bilingual author presented not only at Canadian conferences, but also internationally in the United States, Australia and Greece. In 2012 Dufault began investigating ways to enhance brain health for learners experiencing concussion symptoms and cognitive decline. Dufault collaborates daily with her live-in 90-year-old mother-in-law recognized as a nursing care leader.

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Diane Gallas, MEd, owns and operates Imagine That…Creative Children's Centers in the Grants Pass area. Her programs have received the Preschool Promise grant to support childcare programs for preschoolers and partnership grants from the Oregon Childcare Career Development (OCCD) to support work with infants and toddlers. Currently, Michelle is an adjunct faculty member teaching early childhood classes at Rogue Community College. She is a consultant specializing in early learning environmental design. She is also a passionate advocate for the importance of play using creative arts and outdoor learning as an early learning tool.

Samantha Goss, PhD, is currently an assistant professor and graduate coordinator in the art department at the University of Northern Iowa. Her main teaching responsibilities include secondary art methods and several art education graduate research courses. Her role, guiding art education graduate students' qualitative research, allows her to continue wondering about how we come to know, mentoring through engrossment, and remaining continually surprised at the power of the arts. Samantha's love for art and literature during college led to her beginning her career as a high school art teacher. She has also been an adjunct professor of composition, art, and art education.

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Robert London, EdD, is a professor emeritus at California State University, San Bernardino. His major professional interest is clarifying the implications of a spiritual perspective in education, particularly a spiritual perspective that is consistent with a variety of spiritual traditions, as well as consistent with the implications of the new sciences and some current educational psychologies. His specific interests in this area include: identifying principles and statements concerning education considered consistent with a spiritual perspective, clarifying the implications of a spiritual perspective for developing a strong connection with Nature, describing a research methodology consistent with a spiritual perspective, introducing secondary students to nonroutine in mathematics and holistic education, investigating the implications of the Mystery of Spirit for secular education, and transformative approaches to teacher education.

Ellyn Lyle, PhD, spent her youth wandering the margins between land and sea in Eastern Canada. These beginnings created a particular attunement to the natural world and fostered a deep reverence for the wisdom possible in witnessing its rhythms. Ironically, perhaps, it was this dwelling with/in nature that taught her to think deeply about humanness and how our ways of engaging with the world and each other create benefit or harm. When she entered the field of education more than 20 years ago, she brought these contemplations with her valuing them as rich sources of continuous growth and insight. Having worked across multiple education contexts, she has remained intensely interested in supporting the development of students and teachers as they contribute to socially equitable and sustainable programs.

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John P. Miller, PhD, has been working in the field of holistic education for over 40 years. He is author/editor of 20 books on holistic learning, spirituality in education, and contemplative practices in education. His writing has been translated into nine languages. *The Holistic Curriculum* was used to develop the program for Equinox Holistic Alternative School in Toronto. Jack has worked extensively with holistic educators in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong for the past 30 years. He has been a visiting professor at two universities in Japan and also at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. In 2009 Jack was invited with 20 other educators from around the world to Bhutan to help that country orient its education system to the country's goal of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Jack teaches courses on holistic education and contemplative education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where he is Professor. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_P._Miller_(academic).

Ron Miller, PhD, has had a diverse career as an educational scholar and activist, publisher and bookseller, community leader and philanthropist. He received his BA in interdisciplinary liberal arts at Michigan State, an MA in phenomenological psychology from Duquesne, certification as a Montessori educator, and a PhD from Boston University in American Studies, focusing on the cultural and historical foundations of American education. Miller founded the journal *Holistic Education Review* in 1988, and the book publisher Holistic Education Press. He authored or edited ten books including *What Are Schools For?* and *Free Schools, Free People*, and published works by other scholars in the Foundations of Holistic Education series. Miller has taught at Goddard and Champlain colleges, and in 1994, he co-founded the Bellwether School, a holistic pre-k/elementary school in Williston, Vermont.

