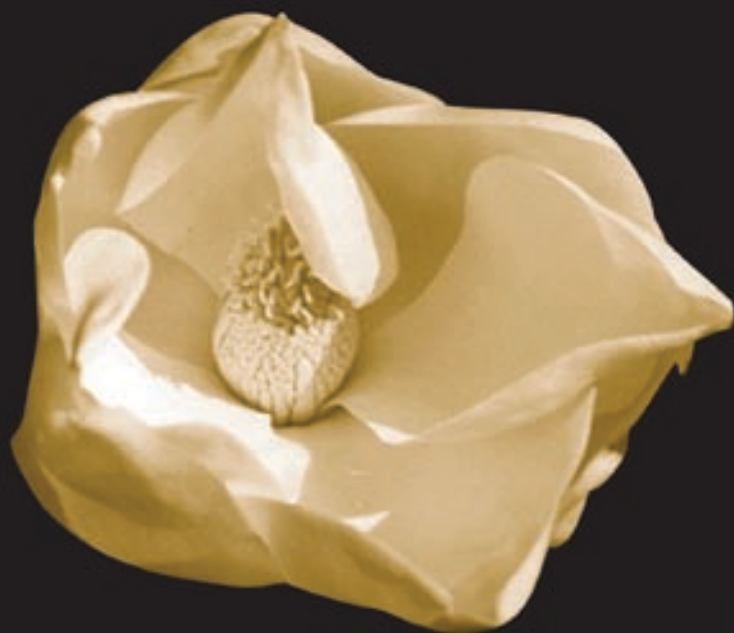


HOLISTIC LEARNING

AND SPIRITUALITY IN EDUCATION



BREAKING NEW GROUND

Editors

John P. Miller, Selia Karsten, Diana Denton,
Deborah Orr, and Isabella Colalillo Kates

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Edited by

JOHN P. MILLER

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AND

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IN MEMORY
To
Dwan Emelie Griggs
(1945–2004)
Pioneering Holistic Educator

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The Editors

Introduction

Holistic Learning

JOHN P. MILLER

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

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

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

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

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

HOLISTIC EDUCATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEORY, PRACTICES, AND POETICS

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

Theory

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

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

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

TABLE 1.1
Comparison of Educational Paradigms

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

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

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

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

Practices

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

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

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

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

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

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

Poetics

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

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

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

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

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PART 1

Theorizing a Pedagogy
of Wholeness

Awakening Self, Soul, and Spirit

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CHAPTER 1

Educating for the Soul

THOMAS MOORE

Everything a human being does, including learning and teaching, is filtered through many layers of the imagination. Our childhood and our parents are always with us, setting the stage. The worldview of the society in which we live is always pressing. Our fears and our hopes, our fantasies of the future, all those things we feel as needs—this entire mass of images, soaked in emotions, profoundly influences how we imagine learning to take place and how we go about teaching and learning. And this world of imagination is largely unconscious, doing its work in the background as we develop our strategies and forge our theories on the surface of experience.

A case could be made that the current focus on accountability and testing stems from anxiety, the fear that our students may not learn as much as they should or that they may be given the wrong facts and the wrong ideas. I see two problems here. First, whenever we try to be creative out of anxiety, we are doomed to failure. Anxiety always has a place, but as the basic emotion shaping the thrust of our activity, it is a destructive starting point. Second, no matter how much testing we do, we will still get it wrong. It's the nature of learning to be a mixture of insight and dimness, facts and mistakes. We know all too well that what one generation takes to be proven truth a later generation transcends and revises. It might be better to incorporate ignorance into the design of teaching and learning.

Before elaborating on that point, let me proclaim as clearly as possible that my concern is the soul. Our current focus on facts and science and skills highlights a certain dimension of human reality but overlooks others. An emphasis on mind has generated a neglect of soul. The matter of soul is taken up today by the fringe writers who are generally outside the culture of academia and

professionalism, digging in the murky swamps of self-help and popular psychology. I think we need to bring soul more into the center, where we can study it seriously and allow it to have an impact on the culture at large.

But how do you educate the soul, and is that the proper way to formulate the issue? Do we cultivate the soul, or do we shape our ideas and practices so that soul is included? Let me phrase my concern as “educating for the soul”—teaching certain subjects and doing it in a way that brings the soul forward into our awareness and our list of priorities.

WHAT THE SOUL NEEDS AND WANTS

As a starting point, we might realize that the soul is essentially different, though by no means disconnected, from the mind and body. It has its own qualities, which give rise to its own requirements. Because it is so mysterious, it is difficult to list those qualities without many caveats, but generally I feel comfortable saying that the soul is eternal, unique, contemplative, poetic, erotic, aesthetic, and transcendent. To lay out an approach to educating for the soul all we would have to do is consider each of these elements and see how we might become more sophisticated in our knowledge and practice of them.

