HOLISTIC EDUCATION

A Brief History

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Holistic education, above all else, is an expression of profound respect for the deeper, largely unrealized powers of our human nature. Holistic educators see each child as a precious gift, as an embryo of untapped spiritual potential. This attitude is similar to the Quaker belief that there is “that of God in every one”—or at least an unfathomed depth of personality, contained in the soul of every person.

(p. 2)

In the first edition of The Holistic Curriculum I presented this definition:

The focus of holistic education is on relationships—the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, and the relationship between self and Self. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he/she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate.

(1988, p. 3)

In later editions (1996, 2007) the connection to the earth was included and soul replaced Self. Holistic education, then, is about educating the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—within the context of an interconnected world. Although the term is relatively new, as a practice holistic education has been going on for centuries.

Indigenous Education

Indigenous peoples were the first holistic educators. They saw the interconnectedness of life that is referred to as the “web of life”. One of the best descriptions of Indigenous education comes from Gregory Cajete’s book, Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education (1994). He argues
that “American education must move from a focus on specialization to holistic knowledge; from objective science to systemic science, and building to networking” (p. 27). Cajete identifies several characteristics of Indigenous education. Some of these are:

- A sacred view of Nature permeates its foundational process of teaching and learning.
- Integration and interconnectedness are universal traits of its contexts and processes.
- It unfolds within an authentic context of community and Nature.
- It recognizes that learning is about seeing the whole through the parts.
- We learn through our bodies and spirits as much as through our minds.

(PP. 29–31)

These characteristics are also fundamental to holistic education. I conducted a dialogue with Four Arrows about the relationship between Indigenous education and holistic education (Four Arrows & Miller, 2012). In our dialogue there was agreement around three principles—the first one is bringing to awareness the deep interconnectedness of life. Seeing how we are intimately connected to all life and the processes of the earth is shared by both Indigenous peoples and holistic educators. A second principle that is shared is a sense of the sacred. The cosmos, the earth and its inhabitants are viewed as sacred and imbued with wonder. No one has expressed reverence for the earth better than Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, this has been lost today in the materialistic, consumerist mindset. We have forgotten how to be enchanted by looking at the stars, feeling the wind on our face, or smelling grass after it has rained. The third principle is educating the whole person, which includes body, mind, and spirit. Today, education focuses almost solely on the mind with some lip service to the body. The soul is almost completely ignored (Kessler, 2000; Miller, J., 2000).

Four Arrows, however, pointed out that Indigenous peoples have embodied these principles and thus have “walked the talk”. It could be argued that although holistic educators are committed to these principles, they sometimes remain intellectual concepts rather than deeply embodied ways of being in the world. So holistic educators can look to Indigenous educators as guides on the path of holistic learning and teaching. Four Arrows’ book, Teaching Truly (2013), is one guide for integrating an Indigenous perspective into the curriculum.

The Axial Age

Karl Jaspers (1947) coined the term Axial Age, which lasted approximately from 900 to 200 BCE. It was a time when great teachers appeared on the earth including the Buddha, Zoroaster, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, and the Israelite prophets. Karen Armstrong (2006) in her book, The Great Transformation, has given a wonderful description of this period and how these teachers embodied many principles of holistic teaching and learning. She writes that “As far as the axial sages were concerned, respect for the sacred rights of all beings—not orthodox belief—was religion. If people behaved with kindness and generosity to their fellows, they could save the world” (P. XIV).

A principle shared by most of the teachers during the Axial age was that within each person was a divine spark. Socrates called it the daimon, the Hindus named it the Atman, and in Asia it was called Qi and the “most concentrated form of qi was being itself, the “quintessence” (jing) of reality” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 292). The teachers of this time focused on spiritual and contemplative practices to realize this part of the human being. Plato and others believed that the divine spark “simply had to be awakened. Truth was not introduced into the mind from outside but had to be ‘re-collected’ from a prenatal existence when each man or woman had enjoyed direct knowledge” (PP. 317–318). Armstrong states that in Plato’s Academy, “Greek education became more spiritual” (P. 318).