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Martyn Rawson is responsible for the International Masters Programme in Waldorf education at Alanus University, Germany, where he is Professor of Waldorf Education in International Contexts. He also teaches on the International Masters Programme at the Freie Hochschule Stuttgart and is Associate Professor at the National Tsinghua University, Taiwan. He also teaches part-time at a Waldorf high school in Hamburg in Germany. He has been teaching in Waldorf schools since 1979 in England and in Germany. Martyn contributes to teacher education and advises schools in China, Taiwan, South Africa, Canada and in various countries in Europe. He is a member of the European Commission Working Group on Schools. He has published widely on Waldorf education, most recently; Rawson & Bransby (2025) *Crafting a Curriculum of Coherence*. Published by Routledge.

Jeeyeon Ryu, PhD, is a pianist, teacher, and researcher who has been deeply dedicated to the arts and education for more than 20 years. She loves all things creative, including music improvisation, photography, poetry, storytelling, and videography. Inspired by a variety of artistic genres, she enjoys using a/r/tography, autoethnography, and poetic inquiry to explore artful, reflexive ways of teaching, learning, research, and writing. Jeeyeon's scholarly interests and publications include themes and variations related to arts-informed pedagogies, praxis and teacher education, music education, and lived/living curricular practices. Currently, she is Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at Yorkville University.

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Philip Snow Gang, PhD, is the Founder of The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES) and its graduate programs in Integrative Learning and Montessori Integrative Learning. He is a pioneer in the field of integrative, systemic, and transformative approaches to education. Phil has been a Montessori school head, consultant, and educator of teachers. He was close friends with Dr Maria Montessori's son, Mario Sr., and her grandson,

Mario Jr. served on his doctoral committee. From 1987 through 1992, he was a citizen diplomat, joining a small group of American educators who visited Leningrad, Moscow, and Tbilisi (in Georgia). He lectured at the Soviet Academic of Sciences where he introduced *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective*.

Rebecca Tree, MEd, has over 40 years in the early childhood field. After serving as Founder and Director of Roots & Wings Community Preschool for 25 years she joined the Community Preschool at Southern Oregon University as director in addition to adjunct faculty in the Early Childhood Development program. Ms. Tree mentors practicum and capstone students and provides workshops on various early childhood topics. Ms. Tree advocates for holistic practices in early childhood education for preservice teacher development. She earned her master's degree at age 62, proving that learning is a life-long endeavor believing as long as we breathe, we can be engaged in meaningful work.

Mirian Vilela, PhD, is Executive Director of Earth Charter International and the Earth Charter Center on Education for Sustainable Development. She also serves as professor at the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica. In addition, Dr Vilela is Coordinator of the UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter. Prior to her work with the Earth Charter, Mirian worked for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) for two years in preparation of the 1992 UN Earth Summit and a year at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). She actively participated in the 2002 World Summit of Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, and the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development/Rio+20. Mirian holds a PhD. in Education from LaSalle University and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where she was an Edward Mason Fellow. She is originally from Brazil.

Lorie C. Wright is a Doctoral candidate at Queen's University, Kingston, ON, and an alumnus of the Ontario College of Art. She is also an adult literacy instructor who has worked in the field for many years. Her interest lies in imagining possibilities beyond colonial institutional frameworks so that literacy may be understood as a relational capacity to make and share meanings, insights, and understandings.

PREFACE

Threading the events that led to this publication, *Holistic Education, Part 1: Enduring Principles and Practices,* is like weaving a tapestry with no clear beginning. The roots of holistic thinking preceded civilization and most likely originated with early Indigenous peoples whose view of the world did not differentiate between the out there and in here. There was a unity in the creative forces that were present throughout their landscape. That is still prevalent today in the lens through which native people view the cosmos. It also came to the West through the Vedic masters who wrote about a holistic worldview thousands of years ago in poetic verses, as in the metaphor, *Indra's Net* (Cleary, 1993, p. 44).

My insights and explorations have led me to believe that a paradigm shift in scientific thinking over the last 150 years has been the catalyst behind the acceptance of a holistic worldview and the growth of the holistic education movement. Western science has recognized a systemic interconnectivity. Antonio Stoppani (1824–1891), an Italian priest, paleontologist, and geologist, demonstrated how all the Earth's systems depend on one another (Stoppani, 1882, p. 5-6). Another Jesuit priest, scientist, and anthropologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), extended Stoppani's Earth-system focus to the entire cosmos.

