

A VOLUME IN **CURRENT PERSPECTIVES IN HOLISTIC EDUCATION**

The background of the cover is a photograph of a person seen from behind, with their arms raised in a 'V' shape towards a bright, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong orange and yellow glow with visible rays. The person is silhouetted against this light. The title text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

# *Holistic Education* AND *Embodied Learning*

*edited by*  
**John P. Miller**  
**Kelli Nigh**

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# **Holistic Education and Embodied Learning**

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A volume in  
*Current Perspectives in Holistic Education*  
John P. Miller and Kelli Nigh, *Series Editors*

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# **Holistic Education and Embodied Learning**

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*edited by*

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# FOREWORD

This inspiring book is about the role of the body in Holistic Education. It is a book that not only opens the mind for new perspectives and new possibilities, but most of all it opens our hearts, and touches upon a deep desire to live a life of wholeness.

Throughout our life, the body is a continuous source of wisdom. Through awareness of our bodily experiences we can discover what is really important to us. In this way the body is a guide showing us directions that the mind cannot always find by rational thinking alone. Sometimes it is a friendly guide, and sometimes a critical one helping us realize that we are not on the right path. But the body is more than an information channel for signals that help us find our way in life. It is also our instrument for expressing what is important to us, our feelings, our passion, our inner drive.

Being in touch with the body is a matter of awareness in the moment. This is why the body is such a powerful part of who we are. The body helps us in being fully present, as it always lives in the now. Education generally promotes thinking and understanding, but here-and-now awareness is generally an undervalued aspect of teaching and learning.

Much of my own work has focused on the role of reflection in the education of teachers, but it is important to be aware of the limitations of this concept. Reflection is very useful for learning from experiences by looking back, or for preparing ourselves for future situations by thinking about effective actions. A limitation is that reflection is always focused on the past or the future. Even in the case of “reflection-in-action” we “think about” the situation as it occurred a few seconds ago. We are the one reflecting, and



there is an object of reflection. In this way, reflection slightly alienates us from the essence of our being in the here-and-now. This is not an intentional choice behind the current emphasis on reflection in teaching and teacher education, but an implicit characteristic that can easily be overlooked.

Hence, although reflection is an important instrument in learning, there is the risk of missing the most valuable source for growth (i.e., our awareness of the here-and-now). Even if we have reflected on how to act in a future situation, the situations will confront us with unexpected moments we have not been able to prepare for. Then we need the power of our awareness of the present to break the pattern we devised beforehand and to act upon what calls us in the moment. This requires a connection with our inner experiences and with what happens in the other(s) in the situation. Only through this awareness of both ourselves and our environment, we are able to (re)create interpersonal contact. In this way we use our potential to be fully in the moment, to act upon who we are, instead of following a pre-planned set of actions that conditions us and disconnects our attention from the momentary experience. Awareness of the body signals in ourselves and others is necessary in order to be fully aware of what is actually happening in the present, and we need the body to express ourselves based on this awareness. The future then emerges from the here-and-now, in a process of interconnectedness.

Through this process of expressing ourselves on the basis of presence, embodied awareness, and connection, we grow as human beings. This is an organic type of growth, one that is quite different from traditional views of learning. Too often, learning is equated with developing new knowledge, insights, and competencies, for future use. There is a tendency to forget that learning can be a process of “becoming in the now,” through presence and awareness, a process of getting more in touch with the core of our being. In my view, this is a type of learning in which students can and should be supported, over and over again. This makes education transformative.

As this important perspective on learning and connecting with the world is often overlooked in education, this book offers valuable insights for filling a blank spot. Partly based on ancient roots, and at the same time innovative, the book shows a richness of ideas, strategies, and approaches that can inspire us over and over again.

A thread running throughout the book is a two-sided perspective on growth towards fully being who we are. The two sides have to do with the teacher and the learner. The book challenges us to connect with ourselves as a teacher, teacher educator, or whoever we are as an educationalist. This connection with ourselves is a prerequisite for supporting others in the journey of wholeness.