Pierre Hadot, the French philosopher, makes the case that ancient philosophy was not just an intellectual exercise but was primarily a contemplative practice. He states that the Platonic dialogues
were not just an intellectual exercise but were a form of spiritual practice, which demanded self-
inquiry and self-transformation. Hadot (2002) states: “To live in a philosophical way meant, above all, to turn toward intellectual and spiritual life, carrying out a conversion which involved ‘the whole soul’—which is to say the whole of moral life” (p. 65). Philosophy, then, could be called an education of the soul.

Education in the Axial age focused on textual study and engaging in spiritual practices. Armstrong (2006) writes:

In India, education was never simply a matter of acquiring factual information. A pupil learning by doing things—chanting mantras, performing tasks, rituals or ascetical exercises that were just as important as textual study, and that over time transformed him, so that he saw the world differently. (p. 121)

By nurturing the divine spark, the person can also see this spark in others and this leads to a sense of connection and compassion. Armstrong believes that compassion was a central principle of all the great teachers of the Axial age. The teachers all had some form of the Golden Rule.

**Rousseau–Pestalozzi–Froebel**

These three educators lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rousseau (1712–1778) wrote *Emile*, which was published in 1762 and described his approach to education. Rousseau advocated a natural approach to child-rearing as he believed the natural soul of the child was good and must be protected from civilization. He said: “From the outset raise a wall round your child’s soul,” or it will be overcome by “the crushing force of social conventions” (1955, p. 6). This romantic view of the child has continued to inspire holistic and alternative school educators.

In *Emile*, Rousseau describes four stages of development—infancy, childhood, youth, and adulthood. These stages are described in four parts of the book and in the last part Rousseau describes the education of a girl, Sophie. At the heart of his approach is negative education. Rousseau stated:

Nature provides for the child’s growth in her own way and this should never be thwarted. Do not make him sit still when he wants to run about, nor run when he wants to be quiet. If we did not spoil our children’s wills by our blunders their desires would be free from caprice. (p. 50)

Give him no orders at all, absolutely none. (p. 55)

Give your scholar no verbal lessons, he should be taught by experience alone; never punish him, for he does not know what it is to do wrong; never make him say, “Forgive me,” for he does not know how to do you wrong. Wholly unmoral in his actions, he can do nothing morally wrong, and he deserves neither punishment nor reproof (p. 56)

There the education of the earliest years should be merely negative. It consists, not in teaching virtue or truth, but in preserving the heart from vice and from the spirit of error. (p. 57)

Rousseau believed that the heart of the child was good and the soul of the child should be allowed to unfold according to its own natural pattern. The child, then, should be allowed to explore the world and make his or her own discoveries.
In a biography of Rousseau, Damrosch (2005) draws the following conclusion about *Emile*:

. . . what was truly original was his claim that each person has a unique temperament that needs freedom to flourish. . . . His intention was to show how a person might prepare for life in society without sacrificing integrity, “seeing with his own eyes, feeling with his own heart, and governed by no authority except his own reason.”

(pp. 333–334)

Rousseau’s phrase that the most useful rule in all of education is not “to gain time but to lose it” has inspired many holistic educators such as George Dennison (1970).

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), a Swiss educator, was influenced by Rousseau, and Comenius. He differs from Rousseau in that he taught most of his life and attempted to put his beliefs into practice. He cared about poor children and devoted much of his life to their education. A few of the major principles of Pestalozzi’s approach to education reflect Rousseau’s influence:

- Intuition is the basis of instruction.
- The time for learning is not the time for judgment and criticism.
- Teaching should aim at development and not dogmatic exposition.
- The educator should respect the individuality of the pupil.
- The relations between the master and the pupil, especially as to discipline, should be based upon and ruled by love.

(Cited in de Guimps, 1889, pp. 154–155).