In 1929, astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered that the universe was expanding from a common origin. This laid the groundwork for seeing the cosmos and everything within it as dynamically interconnected. Over time, I have realized that the story of the universe is primary to our collective consciousness so that we understand our journey as it embraces not only the noun-ness of the material world but also the unity present throughout the evolutionary process. Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme introduced the universe's story in their seminal 1992 book. This is the emerging story that is central to educating holistically. Many other twentieth-century scientists have contributed to this systemic holistic view of life and cosmos. To name a few: Gregory Bateson, James Lovelock, and Lynn Margolis (Gaia theory), Francesco Varela, Luigi Fantappié, David Bohm, and Fritjof Capra.

Also emerging during the last century were the theories of relativity and quantum physics, chaos theory, fractal geometry, and the theory of autopoiesis.

My recent thinking has concerned the contributions of Luige Fantappié (1901–1956) and David Bohm (1917–1992). Fantappié demonstrated that *syntropy* is another force at work to counterbalance the Second Law of Thermodynamics: The Law of Entropy. According to Fantappie's research, entropy's main principle is the degradation of material/energy. Fantappié explains that syntropy is a tendency toward complexity, structure, order, and organization of ever more advantageous and orderly patterns. He further asserts that both forces exist in equal quantities in nature. According to Di Corpo and Vannini: "Syntropy established our identity, or consciousness, or Self… whereas entropy is the diverging Universe, outside, initiating ….is, thereby inflating toward infinity. Our ultimate goal is to unite ourselves with the Universe, a process known as the '*theorem of love*'" (Di Corpo & Vannini, 2015, p. 79).

This brings me to the more recent work of David Bohm, who, in 1980, introduced the concept of the implicate order to counterbalance the explicate order, whose principal function describes a Cartesian worldview. Lee Nichol (2021, p. vii) sites Bohm (1980) explaining that, "To generalize so as to emphasize the undivided wholeness, we shall say that what *carries* an implicate order is the holomovement, which is an unbroken and undivided totality" (p. 191). There is a potential connection between love and the implicate order, as both are seen as aspects of a deeper, interconnected reality where everything is fundamentally unified and flowing, suggesting that love could be understood as a manifestation of this underlying wholeness within the implicate order. As does syntropy, the implicate order holds the space for self-direction based on intuition and creativity.

In revisiting the principles of *Education 2000: A Holistic Vision* (1991) and *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives and Practices* (Flake, 1993) the originators of holistic education may see their work carried into the future. The contributors of this volume demonstrate that they not only bear witness, but they situate teaching and learning through an ever-expanding field of embodied and diverse wisdom. This establishes the holistic education movement not as an alternative form of education but organized against the backdrop of the true center of scientific understanding: the complementary forces that pervade the world. As such, all other forms of modern education are alternative and emanate from the entropic, explicate world of objectivity.

Philip Snow Gang, 2024

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MILESTONES LEADING UP TO THE PUBLICATION OF *EDUCATION 2000: A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE* (1991) AND *HOLISTIC EDUCATION: PRINCIPLES, PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES* (1993)

Philip Snow Gang, PhD

Year	Place	Event
1984	Milton, MA	Connect with Ron Miller at an Association for Humanistic Psychology Conference. Discover we have common interests including Montessori education
1984	United Nations, NY	Meet United Nations Assistant Secretary-General Robert Muller who had authored *A World Core Curriculum*, congruent with holistic education principles. He is also Chancellor for the UN University of Peace in Costa Rica. He introduces the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme
1986	Atlanta, GA	Ron Miller visits my school and talks about the upcoming publication of *Holistic Education Review*. Later he asks me to write an article for the first edition
1988	Greenfield, MA	Initial publication of *Holistic Education Review* Contact Ron Miller and suggest we organize a gathering of holistic education organizations.

