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**Holistic Education:  
A Vision for 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Zealand Primary School Classrooms**

A thesis  
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of  
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## Abstract

In today's world, teachers in New Zealand primary schools struggle to meet the requirements of an over-full curriculum and pressure from politicians to raise student achievement. Despite a curriculum document that speaks of developing "lifelong learners who are confident, creative, connected, and actively involved" (MoE, 2007, p. 4), teachers are being compelled to return to traditional forms of teaching in an attempt to ensure that students are meeting required 'standards' in reading, writing and mathematics (MoE, 2013a).

A common theme in current educational discussions is concerns around the 'tail of underachievement' (Hattie, 2011; Te One, 2011) that continues to plague classrooms despite on-going professional development and the introduction of National Standards (MoE, 2009a, 2009b). This research, therefore, attempts to define a viable alternative to the status quo, holistic education, a teaching paradigm that has produced pockets of success, mainly outside mainstream education, over the last few centuries and which may hold promise for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Holism is not new. It spans much of human history from early Greek philosophers in the West and traditional ways of thinking in many non-Western indigenous cultures through to the current day, although the term itself was not 'coined' until 1926 (Esfeld, 1998). In recent years, holism has found some legitimacy in healthcare (McEvoy & Duffy, 2008), Western judicial systems (Takagi & Shank, 2004) and even education (R. Miller, 2006).

Although holistic education has taken various forms throughout history, one overarching theme is that it is focused on the whole child – body, mind and spirit – and their relationships with others and the world around them (J. P. Miller, 2007). The literature even suggests that holistic education is a matter of the heart – a paradigm or worldview that underpins everything the teacher does in light of this understanding (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, & Liaghatdar, 2012) rather than a pedagogical style. Thus,

holistic teachers select from a toolbox of practices in order to find what is most appropriate for each learning situation and student.

Beginning with an analysis of research into holistic education, this thesis then considers the practises of some local teachers that appear to have holistic underpinnings, to discover how viable they are in practice, and what difference they make to the students and their learning. Interviews with teachers and their students produced data was grouped into themes. One overarching theme showed that connecting learning to the students' lives, increased their motivation and engagement. The development of strong relationships with students was another clear theme, and the knowledge teachers gained as a result, informed their teaching decisions.

Though holistic teaching is time consuming it is rewarding, and these teachers felt the rewards far outweighed the cost, a sense that was echoed in literature on the subject (Apple & Beane, 2007). Furthermore, these teachers did not think of their practice as holistic, but clearly taught from the heart. It is this sense of a change of 'heart' by teachers, rather than specific practices, which suggests that holistic education could be a viable vision for today's primary school classrooms.

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# Chapter One:

## Introduction

### Preamble and Background

Like many of my colleagues, I began my teaching career with visions of a classroom buzzing with the sounds of excitement, of students who were fully engaged in their learning and motivated to do their best, and of me, the teacher, making a difference in my students' lives as I helped them find their passion and drive, while making sense of the world around them. Although I knew that teaching would also involve testing, record keeping and reporting, I had no idea how much of my time would be consumed by such activities, or how the pressure to ensure the curriculum was being covered, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy, would impact on what I could and could not achieve with my students and the world I hoped to create in my classroom.

Very soon I was feeling swamped by the organisational requirements of teaching in a New Zealand primary school; of making sure my planning was adequately documented and filed systematically; of a plethora of data being recorded accurately; and of attending yet another professional development session to help improve some area of my teaching (even though there had not been enough time to embed, or even implement what I had learnt in the previous session). To add to my frustration, my classroom vision was not fulfilled either, as I struggled to keep students engaged in maths, then writing, then reading, simply because it was expected that a certain amount of time each day would be spent on each of these areas of learning. Moreover, other curriculum areas were being crammed into whatever time was left after whole school activities and 'extras' were timetabled into the day or week. Where was the excitement? Where was the desire to find out about the world? Where was the passion? It seemed that these desires had been supplanted by the demands of an overcrowded

curriculum and the need to make 'measurable gains' in literacy and numeracy.

Certainly some students were engaged and achieving well; this system worked for them. However, despite my best efforts, there were students who, at best, were bored or disengaged and at worst actively avoided or resisted learning, whose behaviour in the classroom were becoming increasingly problematic. These students were also, more often than not, the very ones who were not progressing as I hoped they would, and for whom the 'key' to making learning accessible seemed to be elusive, if not impossible to find.