Many educational historians (Bayles & Hood, 1966) have argued that the real genius of Pestalozzi was his empathy for children and how he could adjust his instructional methods to the unique needs of each student.

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), a German educator, was influenced by both Rousseau and Pestalozzi; however, he was more mystical in his conception of education. Froebel developed the kindergarten and focused on play as an important factor in the young child’s development. He said:

play is the first means of development of the human mind, its first effort to make acquaintance with the outward world, to collect original experiences from things and facts, and to exercise the powers of body and mind. The child indeed recognizes no purpose in it, and knows nothing, in the beginning, of any end which is to be reached when it imitates the play it sees around it, but it expresses its own nature, and that is human nature in its playful activity.

(as cited in Von Marenholz-Bulow, 1895, p. 67)

Froebel, like Rousseau, believed in the inherent goodness of the child. Froebel (1887) claimed: “Therefore, a suppressed or perverted good quality—a good tendency, only repressed, misunderstood, or misguided—lies originally at the bottom of every shortcoming in man” (p. 121). The natural play of the child, then, allows this goodness to unfold.

**Tolstoy**

Leo Tolstoy, known for his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina,* was interested in education and ran a school on his estate. He also developed a Russian reading primer. Dan Moulin (2011) has written a book about Tolstoy’s approach to education. Tolstoy read *Emile* and agreed with Rousseau’s vision of the child as basically good. However, he felt Rousseau’s theory was too abstract and not grounded in practice. He was aware of Pestalozzi and Froebel but he found their work too theoretical and not focused enough on the individual child.
In 1859 Tolstoy started a school on his estate, Yasnaya Polyana, for the children of the peasants working there. He also wrote about his ideas on education in a journal entitled Yasnaya Polyana. In reflecting back on his work at the school, Tolstoy considered teaching there one of the happiest periods in his life. His approach to teaching was to avoid theoretical approaches and focus as much as possible on the child. He believed in the goodness and wisdom of children and even encouraged his students to write their own stories. A few of these stories, which he helped with, were published. Tolstoy saw his school as a “pedagogical laboratory” where teachers could explore different approaches in working with children. He saw teaching and learning as an organic process that should avoid imposition and as much as possible arise from the interests of the children.

Tolstoy also developed a Russian reading primer, Azbuka, as he objected to teaching reading phonetically, which was the dominant approach at that time in Russia. The later version of Azbuka contained stories that he gathered from the peasants and other cultures. Moulin points out that “the stories are obviously intended to have educational value over and above that of basic literacy and true to Tolstoy’s heuristic pedagogy, the moral of each is inductive, rather than didactic” (p. 98).

For Tolstoy, spirituality was inherent in education; the aim of education is to learn how to live. He felt that education should continually deal with the fundamental questions of life such as “Who am I” and “What is the purpose of my life?” The teacher and school do not offer answers to these eternal questions but help the student explore them. The teacher is crucial in this process and should “strive after perfection in love”. If the student grasps this intention then “education will be good” (Moulin, p. 122). Teachers need to work constantly on their “moral and spiritual enlightenment”, which Tolstoy saw as the foundation for education (p. 123).

Tolstoy traveled around Europe and Russia to visit schools. He was horrified by the rigid methodologies that were used and felt he was witnessing children drowning. Tolstoy wrote, “What is being drowned is that most precious thing, that spiritual something” (Moulin, p. 42). This is a powerful metaphor which could be applied to how “that spiritual something” is drowning in the world of No Child Left Behind and high stakes testing.

Tolstoy continued to write about education till the end of his life. His last essay on education, “On Upbringing” was written in 1909. Moulin writes that for Tolstoy “true education . . . is balanced, holistic and centered on the individual student’s needs” (p. 128). During the 1960s, the free school movement grew and some schools such as the one described in George Dennison’s book, The Lives of Children, were influenced by Tolstoy’s ideas.