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Year	Place	Event
1989	San Juan, Costa Rica	*Seeking the True Meaning of Peace Conference.* Robert Muller introduces me to Thomas Berry. Muller shares names of contributors to the holistic movement in Brazil, Italy and France
1989	Dahlonega, GA	Ron Miller confirms the idea for a conference. We hold an organizing event and invite six others to join a steering committee: Ed Clark, David Lehman, Linda Macrae-Campbell, Nina Lynn Meyerhof, Lynn Stoddard, and Joey Tanner. A retreat is held at The Center for New Beginnings An event takes place in Chicago titled *Creating a Common Vision for Holistic Education* with 80 participants Contact Robert Muller to ask him to speak. He suggests Abelardo Brenes, a faculty member at the UN University for Peace who later helped organize *The Earth Charter.* Muller strongly suggested we issue a "Statement" at the end of the event which would get global attention
1990	Chicago, IL	Nina Lynn Meyerhof and Ron Miller draft a document for review. Event culminates with an adoption of the *Chicago Statement on Education* In 1990 the Steering Committee meet and form the non-profit organization Global Alliance for Transforming Education (GATE) and hold a follow-on conference in June 1991
1991	Winter Park, CO	Adoption of *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective*…an expansion of the Chicago Statement drafted by Ron Miller and edited by the 100 participants
1993	Brandon, VT	Publication of *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives and Practices: A Book Based on Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective.* Carol L Flake, Editor
1991–1995	USA, Sweden, Japan, France, Italy, Argentina, New Zealand, France, Switzerland, Canada, Czech Republic, Norway	GATE Conferences: Colorado, Oklahoma, New York, New Mexico GATE events held in countries around the world with Chapters in New Zealand, Japan, Italy and Sweden. *Education 2000*: A Holistic Perspective translated into Spanish, French, Hungarian, Portuguese and Japanese

Related Publications Note

Flake, C. L. (1993). *Holistic education: Principles, perspectives and practices.* Holistic Education Press.

The Global Alliance for Transforming Education. (1990). *Education 2000: A holistic perspective.* https://www.ties-edu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Education2000en.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kelli Nigh and Duyen Can

This manuscript was conceived to mark the 30 year anniversary of *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives, and Practices: A Book of Readings Based on Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective* (Flake, 1993). However, the original timeline proved impossible, and so it is that we thank all contributors who patiently waited for the publication of this book, *Holistic Education, Part 1: Enduring Principles and Practices*. In 2026, this book—one part of a two-part volume—honours the enduring influence of Flake's work and the holistic education movement it helped shape. Special appreciation is extended to Philip Snow Gang, whose Preface celebrates holism and whose Milestone chapter chronicles the publications and conferences that define an important moment in holistic education's history.

Ron Miller, another leader in the holistic education field and contributor to Flake's edited collection, generously adapted his Volume Introduction. With the support of original members of this movement, including Kathleen Kesson, this 2026 manuscript evolved into a two-part volume dedicated to the continuity and relevance of holistic education. *Holistic Education, Part 1: Enduring Principles and Practices* reflects the historical foundations and present day expressions of holistic teaching and learning.

Flake's 1993 edited collection articulated core principles of holistic education, including educating for human development; honouring students as individuals; the central role of experience in learning; holistic teaching and learning; freedom of choice; participatory democracy; global citizenship; earth literacy; and spirituality in education. These principles continue to inform curricula, pedagogies, and the sustained presence of holistic schools.

This is not an anniversary volume, but it is a celebration of the holistic education field and the remarkable scholars who teach and learn to relate to students as whole people. We are honoured to have the original

contributors to Flake's collection appear throughout this book and the forthcoming *Holistic Education, Part 2: Present Landscapes and Future Horizons*. We deeply appreciate each one of you: Peter Berg, Ellen Doris, Susan M. Drake, Philip Snow Gang, Kathleen Kesson, John P. Miller, Ron Miller, and Nina Meyerhof. Their example of courage and commitment has made a difference in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