This is a book that calls for action. In my view, we are in this world to embody our talents and personal qualities, or one step further: to embody our

souls. I see it as a crucial task for education to touch and support students in this process of embodiment. Being in touch with the inner potential present in each person requires attention for the whole person, in particular for the body as the instrument through which the inner potential can be both experienced and expressed. A holistic approach to education, and more specifically, a clear view of the key role of the body, is much needed in this era, in order to define, and probably redefine our place as humans on this planet.

In conclusion, this inspiring book offers gems of wisdom showing us new directions, new pathways for education, and for our personal lives. It invites us to a journey back home.

**Fred A. J. Korthagen**

Professor Emeritus of Utrecht University  
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## PREFACE

One student at a holistic school said this about the importance of the body in learning, “Equinox focuses on the whole child. Not just teaching academics. Really teaches the entire body.” This book is about what it means to *teach the entire body*. Embodied learning is critical to holistic education. If learning remains in the head, there is the danger that it will not be integrated. Embodied learning does not ignore the intellect; instead, the intellect is connected to the whole being. When the intellect is connected in this manner, wisdom can arise. Embodied learning is about fully engaging the learning process. There is no better description of embodied learning than Walt Whitman’s (1980) poem *There was a Child Went Forth Every Day*:

There was a child went forth every day,  
And the first object he look’d upon, that object he became,  
And that object became part of him for the day or certain part of the day,  
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

Whitman then describes all the things that the child encounters during the day so that the “early lilacs became part of this child” and “the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there” became part of the child. Adults learn this way as well. Emerson wrote that the painter painting the tree becomes the tree. The subatomic physicist becomes the atom.

The body is central to the development of the whole person. Yoga, Qi Gong, and Tai Chi use body movement to actualize this development. Many meditative methods start with the breath as the point of focus. Experience of the body breathing is an ancient practice that has led many people to awakening.

This book explores embodied learning in a variety of contexts. There are four main sections to the book: psychological perspectives, schools where embodied learning is central to teaching and learning, contemplative practices such as meditation and movement, and finally visions of how embodied learning may be employed in the future.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychological perspectives in Holistic Education shed light on the various theories and fields that integrate body, mind, and spirituality within the teaching and learning process. Various psychology fields are presented in this section; depth, transpersonal, somatic, existential, and archetypal psychology.

Kelli Nigh's brief explanation of these psychology fields show how practitioners who were engaged in early 20th century psychology were intrigued by the body and eager to explore the unconscious as a means to ameliorate anxiety. Many of the early psychologists assumed that the body was the source for the unconscious and based their inquiries on this assumption. Both Carl Jung's imaginal inquiry process and Wilhelm Reich's body oriented therapeutic techniques were centered on a non-critical form of attention and one that could be achieved through the imagination or by cultivating energetic sensitivity.

In the following chapter, Jim McNamara and Caroline Mardon explain the genesis of a therapeutic approach called the Holistic Experiential Method. The Holistic Experiential Method is a psychotherapeutic method that places holism and the body's experience at its foundation, "The body is seen to reflect the psyche, and by working directly on the body the psyche is affected in a unique way, not available via verbal and interpersonal techniques." Drawing from student insights, McNamara and Mardon explain the evolution, curriculum development, and therapeutic practices of a psychotherapy school called The Living Institute.

Within a frame of feminist post structural thought and Cifford Mayes' archetypal pedagogy, Joanna Krop suggests that five teacher archetypes are present in the classroom; The Mother, The Hero, The Instructor, The Servant. The fifth, and at the center of this archetypal interplay, is the Wild Feminine, which Krop argues is the archetype that can re-energize teaching and learning. The wild feminine

is sensual, she is full of zest and joy, in tune with the many faces and dimensions of a person's life, she is not afraid of the shadow, of ugliness and death because she understands their own beauty in the natural cycle of life, she too is beauty and birth and inspiration.

## **SCHOOLS**

This section begins with a chapter by Warren Cohen and Brian Bresnihan on Waldorf education. Their paper presents an in depth description of Waldorf Education. They first discuss the basic features and principles of Waldorf education which include teaching artistically and using rhythm as guide to pedagogy. They then present three examples from classrooms in grade 1 (mathematics), grade 3 (growing wheat and baking bread), and grade 7 (Combustion in Chemistry).

