

# Chapter 1

## Holistic Education: The Paradigm Shift You Have Been Looking For – Foundations of Whole Student Education K–12

**Autumn Joy Florêncio-Wain**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1571-0243>

*State University of New York at New Paltz, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the theories and histories of the holistic educational paradigm. Beginning with a description of the theoretical structures that underpin the holistic educational viewpoint, it lays the groundwork to understand how pedagogies as diverse as Waldorf, Montessori, Democratic Free Schooling, and homeschooling are connected by a common set of paradigmatic assumptions. Following brief summaries of the origins of these traditions, key aspects of practice and highlights from research carried out in each pedagogy are discussed. Concluding remarks draw connections between the fundamental convictions that gave rise to these pedagogies and the needs of educators in diverse contexts today.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the theory, history, enactment and relevance of the holistic educational paradigm in a series of four steps. Beginning with an examination of the fundamental theoretical structures of holistic education, it describes the common set of paradigmatic assumptions that connect pedagogies as diverse as Waldorf, Montessori, Democratic Free Schooling and homeschooling. A set of brief

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summaries of the origins of each of these traditions is then followed by a description of key aspects of practice and research carried out in each pedagogy. Concluding remarks draw connections between the fundamental convictions that gave rise to these pedagogies and the needs of students and educators in diverse contexts today.

## **Step 1: Defining Holistic Education**

Holistic Educational Theory can be summarized in the following terms: (1) there are five key aspects of human wholeness; cognitive, physical, interpersonal, intrapersonal (self-knowledge) and transpersonal (sense of connection to a greater whole); (2) these aspects are inextricably intertwined and interdependent thus; (3) any attempt to foster learning must attend to the developmental needs of each student in each of these areas and; (4) in so doing, the ends of peace, justice, equity, awareness of interconnectedness, interdependence and understanding are supported, for individuals and society. This summary follows the structure of Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* (Huxley, 1946), a bedrock of holistic education, and is based on the fundamentals of the holistic educational paradigm as articulated by Jack Miller (1986, 2007, 2011).

Holism in education is best described, not as a pedagogic approach, but as a paradigmatic stance. When comparing the essential convictions evidenced in the educational paradigmatic status quo to those of holistic education, there are striking contrasts in conceptualizations of how learning environments can and should be constructed, what learning needs can and should be attended to and, fundamentally, what it means to educate.

Holistic educational theorist Ron Miller asserts that the fundamental mission of holistic education is to cultivate in students, "... a deep sense of connectedness to community, the natural world, and values such as compassion, peace and reverence for life in order to create a more compassionate, democratic, life-affirming, ecologically sustainable society" (Miller, 1997, p.1). Jack Miller, the foremost voice in holistic educational theory for the last several decades, sums it up by saying that the heart of all educational endeavors should be facilitating students' awakening to the fundamentally interconnected nature of all that is; to the extent that this is achieved, students will go on to prioritize social activity that counters injustice and suffering (Miller, 1986).

The paradigmatic assumptions intrinsic to the holistic perspective concern how educators and educational environments can support the innermost personal development of each child. Facilitating learners' developing sense of union/belonging, purpose and empowerment is understood as vitally important to both individuals and society. Learning environments and educators cannot be neutral in this regard; it is necessarily either supported or impeded. As such, it is incumbent upon schools and

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