VOLUME INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The holistic education movement emerged in the 1980s and 90s, building on a 200-year history of educational dissent and reflecting a countercultural challenge to the worldview underlying modern industrialized society. This was a time of historical transition; an optimistic era of progress and expansive democracy was coming to a close, and aspects of cultural decline that became evident in the 21st century were beginning to appear on the horizon. Those drawn to holistic education believed that the future was open to diverse possibilities, and promoted a worldview rooted in ecological consciousness, spiritual renewal, alternative economics, participatory democracy and other countercultural initiatives. They sought to guide the culture toward these values through educational transformation. However, the emerging age of hypercapitalism, globalization, populist nationalism, environmental collapse and rising fascism has significantly marginalized the ideas and practices of holistic education. This essay reflects on the goals and hopes that motivated the author and his colleagues in the 1980s, and on how the movement might adapt to the unexpected, drastically different conditions of the present time. The idealism of that first generation, their faith in the "awesome powers" of

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human potential, has been forced to contend with an era of deepening cultural regression.

Keywords: Holistic education; countercultural; educational transformation; ecological consciousness; hypercapitalism; cultural regression

Like any philosophical orientation or conceptual model, the holistic education movement is rooted in an intellectual history: It emerged at a particular historical moment in response to specific needs and characteristics of that time, while building on ideas and pedagogical practices developed in diverse places and cultures over the previous 200 years (Miller, 1997). The designation "holistic education" for a coherent, nontraditional educational philosophy was first established in the United States in the late 1970s and gained traction over the following two decades. But this philosophy drew upon an array of pedagogical practices and intellectual threads, many of which were already well established.

Pioneering educators during the Romantic period, from J.H. Pestalozzi in Switzerland to Bronson Alcott in the U.S., acted on a core principle expounded by Jean Jacques Rousseau: they treated the developing child as a creative being, a seeker of meaning, guided inwardly by mysterious natural/spiritual energies. This understanding directly challenged the West's prevailing approach to education (it still prevails today), which views young human beings as more or less passive receptacles of whatever package of academic knowledge and cultural directives are deemed essential for a society's identity and goals. Education, according to this dissident view, ought to be a nurturing of latent human potentials, not an imposition of established prejudices. This is a foundational tenet of holistic education.

In the early 20th century two European philosopher/educators, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, developed sophisticated and comprehensive systems based on this understanding. In different ways, they conceived of child development as a spiritual process, an unfolding of new life through distinct organic stages, and not merely as a gradual accretion of measurable intellectual abilities alone. Other inwardly-oriented spiritual communities, such as Quakers, Sufis and several schools of yoga, have established schools on similar principles. Holistic education embraces contemplative practices and various means of inner development drawn from these and other sources, many of which are rooted in ancient traditions.

In the 20th century, the combined influence of progressive pedagogy (largely articulated and inspired by John Dewey) and developmental psychology (after Jean Piaget) led to numerous experiments in teaching and expansive new ways of learning. The student was no longer seen as an autonomous and isolated striver for academic success but as a participant in

layers of social organization—family, classroom, school, community, society and culture—that co-create our individual identities. By the 1980s progressive/developmental pedagogy had developed approaches such as multiple intelligences, social and emotional learning, emergent curriculum and similar innovations that recognize and nourish diverse learning styles within healthy and supportive learning communities. Again, a holistic philosophy includes this orientation, which complements its interest in personal, inner development.

Meanwhile, serious movements for social and cultural change hatched during the turbulent 1960s—racial justice, feminism, environmentalism, recognition of Indigenous cultures and many others—began to inform educational theory. A sophisticated literature of "critical pedagogy" urged educators to challenge unjust and destructive institutions and social patterns. In a similar vein (though with a very different style), radically democratic "free schools" and a libertarian homeschooling movement also sought to overturn assumptions about teaching and learning rooted in a social order they deemed oppressive (Miller, 2002). Although the first generation of holistic educators did not often draw from these movements as explicitly as from those previously described, I would argue (as a leader of that generation) that the thrust of these radical critiques informed our probing questioning of traditional education. Romantic, spiritual and progressive/developmental pedagogies were often politically tame and isolated movements on their own, but after the ideological rebellions of the 1960s they could be forged into a comprehensive critique of conventional schooling, a crusade for educational liberation—and that is what holistic education did. We were allied with movements for social change even if we did not use the particular language of critical pedagogy.