Young-Yie Kim also discusses Waldorf education in her chapter on Compassionate Teaching. Her chapter focuses on teachers in different schools and how they manifest compassion in their teaching. Besides discussing the classroom practices of a Waldorf teacher, she also discusses a Montessori teacher, a Buddhist Kindergarten, and her own teaching of Korean at the university level.

The next chapter describes research done on a public holistic school in Toronto. Equinox Holistic Alternative School is completing its 7th year and their vision is about educating the whole child: head, hands, and heart. The quote at the beginning of the introduction about “teaching the entire body” came from a study Jack Miller conducted on the school that included interviews with teachers, parents, and students. Despite the challenges of working within the public system, this school has created an environment where children can grow and develop as whole human beings. The curriculum is based on the concept of connectedness.

The last chapter in this section focuses on secondary education. Misha Abarbanel presents his vision of holistic secondary school. The challenges of holistic education in high school are significant with a curriculum that is broken down in specific subjects. Abarbanel’s vision presents a conceptual framework based partially on Miller’s work (2007, 2010) in holistic education and specific examples in the classroom including an integrated curriculum unit.

## **MEDITATION, CONTEMPLATION AND MOVEMENT**

Two chapters in this section explore the relationship between a teacher’s meditation practice and their teaching. The first paper by Keith Brown is a qualitative study of four teachers who practice lovingkindness meditation. Lovingkindness meditation is where the person sends thoughts of wellbeing to self and then others. Here the participants who taught at different levels ranging from elementary to adult education directed their practice towards students in their classrooms. One of Brown’s findings was “all of the teachers reported feelings of calmness and even ‘coming home’ to their

bodies, as they recited the words of loving kindness, whether before a busy class or before their sleep times.” Besides this sense of embodied presence, he also found “the teachers seemed to shift their views away from seeing themselves as the authorities in the classroom, and toward seeing their students as equally valid sources of learning and knowledge.”

Jennifer Motha also studied teachers who practiced meditation. Hers was a qualitative study that focused on teachers who practiced forms of Buddhist meditation. Motha explored how the teachers’ meditation practice affect their classroom pedagogy. Although these teachers’ practices were different than those done in Brown’s study, some of her findings were similar in terms of embodied presence and seeing the students in a more compassionate way.

In the last chapter in this section Sharon Dutton writes about Dalcroze movement education. Developed by Jaques-Dalcroze this is a holistic based approach to movement. Dutton writes, “Dalcroze pedagogy is a learner-centred, embodied approach to music education that uses rhythmic movement to teach musical concepts in a socially interactive and experiential setting.” Dutton’s chapter describes a qualitative study that focuses on four individuals who are teachers or students of Dalcroze. One of her subjects said that Dalcroze allows “the education of the body that really supports or develops those brain connections for all learning.”

## VISIONS

To be a visionary is not only to hold a transformative image for oneself but also for the community in which one belongs. From the early psychologists we learn that images arise from a connection to presence in the body. Once awoken, how does the image develop into a full-fledged vision? Julian Jaynes (1976) proclaimed that: “It is by metaphor that consciousness grows” (p. 49). In Rupert Clive Collister’s chapter titled, *A Journeyman’s Professor’s Walk Through Metaphor and Philosophy in Search of Holistic Approaches to Teacher Education Curriculum* the reader is introduced to a vision for holistic teacher education. Collister provides a rich array of curriculum literature as he situates metaphor and philosophy at the center of his classroom teaching. Students also learn to articulate their philosophy through conversation.

With over 30 years’ experience as an active member in the Holistic Education field, we are privileged to include Colalillo Kate’s wisdom and experience in the classroom. The chapter offers an engaging self-narrative, outlines the key principles of a holistic educator and describes classroom practices that foster spiritual intelligence.

Tobin Hart begins his chapter titled *Embodying the Mind* with an incisive statement: “The body has largely been left out of the classroom.” Hart

visions a classroom that includes the living body. Amongst the many notable examples of integrating the body into the classroom, Hart discusses the body's knowing, how it can know before the mind knows and how an inner body awareness, or felt sense can be practiced: "Embodied tells us we know through our bodies . . . that there is a certain internal awareness that operates through and sometimes even away from our typical awareness of the senses."