Before going through the list, let me point out that eros is the dynamic of the soul. It works by desire—by want, need, and longing. It’s easy to quickly pass by this important realization, but it is crucial. As my colleagues in archetypal psychology used to say, “What does the soul want?” That is the first question. Not, what will improve it or make it excellent or help it to function, but what does it want? As a therapist, I saw over and over how people were brought to a recognition of their soul through desperate feelings of need, lack, and confusion. As a musician and artist, I know, too, that people can become keenly aware of soul in the process of their art and their longing for beauty and insight.

If we understand eros in its classical and mythological origins, we might appreciate that desire and need are aspects of the erotic dynamic of the soul, and if we are going to educate for the soul, then we have to give full attention to these strongly felt emotions and realizations. Eros, then is not just a quality of soul but the very energy that sustains it and causes it to increase.

POETIC VISION AND KNOWLEDGE

We live in a quite literal-minded, fact-loving society, and so it is difficult to appreciate the soul’s language and dialects. It is at home in poetic imagery and language, and that is not surprising given the soul’s tendency toward mystery and multiple levels of meaning. A dream is a perfect example of soul speech. It usually connects strongly with the dreamer’s daily life, it is full of obscure imagery,

and it hints at far broader, collective, and eternal issues. It demands a poetic sensitivity if we are to take any insight from it. But these are directions of soul in everything it touches.

Soul-centered education would emphasize the many dimensions of poetic existence: poetry as such, literature and art, a poetic reading of science and nature (advocated and described by soul specialist Ralph Waldo Emerson), and a generally imagistic approach to all human interactions. We glimpse soul through insight rather than through direct analysis. We see it in reflection—implied, distorted, obscured, camouflaged. Soul is like poetry as described by the American poet Wallace Stevens—“like a pheasant disappearing behind a bush.”

So let us try to resist the temptation to define soul, to establish a once-and-for-all theory of it, to make a school of soul experts, to program its study on models not inherently appropriate to it. Our best model is the poet, who may or may not speak explicitly about it. Our approach could be mythological, lyric, narrative, epic, comic, ironic, absurdist. We could be cautious in the genre of our speech about it, knowing that certain styles that are beautifully elegant for the mind and for fact are entirely inappropriate for the soul.

ETERNITY IN A MOMENT

If the poetics of soul is a stumbling block for educators in the modern setting, the notion of eternity is even more difficult. We live in a secularist society. The word *secular* refers to our age, our time and place. We focus our attention more on what is happening now and on a futurism that is equally literal. We imagine a future that has more and better of what we already know, and for the most part that future is a material one. I have yet to hear a futurist talk about how children will be fed, nurtured, brought up, and taught in profoundly fulfilling ways in the future.

Eternity is not the same as afterlife. Eternity is now, if it is anything. Marsilio Ficino, who single-handedly did much to promote education for soul in the 15th century and had an influence far beyond that, said that soul exists in both eternity and time. The eternal is that which is beyond time and yet fully present. A beautiful object may stop time for a moment, allowing a moment of refreshing withdrawal from the pressures of the temporal. A brief period of contemplation, whether it is formal sitting and meditation or informal absorption in a child playing or a few bars of music, may take us out of time, and the soul increases in this moment.

I use the word *moment* because the eternal is not limited or conditioned by time. A few seconds of reverie equal hours of hard work at the temporal level. Educators could keep in mind this principle as they develop a curriculum for the soul. It doesn't require grand new schemes of coursework and activities, but it may

ask for attention to gardens, empty rooms, empty times, paintings, good sounds (a beautiful bell)—anything that might foster a mere moment of contemplation.

The soul has a spiritual dimension, and the eternal is certainly part of that spirituality. But it is never far removed from ordinary existence and from the material earth and the human body. The sound of the resonant bell doesn't just inspire the eternal; it is itself participation in the eternal, and its physicality is essential. The soul's spirituality is also as deep as it is high and as diverse as it is intense. I picture the soul as a sphere surrounded by its eternal dimensions, its spirituality as rich deep in its body as at its periphery.

EXQUISITELY UNIQUE

Talk of the soul is filled with paradox. Dreams teach us that eternal, archetypal, mythic themes lie at the base of our daily lives. We are always living a myth, being human and incarnating human potential. Soul writers favor mythology because it addresses these huge, cosmic themes.

But at the same time nothing is more unique and momentary than the soul. As Cicero said, it is the *animus*, the daimonic and driven aspect of soul, that gives us our identity. Modern psychology favors the idea of an ego, a kind of self-sufficient, self-constructing identity fully in our ken and control. But Cicero suggests something more in the line of the artist's ego, a sense of destiny and identity that rises up from passionate, uncontrolled, fate-filled dimensions of our entire existence. The ego is only a small portion of that volcanic power. Our idea of it reflects the shallowness of our very image of the human being, a mechanical ego lacking the profound vitality of a soul.

Cicero hints at the mystery and paradox by which the great archetypal ground of human being gives birth to a remarkable individual person. Like artists who must be in touch with the inspiring muse aspect of being for their supply of images and familiarity with the mysteries, any person thrives through such a funneling of powerful forces and possibilities that draw fatefully into a personality and a life story.