To make matters worse, my passion was being slowly eroded. Although I loved being with the students, getting to know them and sharing interesting tidbits of life with them, I found I was becoming dis-enamoured by the 'learning' that was being forced upon them and me. I tried to improve my practice by implementing as many of the techniques I had learnt in professional development sessions; to little or no avail. I became an expert at creating shared learning intentions and success criteria with the students, and adept at sharing specific and timely feedback, as this was the agreed upon tool for engagement and success, and yet many students continued to resist my efforts to get them connected with the learning, while others used the set criteria as an excuse for mediocrity – 'that's what the criteria asks for' – and nothing more. What was I doing wrong? Was it my approach, or was it the system that needed to change?

Clearly, at this juncture I had a choice to make: to simply knuckle down and continue to struggle along with an increasingly busy curriculum and partially engaged students, or to ask the hard questions, by looking into my practice and the practice of others for any real alternative that might make a difference to me and my students. This thesis is the result of that choice – to examine what worked and what didn't work in my practice, to see what alternatives are out there, what researchers are saying about those alternatives and to talk with colleagues and students about what was and wasn't working for them in their classrooms.

At the same time as I began to analyse my teaching practice, our school professional development sessions shifted their focus from teaching tools to classroom culture. This shift came about in light of the reported success of professional development schemes designed to enhance Māori achievement such as the Kotahitanga project (Bishop & Berryman, 2009), Ka Hikitia (MoE, 2013b) and Tataiako (NZTC, n.d.), together with success reported by various schools around the country, particularly those in the Manaiakilani Learning Change Network in South Auckland (Manaiakilani, 2013). The result was an increasing awareness that a key to improving student engagement and academic success appears to be found in teachers becoming more responsive to the individual cultures of their students.

The clear message from this research was that to make a difference, particularly for Māori and Pasifika students, teachers must find ways to relate to them as culturally located people – build relationships and respect their cultural identity – and engage them in authentic learning that is relevant to them, their communities and their current life situations. Yet, despite this persuasive argument, there still seems to be a drive, perhaps afforded momentum by National Standards and the ensuing demand to have students meeting or exceeding targets, for teachers to focus on specific areas of learning, and to break down learning components into pieces so small that, for at least some learners, meaning and relevance is lost (Taylor, Hawkins, & Harvey, 2008).

In the midst of this process I came across the philosophical concept of holism and its antithesis – atomism. This discovery piqued my interest, as it seemed to me that the current practice of dissecting learning into small ‘manageable’ parts was perhaps driven by a western ‘scientific’ mind-set where atomism prevails as the overriding paradigm. The Miriam-Webster Online Dictionary suggests the following two definitions for atomism: “A doctrine that the universe is composed of simple indivisible minute particles” and “a psychological doctrine that perceptions, thoughts and all mental processes are built up by the combination of simple elements” (“atomism,” 2013). It is this second definition, in particular, that appears to give credence to the theory that learning happens in small, measurable steps in

a somewhat linear manner (Meier, 1985) and therefore will be more easily understood and assimilated if presented in bite-sized pieces.

Holism, by contrast, takes an opposing point of view by suggesting that the world – and, by implication, learning - makes sense only when viewed as a whole and that understanding comes from regarding the parts as interrelated within that whole (Shroff, 2011). This view and its resulting practices have become increasingly popular in mainstream medicine, and I discovered have also made inroads into educational thought. Holism may be defined philosophically as:

The theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. Holism is often applied to mental states, language, and ecology. ("holism," 2013)

And medically as “the treating of the whole person, taking into account mental and social factors, rather than just the physical symptoms of a disease” (“holism,” 2013).

When viewed in light of teaching practices, these definitions imply that current understandings of how learning occurs may need to be turned on their heads, if a more integrated method of presenting information, skills and knowledge is to be considered. Furthermore, holism clearly positions the student at the centre of the learning and suggests that this centrality must include all aspects of his or her being, including physical, mental, relational and spiritual elements. Investigating further, I discovered that many traditional cultures are imbued with a holistic mind-set, either in terms of knowing themselves as a people or their understanding of personal wholeness. Hebrew culture, for instance, includes no clear distinction between “religious, national, racial, or ethnic identities” (Edelheit & Edelheit, 2000, p. 3) as these features are seen equally as integrally part of what it means to be ‘Jewish’. African tradition and its view of humanity is also based on a platform of “holism – dealing with people as one undivided and indivisible family” (Bailey li, 2008, p. 78). And closer to home, in Māori

culture, the concept of Hauora defines wholeness as including all elements of a person's life – physical, mental and emotional, relational, and spiritual (Durie, 1998), thereby acknowledging the necessary integration of all parts of a person to form a congruent whole.