Actually, holistic educators did embrace environmentalism and an understanding of ecological principles. Ecological thinking is essentially holistic, and most of us recognized that. In addition, other cutting-edge developments in science, such as the ramifications of quantum theory, brain research, systems theory and so forth also gave shape to holism as a coherent and sophisticated philosophy. These ideas were an intrinsic part of the historical context, as they were first becoming popularized at exactly that time (e.g. Capra, 1975).

Holistic education, then, is the confluence of these dissident, experimental and frankly countercultural approaches that took place around the 1970s. It was not the sudden emergence of a novel educational method but an emerging awareness that the social and cultural conditions at that moment of history gave new meaning and opened new possibilities for ideas and practices that had been arising over the previous two centuries. Holistic education was then, and remains today, an overarching philosophy that weaves these various strands into a sophisticated alternative to modernist schooling and, importantly, to the worldview that underlies it.

When my peers and I were working to establish a holistic education movement, we were deliberately responding to the unsettled, transitional nature of the modern world at that time. We could see that epochal change was in store, but the direction this change would take was not yet clear. Looking back now, we can see that the world of the 1980s and 1990s was sandwiched between two significantly different phases of modern civilization and served as a bridge from one to the other. Those of us who traversed this bridge did not know where it would lead; it felt to us that there were several possible futures on the other side, and we embraced holistic education as an expression of the life-affirming, egalitarian, and ecologically balanced future that we preferred, and indeed as a vehicle that could help society achieve this future.

But now here we are in the 2020s, facing the dawning and daunting reality that on the far end of the bridge our civilization has instead entered a much more problematic phase of advanced dysfunction and dissolution, an era completely different in mood and expectations from the hopeful attitude that motivated us. I will argue here that this unfolding reality forces today's theorists and practitioners to think differently about holistic education than did we in its founding generation. Now, a quarter of the way into the 21st century, more than thirty years after the original publication of *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives, and Practices* (Flake, 1993), we ought to reflect on the prospects for holistic education in today's world.

Our hopeful vision was a reflection of our time. For about three decades after the end of World War II, the modern world, particularly in the United States, pursued a heady promise of unlimited progress in all aspects of life. This was, as historian David Farber (1994, title) observed of the 1960s in particular, "the age of great dreams." Social movements for racial and gender equality, environmental protection, and more freedom and fluidity in many areas of society seemed to be making great strides. John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" and Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" were dynamic, forward-looking programs of engaged governance arising from a perceived "liberal consensus." The most progressive Supreme Court in American history, under Earl Warren, opened expansive new territory for human rights and liberal democracy. Continuous advancement in science, technology and medicine promised a dazzling and comfortable future; the sense of possibility was captured above all in the exploration of space, especially the first moon landing in 1969. The economy generated unprecedented national wealth (a commonly used word at the time was "affluence") and with a strong labor movement and a reasonably progressive tax policy, distributed it (though with glaring exceptions) relatively widely and fairly.

Riding on these waves of progress and promise, a generation of scholars and practitioners began subjecting their disciplines to critical examination and started tossing out stale assumptions. Historian Thomas Kuhn (1962)

explained how even the presumably objective understandings gained by science were subject to revision when new "paradigms" replaced established approaches or theories that failed to keep up with changing experience and knowledge; revisionists seized on this concept to justify their wholesale overthrow of conventional dogma. One of the professional fields challenged by upstart thinkers was psychology—the study of the human *psyche* or soul, or the character of human nature itself. Influenced by philosophers writing on phenomenology and existentialism as well as the progressive spirit of the time, therapists and researchers such as Rollo May, Fritz Perls, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers questioned the adequacy of standard Freudian and Behaviorist paradigms, and established what would become known as *humanistic* psychology. They asserted that the human spirit contains vast potentials that the contemporary state of civilization diminishes or actively represses.