Therefore, in educating for the soul, the teacher will help the student meander in this paradoxical territory, a liminality, you might say, a capacity to stay on the border between the universal and the unique. We make a mistake when we reduce our psychological thinking to personal terms and dimensions. A person thrives from the great images as well as personal reflection. Our studies need not be made relevant to give them soul, and in fact confusing soul for personality psychologizes in the worst way our efforts at education. There is a vast difference between allowing soul into the classroom and making learning a personal experience. A person's uniqueness comes from the soul, not from a focus on personal particulars and a delimiting of learning to what is personally rele-

vant. That is the problem, too, with learning for skill and financial success. These may be relevant to the ego, but they obscure the needs of the soul.

VITAL AND NECESSARY EROTICISM

The great story of Eros and Psyche, ancient in its roots and loved by many modern psychologies, tells us allegorically that the soul needs eros to work its way out of its primary narcissism, its concern for itself and its family—its literal and immediate roots. Orphic religion in Greece taught that Eros is a creative force, making worlds and keeping them alive. It is this terrifying profundity I have in mind when I say that educating for the soul is fundamentally erotic.

As teachers and learners we have to distinguish between what we think we need and what the soul desperately longs for. In therapy, I sit and watch as people struggle against the obvious and powerful desires that burn deep within them, but which seem to contradict what they consider best for themselves. Their healing would be the discovery of what the soul wants and the capacity to grant the soul its pleasure. Therapy is no more and no less than this, and neither is education.

As everyone knows from experience, eros is inevitably entangled with sexuality. In some ways they overlap and are essentially the same, provided you imagine sexuality as an experience of soul and mind as well as body. On the few occasions when I have addressed groups of educators on the theme of eros, I have met strong resistance, out of the fear, I believe, of sex.

Education is a highly sexual activity: intimate, physical, full of desire, involving a deeper tangle of souls than is usually admitted. It also involves the thrill of authority and power, on both sides. It might help to remind ourselves how these power issues can turn into sadomasochistic patterns, where the sexuality in the power struggle comes more into the foreground. Eugene Ionesco's play *The Lesson*, in which the teacher dominates and finally rapes his student, has always been instructive to me. In my studies of the Marquis de Sade, I also learned how sex and power, differences in age, and learning itself are all riddled with sexual colorings.

Whether or not we invite eros into education, it will be there. Better to cultivate it than to let it do its work outside any positive effort on our part to address it. I believe that the sexual demands in education can be satisfied through a more general attention to the erotics. Most Western education is highly saturnine in tone: we like order, hierarchies, grades, tests, a gloried past, control, deprivation, remoteness of various kinds, and weighty seriousness.

The saturnine has its pleasures, and we do indeed take pleasure giving and often taking tests and all the rest. The problem is really more one of monotheism, the exclusive attention to saturnine values, a focus that denies other legitimate pleasures. I often ask students to imagine a Venusian form of education. It

might take place in lush gardens, where the body feels tended and pleased. Desire would be in the foreground. Beauty everywhere. Of course, there would be venereal problems. Everything has its shadow. My point is to suggest a way to give eros some range.

COSMETICS IN THE SCHOOL

If I had another lifetime like this one, I'd want to study the sacred art of the world as a way of learning life's mysteries. In the gesture and details of art we glimpse truths about the nature of things. One of the most precious moments in my life took place when I was fifty and visiting Rome. I wandered the narrow streets by myself and visited the Museo Capitolino, in which I stood alone and quietly contemplated two sacred sculptures that have given my life meaning for many years: the *Capitoline Venus* and the *Eros and Psyche*. I wondered about Venus standing there naked with her hands in front of her breasts and some clothing and a vase beside her. She is often shown with a mirror, rising from water, wearing bracelets, and anklets, or, in the unsurpassable paintings of Lucas Cranach, with brilliant jewels.

Beauty, adornment, and cosmetics are all of great importance to the soul, even though they may seem secondary to an ego-centered life. Beauty arrests the attention so the soul can come into view. It does little for practical life but everything for that which makes human life meaningful and worth living. Shouldn't education be concerned with these issues, as well as understanding the physical world and getting along in it?

Writers often note that the word *cosmos* means adornment, and conversely we might say that cosmetics have a universal importance. Ficino said that sparkling sand and stone transmit the light they have absorbed from the brilliant stars. The cosmetic aspect of our experience similarly lets the mysterious light of the soul shine through, placing us at another liminal point between the eternal and the temporal.

Educators sometimes reject plans to bring beauty into the learning environment as being "merely" cosmetic. From the soul viewpoint, instructed in the mysteries of Venus, we would not make such a judgment but rather appreciate the importance of adornment in our schools, beauty in everything we do, and even the role of cosmetics for the body, an issue often discussed by school administrators who are usually fearful of the Venusian soul.

IN PRACTICE

I can see that these few, abbreviated reflections are really an outline for a book on educating for the soul. Each of these areas and many more need further development. The main point I want to make is that educating for the soul asks