The Transcendentalists

In mid nineteenth-century America there was a group of individuals who lived mostly in Concord, Massachusetts and affirmed a belief in what Emerson called the “infinitude” of the individual. They include, among others, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry Thoreau, Elizabeth Peabody, and Bronson Alcott. All of these individuals taught and wrote about education.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the intellectual leader of the Transcendentalists and mentor to others in this group. His lectures and essays inspired many individuals connected with Transcendentalism. Buell (2006) comments that for the Transcendentalists it was more important to “inspire than explain” (p. xxiii). Emerson did not lay out a systematic philosophy but wrote and spoke in a manner that moved the reader and the listener. James Russell Lowell wrote, “I have heard some great speakers and some accomplished orators, but never any that so moved and persuaded me as he” (cited in McAleer, 1984, p. 493). Many of Emerson’s ideas resonate with a holistic perspective. He wrote (1990), “Nothing is quite beautiful alone, nothing but is beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace” (p. 26).

Henry David Thoreau lived in Concord and would stay in Emerson’s home while Emerson was away lecturing. Thoreau was the earthy face of Transcendentalism. He loved nature and could be
viewed as the father of the American environmental movement with his book, *Walden*, as one of its seminal texts. Thoreau was also a teacher; he and his brother, John, started and ran their own school that incorporated principles of holistic learning. He would take the students into surrounding countryside to study nature and could be considered one of the first environmental educators.

Margaret Fuller can be viewed not only as one the foremost Transcendentalists but as one of the most important women in nineteenth-century America. Her book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, explored the intellectual and social position of women and argued against women’s second-class status. She also was the first editor of the journal of Transcendentalism, *The Dial*. Fuller was also an elementary school teacher but is most known for the “Conversations” that she ran for women in Boston. She led discussions with women that covered a wide range of topics that were designed to intellectually engage the women who participated. Thus, she was an adult educator who worked on raising women’s consciousness.

Bronson Alcott was interested in education throughout his life. He founded the Temple School in Boston where he engaged the students in discussions and inquiry that differed radically from the recitation and drill approach so common in most schools at that time. Alcott believed children held an inner wisdom that could be drawn out through Socratic questioning. Alcott, in the Temple School, also developed an approach to learning that was holistic. Martin Bickman (1999) comments: “The education was what we would now call ‘holistic,’ since skills like spelling, grammar, and vocabulary were integrated into larger lessons on ethical and spiritual matters” (p. xxiii). Alcott felt that all teaching and learning should be connected to the spiritual center, the soul. Alice Howell (1991), in commenting on Alcott’s teaching, states:

> Alcott’s secret, and I believe, his success consisted in his approach to children; he worked from his innermost center toward the same one he knew existed in each of them. A bond of trust, mutual respect, and affection was established at that level, so that the usual ego-to-ego tussle between teacher and student was avoided.

*(p. xxxii)*

Like Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody devoted her life to education. Bruce Ronda (1999), in his biography of Peabody, states that “education was her great calling and her grand passion” (p. 7). She taught in several schools and helped Alcott in the Temple School, which she wrote about in *Record of a School* (1835). Her crowning achievement was being an advocate for kindergarten. Influenced by the work of Friedrich Froebel, Peabody argued that emphasis in kindergarten should be on play rather than academic work.

As a group, the Transcendentalists offer a redemptive vision of education that includes:

- educating the whole child—body, mind, and soul;
- happiness as a goal of education;
- educating students so they see the interconnectedness in nature;
- recognizing the inner wisdom of the child as something to be honored and nurtured;
- a blueprint for environmental education through the work of Thoreau;
- an inspiring vision for educating women of all ages through the work of Fuller;
- an experimental approach to pedagogy that continually seeks for more effective ways of educating children;
- a recognition of the importance of the presence of the teacher and encouraging teachers to be aware and conscious of their own behavior;
- a vision of multicultural and bilingual education through the work of Elizabeth Peabody.