At the same time, the youthful counterculture undertook its own exploration of consciousness and human nature, plunging not only into Western existentialism but also into Eastern spirituality, psychotropic substances and Indigenous rituals, ecstatic expressions of music and art, free love and communal living. The astute and influential journalist George Leonard considered the combination of new approaches in psychology and countercultural experiments to be a "human potential movement," and he went on to popularize it among somewhat older and less radical segments of the population. The civil rights movement had taught Leonard that "people of all races, all of us, needed to start liberating ourselves from the unacknowledged, unseen oppression that keeps us from achieving our potential" and he wondered "what was not possible?" (Leonard, 1988, p. 167). Experiential retreat centers, weekend seminars, a range of esoteric disciplines and a burgeoning "New Age" literature began flourishing in the 1970s, stirring hopes that by transforming personal consciousness, we could effect a "paradigm shift" in the culture at large, resulting in a world of peace, harmony, and existential fulfillment. What was not possible?

Of course, in seeking a revolution in consciousness, it was only natural that these explorers would think about the transformative possibilities of education. Leonard published his expansive thoughts on the matter in *Education and Ecstasy* (1968), while the humanistic psychology pioneer Carl Rogers contributed *Freedom to Learn* (1969) the following year. Given the broad movement for cultural renewal in the 1960s, this was already a time of unprecedented ferment in American education, with hundreds of radical "free schools" sprouting across the landscape and fleeting attempts to humanize and democratize public schools (Miller, 2002). At precisely the peak of this movement, Leonard's and Rogers's books joined a growing literature that included provocative works by A.S. Neill, Paul Goodman, John Holt, George Dennison, Jonathan Kozol, Herbert Kohl, and Ivan Illich, among others. Still, their more explicit emphasis on the unexplored

and untapped potentials of human nature suggested that education could not only be an arena for social and political change but also for exploring an entirely new cultural paradigm—that is, a new *worldview*—that sought to redefine the meaning of being human. What was not possible?

What was then called "humanistic" (or sometimes "confluent" or "personalistic") education gradually gained followers during the 1970s, even after the free school movement and other progressive education experiments of the 1960s subsided. One of the most lyrical statements of this alternative pedagogy was expressed by the radical intellectual Theodore Roszak (who was best known for his 1969 study *The Making of a Counter Culture*). In a stirring chapter on education in his 1978 book *Person/Planet: The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society*, Roszak wrote:

> This is what all of us bring into life and to school: a wholly unexplored, radically unpredictable identity. To educate is to unfold that identity. […] Anyone who has seen the blossoming of a child's personality must know with an instinctive delight that this is the heart and soul of education. (1978, pp. 182 & 187).

He expressed awe over the unfathomed depths of human potential, asserting that:

> […] before us, something of our essential nature declares itself: the originality and variety that make us the unique animal we are. In that "great leap forward" by which one generation transcends the expectations of the last, we glimpse the awesome powers of innovation that reside within us—and perhaps a glimmer of our destiny as a species. (Roszak, 1978, p. 187).

This is, of course, holistic education in a nutshell. In these excerpts (and the chapter includes much similar language), we see the foundational notions that gave rise to the movement: the uniqueness of the human individual (rather than genetic, cultural or historical commonalities) defining our essential identity; the progressive evolution of humanity (no previous generation or culture would have expected their progeny to "transcend" their expectations but to faithfully live up to them); a glorious "destiny" awaiting us here on earth (as opposed to future repetitions of historical cycles, or at most a glorious destiny in heaven).

In 1979, a group of humanistic and "transpersonal" (more explicitly spiritual) educators and psychologists, along with other advocates including both Roszak and Leonard, gathered in California to clarify and promote this developing educational paradigm. They issued a manifesto, *Mind: Evolution or Revolution? The Emergence of Holistic Education* (Harris, 1980), proclaiming a "human revolution" that "may well be the most important movement of our time," (unknown page) and launched a Holistic Education Network, inaugurating the modern holistic education movement. They

met again in 1980, and over the next few years, some of their writings appeared in publications such as *New Age Journal* and the journal of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, but apparently the Network itself did not endure long.