Having begun to cogitate on these theories and their implications for me as a teacher, I found that I was faced with an incongruity between what I had been taught was good practice and what might be most effective for meeting my students' learning needs. On the one hand it seemed that in order for them to make sense of new learning, students needed to be able to 'see' the overriding or universal principles and links to what they already knew, while on the other hand, I was practising developing and using single concept learning intentions with specific success criteria that simply allowed students to measure whether they were achieving that skill/knowledge or not. This appeared problematic, as holism seems to suggest that these skills, this information and/or the knowledge being aimed at, are of limited value without being situated within a coherent whole (Taylor et al., 2008). Was this the cause of the impasse in which I found myself trapped? Could it be that my students were disengaged and unmotivated because the learning simply didn't make sense at a deeper level than as an isolated skill or piece of information? These questions had begun to foment, and so the search for an answer was 'on'.

Uhl and Stuchul (2011) suggest that the way we 'do school' is a very real problem, and are rather scathing of modern schools and what they achieve in terms of successfully educating students for life in the twenty-first century. "The sad truth is that school, with few exceptions, is enacted in such a way that it mostly distracts young people from what is compelling, immediate, motivating and engaging – thereby undermining self-discovery in any significant sense"(Uhl & Stuchul, 2011, p. 187). Sir Ken Robinson is even more scathing. "Current approaches to education and training are hobbled by assumptions about intelligence and creativity that have squandered the talents and stifled the creative confidence of untold numbers of people" (Robinson, 2011, p. 7) If this is true, then a problem exists within our classrooms.

By contrast, early childhood education in New Zealand paints a quite different picture. My own background as a mother of four children who attended a local Playcentre as pre-schoolers, where I undertook training that enabled me to supervise Playcentre sessions, meant that my experience before entering the world of primary school teaching was one where education was much more holistic. I supervised at my children's Playcentre during the introduction of Te Whariki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (MoE, 1996), and was encouraged by the holistic underpinnings of this document. In the introduction of Te Whariki it states that it is:

founded on the following aspirations for children: to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (MoE, 1996, p. 9)

This is a clearly articulated and unashamedly holistic foundation for a coherent curriculum. This premise is further strengthened when one delves into the principles of the curriculum, in particular that of kotahitanga – holistic development – which clearly states that:

assessing or observing children should take place in the same contexts of meaningful activities and relationships that have provided the focus for the holistic curriculum... [and that this] ...assessment of children should encompass all dimensions of children's learning and development and should see the child as a whole. (MoE, 1996, p. 30)

These statements leave the reader in no doubt of the holistic intent and heart of early childhood education in New Zealand.

Of course, this then begs the question: What happens when children start school? Why is there a sudden change from a holistic foundation to a much more fragmented and academically focused education? This seems odd, especially in light of the vision, principles and values found in the New Zealand Curriculum Document (NZCD), which puts "students at the centre of teaching and learning, asserting they should experience a curriculum that

engages and challenges them, is forward-looking and inclusive, and affirms New Zealand's unique identity" (MoE, 2007, p. 9). In the foreword, the then Secretary for Education, Karen Sewell, presents a holistic vision of our students as "lifelong learners who are confident, and creative, connected, and actively involved" (MoE, 2007, p. 4). Added to these statements and the material that surrounds them, this curriculum document includes a set of five key competencies that are described as foundational for success in living and learning both as students and in later life. These competencies of thinking, relating to others, using language, symbols and texts, managing self, and participating and contributing (MoE, 2007), paint yet another holistic picture of learning in context and give further credence to the supposition that the current curriculum document is holistic at its heart.

Although there is much rhetoric concerning child-centred learning that echoes these sentiments from our curriculum document amongst the educators with whom I associate, this philosophy and the actual practices we are encouraged to employ in our classrooms seem not to marry well. It appears that the introduction of National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics has served to undercut any shift to a holistic philosophy, as suggested by the current NZCD, as the spotlight is being increasingly focussed on achievement in these three areas to the detriment of more connected and inclusive learning environments. Time constraints, focus on the 'key' curriculum areas of literacy and mathematics, along with pressures to ensure that all students are 'meeting the national standards' in these areas, and the use of precise, measurable and transferable learning intentions serve to distract teachers from focusing on the very students they are meant to be supporting.