*(Miller, J., 2011, p. 6)*
The Transcendentalists challenge us to provide an education that inspires, or, in Emerson’s words, sets “the hearts of youth on flame”. Transcendental education recognizes what Thoreau (2002) said, “Surely joy is the condition of life” (p. 5).

I have described the contribution of the Transcendentalists more fully in my book, *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody and Thoreau*.

**Summerhill/A. S. Neill**

Holistic education can take many forms. Perhaps the most radical form was developed by A. S. Neill. Neill founded an alternative school in Germany in 1921, which was later moved to England to become the famous Summerhill School. Like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, Neill disliked moralizing or instilling guilt in children.

At Summerhill, children had the choice of going to class or staying away. Teachers tended to run their classes very informally. Croall (1983) comments that Neill “took virtually no interest in teaching methods, and gave no sort of guidance to his teachers as to what they should be doing” (p. 206). Neill was primarily concerned about the emotional life of the child. Parents often sent problem children to Summerhill and Neill excelled in responding to their needs. Because they were not forced to learn and because of Neill’s caring presence, these children often overcame their difficulties to become healthy individuals. Croall (1983) in his biography of Neill, comments:

Neill’s greatest achievement, however, undoubtedly lay in his ability as “a curer of souls.” A considerable number of adults now leading ordinary unexceptionable lives, owe the fact that they do so to Neill. He himself in later life liked to argue that it was the environment of freedom rather than his individual work with problem children that was responsible for so many startling “cures.” Many former Summerhill pupils thought otherwise as did several of the adults who worked alongside Neill over the years. Because they were not forced to learn and because of Neill’s caring presence, these children often overcame their difficulties to become healthy individuals. Croall (1983) in his biography of Neill, comments:

Neill compared his approach to education with Bertrand Russell, who had established Beacon Hill School in 1927. Once he commented to Russell that if a child were with them, Russell would want the child to tell him about the stars while Neill would prefer to leave to the child with his own thoughts. Croall (1983) concludes that “while Neill aims to release the emotions, Russell wants to train the mind” (p. 159). Neill believed that if “the emotions were free, the intellect will look after itself” (cited in Croall, 1983, p. 219).

Neill was the benign authority at Summerhill. Although students did have a great deal of freedom, Neill drew limits in some areas such as the health and safety of the children and the hiring and firing of teaching staff. For example, he made rules about where the children could climb. Neill, like Rousseau and other romantics, was faced with the dilemma of where and how to intervene in children’s lives.

Neill’s influence beyond the school was immense. By 1969 his book, *Summerhill*, was selling at a rate of more than 200,000 copies a year. This book was a bible to many free school educators in the 1960s and 1970s as they attempted to set up their own versions of Summerhill. According to Graubard (1973), the number of free schools reached approximately 500 by 1972. Ron Miller (2002) has written an extensive analysis of the free school movement. He comments on the long-term legacy of the movement:
The free school movement, like all human endeavors, contained its own flaws, excesses, and blind spots, but it represented a serious effort to turn society away from the path of sprawling technocracy toward more democratic, holistic, person-centered values. More than opposition to public schools as such, free school ideology represented conscious deliberate resistance to the spread of technocracy, and this essential element of the 1960’s radical education critique continues to resonate in the literature of alternative, progressive and holistic education.

(p. 179)

Today, the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts runs on the same principles that operated at Summerhill. It has inspired approximately 50 other similar schools around the world.

Montessori Education/Waldorf Education

Montessori education and Waldorf education could be considered the most popular forms of holistic education in the twentieth century. There are other forms, such as Krishnamurti schools, Quaker schools, and Humanist schools, but Montessori schools and Waldorf schools continue to expand around the globe. Both are presented in the Handbook. Warren Cohen and Brian Bresnihan give detailed examples of Waldorf education in practice, including math and language arts. Aziza Mayo contributes a chapter that describes a study of Waldorf education in the Netherlands that looked at the effects of classroom practices there. Finally, Tim Seldin, Michael Dorer and colleagues write about how Montessori education engages the whole child as children learn through becoming a thing rather than simply learning about it. For example, the children may “become” the sun, a verb, a mathematical operation, or a famous person.