It is important to recognize that the emergence of holistic education took place at *exactly* the historical moment when the "age of great dreams" was dissolving, and the culture had entered its transition toward whatever the 21st century had in store. During the 1970s the humiliating end of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, energy shortages and persistent inflation, the fizzling out of audacious space exploration and various other disappointments sapped the optimism of the age. Starting in the 1970s, pursued especially by the "silent majority" agenda of the Nixon administration, a resurgent capitalist society largely repudiated (or selectively appropriated) the cultural revolution envisioned by '60s dreamers. Conservatives replaced liberals on the Supreme Court and have dominated it ever since. Pro-business, pro-wealth "think tanks" such as the Heritage Foundation were established in the early 1970s and gained significant influence on economic and social policy. Corporations discovered the benefits of transferring manufacturing jobs to parts of the world with lower wages, turning vibrant, prosperous cities into a "rust belt," gutting numerous smaller towns, and decimating the labor movement.

Meanwhile, science—the supposed source of endless progress—began generating ominous warnings about the future. It was in the 1970s that the public started to become aware of the "greenhouse effect"—the raising of atmospheric temperature by the industrial era's spewing of carbon dioxide. The 1972 publication of the landmark study *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) was also a significant harbinger; although it was not widely read at the time, it introduced a troubling pebble in the shoe of the culture's faith in unlimited progress. Anxiety about the future was seeping into a historically optimistic, can-do society, and troubled souls sought refuge. Religious fundamentalism, thought to be extinguished after the embarrassment of the Scopes trial in the 1920s, re-emerged as a potent cultural and political force, exemplified by the founding of the Moral Majority in 1979 (exactly the same year as the first holistic education conference, and much more influential).

In this context, we can understand the gushing celebration of human potential seen in the above passages from Roszak and the California manifesto as an expression of defiant optimism and idealism in the face of anxiety and cultural retrogression. We don't hear much of this sort of language today or take it very seriously if we do. But it inspired us at the time—"us" meaning those who yearned to hold onto the promise of the "age of great dreams" as we witnessed the dreams fading into an uncertain new age of retrenchment and disappointment. This is the key point: Holistic education emerged as a hopeful—even a desperately hopeful—effort to keep

those dreams alive at a time when they were under threat and in danger of being lost.

In 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected president, reinforcing a conservative resurgence that embraced free market economics with its emphasis on competitive individualism and disdain for environmental limits, neo-colonialist foreign policy, renewed emphasis on law enforcement and social control (including skepticism about recent gains in racial justice), and traditional values including the rising religious conservatism. This agenda reflected an utterly different worldview from that underlying holistic education, in fact actively hostile to it. In 1983 the Reagan administration issued a monumental report on educational policy entitled *A Nation at Risk*, asserting that progressive experiments of recent years had weakened schools' ability to shape a well-disciplined workforce in an increasingly competitive global economy. The report galvanized policymakers, corporate and foundation leaders, scholars, and education professionals to re-establish traditional educational goals and practices, enforced by politically generated "standards" and a rigorous regime of testing. From that point on, it was time to go "back to basics" and to mandate "what every fourth grader should know," not to entertain paradigm-shifting idealism. The "most important movement of our time" turned out not to be holistic education, but the conservative restoration.

My own personal story—my involvement as a leader in holistic education—was intertwined with these historical passages. I came out of an idealistic, '60s-spawned liberal arts program (Justin Morrill College at Michigan State University) in 1978, having been inspired by a course in humanistic psychology. I pursued this interest with a masters degree in phenomenological psychology, then chose to apply it in the realm of education rather than as a practicing psychologist. I trained to become a Montessori teacher, and after a couple years of experience I decided to undertake doctoral work in the history and philosophy of radical and humanistic education movements. This was in 1983, just as *A Nation at Risk* was being released. Rather than being discouraged (that would come later), I took the increasingly conservative mood as a challenge to be overcome by the more hopeful and inspiring vision that had animated assorted educational radicals since the time of Rousseau and Pestalozzi two centuries before. My research brought to life an ongoing thread of educational dissent that generated what I saw as a potent and persuasive critique of the dominant, conservative understandings of schooling, and it made sense to me to apply the still new and obscure label of "holistic" education to this neglected countercultural tradition.

I dove into the new paradigm literature (I discovered Roszak, for example, and writers like Fritjof Capra, Marilyn Ferguson, Joseph Chilton Pearce, and others), and believed that this alternative worldview truly offered a path toward a better future. Many of us, during this transitional