Finally, John P Miller outlines a vision for holistic teacher education that includes a call to "soul making" in higher education. This chapter reimagines teacher education as an endeavor to educate the whole being; that focuses on meaning making, a sense of place and the cultivation of wisdom. Miller presents an enduring framework for a holistic pedagogy and highlights outcomes from his longstanding research into teachers and their experience with exploring the benefits behind mindfulness for classroom teaching and learning.

Until the image of an immobile student, donnish and studiously ruminating over an abstract concept, integrates with the image of the body in movement, it is likely that education will continue to produce people who have difficulty understanding how to value and draw from the body's way of knowing. Neither will students learn to be at ease with processing emotion or be able to sense their deeper selves.

As Jack Miller explained in the introduction of this preface, Walt Whitman presents a sound example of embodiment in his poem "A Child Went Forth." The poem features the curious, attending child engaged in an act of becoming with the natural world. Offering another view of the poetics of embodiment, Whitman's (1980) poem "Song for Myself," conveys an adult world, one that comes to terms with human culture, with its shadow, its ugliness and incessant conflict. Refusing dissection and instead seeking integration where possible, the poet proclaims, "All these things I feel or am." In essence, Whitman's is a poetics of embodiment which begins with becoming one with the natural world and continuously integrates disparate aspects of human life.

This afternoon I (Kelli) walked to a park that has contributed to my embodiment process by offering a place to practice Whitman's acts of becoming. On my way there, I felt weighted down by a negative critique of education. When I entered the center of the park garden, two young girls were busy catching butterflies with large nets. I thought at first this was an unsafe thing to do with precious butterflies, but no, a woman was carefully supervising the girls, tagging the butterflies, weighing them, recording their gender and setting them free again. Amazing that one of the girls knew how to decipher the gender of these butterflies. Later, upon releasing one of them, I was encouraged to make a wish for its successful journey from Toronto, Canada to Mexico.



Imagine too that the embodiment process is all of these things, capture, identity, mass and freedom. On the way home I also witnessed teenage girls engaged in the type of conversation that would edify many educators: “I want to tell you about a book I am reading—but no, you finish your story first.” I could not continue in my negative train of thought about the absence of holistic concepts and practices in education. Of course they are not absent, they are present through the lives of students, parents, and teachers who also care deeply for the wholeness and meaning of life. This book is about Holistic Education and it is about affirming as well as visioning the continuance of practices that set free a students’ embodiment process.

**John P Miller**  
**Kelli Nigh**

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We are deeply grateful to the holistic educators who contributed their experience and writing to *Holistic Education and Embodied Learning*.

In a recent publication titled, *Teaching from the Thinking Heart*, classroom teachers wrote about holism in their personal lives and holistic teaching and learning practices in the classroom. In this book we invited educators who have gained experience through many years teaching, writing, and researching in the field of holistic education. We acknowledge the authors' wisdom, the dedication they have shown to holistic teaching and learning, and their specific insight into embodied learning.

This book is an important step towards embodying the field of holistic education. We would like to thank George Johnson at Information Age Publishing, not only for the opportunity to publish this book but for the recent launch of the series *Current Perspectives in Holistic Education*. We thank the editors at Information Age Publishing and the proofreaders for their support and detailed examination of this text.

Fred Korthagen is one of the leading holistic educators in Europe and his work is widely recognized in North America. We are grateful that he has contributed the Foreword to this book.

Many contributors to this book completed their graduate degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. OISE has provided a place where students could pursue theses in holistic education and related fields. I believe OISE is the only place in North America where so many theses in holistic education have been written. As a

faculty member there and supervisor of these theses, I am grateful to OISE for providing a space for this scholarship in holistic education.

I (Kelli) am also grateful to Jack Miller, for his ongoing mentorship and support as co-editor. I (Jack) am so grateful for Kelli's work as co-editor; this book would not have been possible without her contribution. Finally, we thank those who have written before us, especially Walt Whitman, for his exquisite thought:

The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,  
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence  
    downward toward the knees,  
The thin red jellies within you and within me, the bones  
    and the marrow in the bones,  
The exquisite realization of health;  
O I say these are not the parts and poses of the body only,  
    but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!

Walt Whitman  
*I Sing the Body Electric*