Humanistic Education/Transpersonal Education

In the 1960s and 1970s, humanistic education was an immediate forerunner of holistic education. Other terms that were used included affective education, psychological education, and confluent education. It arose out of humanistic psychology and particularly the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Rogers’ book, *On Becoming a Person*, contained a chapter entitled “Personal Thoughts on Teaching” which included the following statements.

- My experience has been that I cannot teach another person how to teach.
- It seems to me that anything that can be taught to another is relatively inconsequential, and has little or no significant influence on behavior.
- I have come to feel that only learning, which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning.
- I realize that I have lost interest in being a teacher.

(1961, p. 276)

These claims clearly challenged traditional conceptions of teaching. In 1969, Rogers expanded on his notions of education in *Freedom to Learn*, where he applied some of the assumptions of humanistic psychology to classroom practice and presented his vision for “self-directed change” in schools. Rogers develops the concept of “significant” or “experiential learning”, which has

a quality of personal involvement—the whole person in both his feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. It is self-initiated . . . It is pervasive. It makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner . . . Its essence is meaning.

(p. 5)
He cites a couple of examples of experiential learning. At the elementary level, he describes the work of one teacher, Miss Shiel, who used a contract system where students set their own goals. At the graduate level, Rogers describes an encounter group experience that was popular at that time but was rarely found in graduate education. Encounter groups aimed to facilitate communication and personal growth where participants could openly share their concerns and feelings. The emphasis was on affect and he states that there was little opportunity to discuss “cognitive learnings”. He cited the positive comments from many of the students who participated in the group.

Rogers’ “Plan for Self-Directed Change” includes an extensive system of encounter groups for enhancing the “openness of administrators, teachers, parents and students”. The encounter group focused on personal growth and was inappropriate for system change. His proposal did not go anywhere as the encounter group movement died in the 1970s but his focus on the importance of self-directed learning did have an impact on humanistic educators.

Maslow (1968) argued for valuing the “peak experiences” of the child. These are experiences where we have direct experience of the world that often lead to awe and wonder.

We must learn to treasure the “jags” of the child in school, his fascination, absorptions, his persistent wide-eyed wonderings, his Dionysian enthusiasms. At the very least, we can value his more diluted raptures, his “interests” and hobbies, etc. They can lead to much. Especially can they lead to hard work, persistent, absorbed, fruitful, educative.

And conversely I think it is possible to think of the peak-experience, the experience of awe, mystery, wonder, or of perfect completion, as the goal and reward of learning as well, its end as well as its beginning. If this is true for the great historians, mathematicians, scientists, musicians, philosophers and all the rest, why should we not try to maximize these studies as sources of peak-experiences for the child as well?

(p. 695)

Two leading humanistic educators were Gerry Weinstein and Mario Fantini, who were funded by the Ford Foundation to conduct a major project in developing curriculum materials that included the affect. They wrote about this work in Toward Humanistic Education: A Curriculum of Affect. One of the conclusions from their project was:

“Significant contact with pupils is most effectively established and maintained when the content and method of instruction have an affective base” [original italics]. This is, if educators are able to discover the feelings, fears, and wishes that move pupils from any background, whether by adapting traditional content and procedures or by developing new materials and techniques.

(1970, p. 10)

Weinstein and Fantini developed a “curriculum of concerns” that included student interests and concerns in the curriculum. These were integrated with the traditional curriculum of language, math, social studies, science, and the arts. They note that “concerns” go beyond feelings and sometimes involve an “inner uneasiness” (p. 37).

The book contains a number of activities that allowed students to express their concerns and feelings. The project was conducted with mostly Afro-American children in the inner city, so the concerns often focused on issues such as power and self-image.

Gerry Weinstein taught at the University of Massachusetts, which became a major center for humanistic education. Another major center was the University of California at Santa Barbara, which focused on confluent education. George Brown was one of the leaders of this approach and wrote Human Teaching for Human Learning: An Introduction to Confluent Education. He writes, “Confluent
education is the term for the integration or flowing together of the affective and cognitive elements in individual and group learning—sometimes called humanistic or psychological education” (1971, p. 3). Brown was influenced by Fritz Perls, who was a practitioner of Gestalt therapy, which focused on being in touch with one’s feelings in the present moment. Brown’s books contain activities such as one for first grade children where students focus on body awareness. In one exercise the teacher, Gloria Castillo, who wrote her own book, *Left-Handed Teaching*, asked the children to walk outside on different surfaces—dewy grass, blacktop, concrete, and sand (1974, p. 134). Some of these activities are similar to mindfulness practices, which are being used in schools today.

*Transpersonal Education* appeared in the mid to late 1970s and grew out of transpersonal psychology, which included the spiritual dimension of experience. Much of the work was published in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Gay Hendricks and Jim Fadiman (1976) wrote *Transpersonal Education: A Curriculum for Feeling and Being*, published by Prentice Hall as part of a series in Transpersonal Education. My book, *The Compassionate Teacher: How to Teach and Learn with Your Whole Self*, published in 1981, was included in this series. It contains the following quotation:

> Why transpersonal education? For many it has been natural development from humanism. For example, Abe Maslow, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, toward the end of his life wrote about self-transcendence as a stage beyond self-actualization. A transpersonal perspective allows us to see ourselves and our students not as isolated egos but as interdependent beings in a connected and dynamic universe. . . . Transpersonal education acknowledges our spiritual identity without sacrificing intellectual sensibilities. . . . the focus is on inner work, such as meditation, visualization, and movement so that we develop our “inner authority”

(p. ix)

Transpersonal education never gained traction as the term was too esoteric for most practitioners. Holistic education as a term and movement arose in the 1980s and has continued to today. Some people originally connected holistic education to the New Age movement, but it has gained more credibility as a holistic perspective has been taken up in a variety of fields. More and more we hear individuals in business, health care, government, education, and other fields adopting a holistic perspective. Such a perspective is inclusive and recognizes interconnectedness as a fundamental reality.

**Holistic/Wholistic**

I have argued that holistic education includes the spiritual dimension while the term “wholistic education” focuses more on a biological and psychological holism (Miller, 2007, p. 6). This review has focused on holistic education. From this perspective, wholistic educators include John Dewey and Nel Noddings. For example, Ron Miller, in a detailed discussion of Dewey, argues that “Dewey’s concept of aesthetic experience does not seem to encompass the meaning of spirituality represented by holistic thought” (p. 134). In my chapter “Atomism, Pragmatism, and Holism”, Dewey’s focus on problem solving and the scientific method place him within the pragmatic tradition (Miller, 1996, pp. 17–20). In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938/1963) wrote, “It means that the scientific method is the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences” (p. 88).

Nel Nodding’s writing on caring (1992) and happiness (2003) are very significant contributions but she mostly avoids including the spiritual. Her work has been beautifully celebrated in *Dear Nel: Opening the Circles of Care* (2012).

The work of Dewey, Noddings, and others is very important in that some educators cannot include spirituality in public education. Their work provides a bridge for teachers who are more comfortable with a wholistic perspective.
Holistic Education Today

Today there are holistic education initiatives around the world. For example, there is the Asia Pacific Network of Holistic Educators that conducts annual conferences in Asia. Meetings have been held in Thailand, Korea, Japan, and Malaysia. A comprehensive study of Whole Child Education conducted by the American Institutes of Research focuses on holistic education work in ten countries, including Ireland, Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, the UK, Canada (Ontario), and the USA.

This Handbook includes educators from Bhutan, Canada, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the USA and, as stated in the introduction, it presents “visionary worlds” of holistic education. These educators share the belief in educating the whole child. Whole children and whole human beings are fundamental to building a world where all beings develop and thrive.

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