Like many other teachers, I am bewildered by this apparent dichotomy – a curriculum that talks of being focused on the whole child and on providing relevant and authentic learning experiences, and the prevailing practice that appears mechanistic and reductionist in its execution, dividing learning into tiny pieces that can be easily explained, analysed and measured, but which often lose all sense of relevance to the learner's life (Fox, 2005). When I have asked my students if they know why we are learning a particular skill or piece of knowledge, I have been saddened by

their first answers. These tend to take one of two possible forms – “so we can use it at college” or, perhaps worse, “because we have to”. Clearly, the learning is neither relevant nor of any real value in the eyes of these learners. Of course, further discussion and deeper thinking usually lends itself to ‘aha’ moments, as I help my students see the life applications of their learning, but at first glance, ‘something is very wrong with this picture’.

Clearly there is a need to address, or at least question, the apparent contradiction between the intention of the current curriculum and the practices being implemented in many primary school classrooms in this country. This is not to suggest that those in the teaching profession are not passionate about teaching and learning, or that the system does not work for most students. Indeed, National Standards results from 2012 would indicate that the system works for at least 70% of our students (MoE, 2013a). However, this still leaves 30% who are not achieving, and perhaps many more who are neither engaged nor excited about their learning.

## **The Research**

This research, in light of my aforementioned thoughts, was therefore, an attempt to define holistic education in philosophical and practical terms, to discover what is going on in the classrooms in our primary schools, what is and isn’t working to engage and support students in their learning, and how much, if any, of the holistic ‘spirit’ of the NZCD is permeating teachers’ practice. As a result, I hope to develop a picture of where holistic teaching and learning appears to be occurring, and what a more integrated, holistic pedagogy might look like in a New Zealand Primary School classroom.

The bulk of this thesis is an extended literature review delving into holism as a philosophy, holistic teaching and learning as an educational paradigm and a brief examination of practices that could be employed by teachers, should they choose to follow a holistic educational path. My original goal was to investigate the effectiveness of holistic pedagogy, when implemented in a New Zealand primary school classroom, for raising student engagement, motivation, self-regulation and, perhaps most importantly, academic achievement. However, discussions with peers,

other educators and my supervisor led me to recognise that this was too broad a topic which needed to be reduced in scope to be achievable in the timeframe and word count available.

The final outcome of these discussions and much pondering on my part was to seek a vision of what holistic education might look like in a New Zealand primary school classroom. In order to provide rigour for such an undertaking we agreed that the majority of the information needed to come from literature already available on the subject of holistic education and curricula. As most of this literature is based on research from countries other than New Zealand, interviewing local teachers about their practice, and their students about their classroom experiences, would provide information about current practice in primary schools in this country and give a sense of how much holistic thinking (whether conscious or unconscious) is already being employed by teachers. The synthesis of these two sources of information would then be used to develop the 'vision' I hoped to produce.

## **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter two delves into literature that discusses holism as an idea. Beginning with an overview of why a broader look at holism was necessary before refining my research to holistic education in particular, the review then investigates the history of holism in both western and ethnic societies, and its expansion within the western world beyond philosophy. This is then followed by an analysis of some of the questions and oppositions to holistic ideas, and a brief look at holism in modern healthcare and judicial systems. The chapter ends with a general overview of holistic education, touching on its significance in indigenous cultures, and an outline of its defining characteristics.

Chapter three investigates the history of holistic education in the western world. Key players in its development as an alternative to mainstream schooling are examined in three main sections – the romantics, the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century educators including John Dewey and two New Zealand educators, and those from the second half of the twentieth century – along with their key ideas and the schools

many developed. This journey through time aims to reveal the unfolding ideas that have resulted in modern understandings of holistic education.

Chapter four considers 21<sup>st</sup> Century holistic learning and its theoretical underpinnings. The benefits and concerns around holistic education are discussed, along with holistic overtones apparent in the current New Zealand Curriculum Document (MoE, 2007). This is followed by a 'toolbox' of options available to teachers who wish to implement holistic education in their classrooms. The tools under investigation include integrated learning, environmental education, spiritual education, democratic education, assessment for learning, and other minor tools. As many of these tools are also found in mainstream classrooms, the chapter ends with a brief comment on the common thread of holistic education – the holistic teacher.

Chapter five discusses the methodology behind the research component of this study and findings from the interviews and group discussions that made up the human research element. It begins with an overview of why I chose to examine this particular topic, followed by a description of the participants. The next sections of the chapter include a brief analysis of qualitative research and justification for its use, a précis of ethical considerations and an explanation of the data gathering and analysis process employed in this study.

The findings from the teacher interviews follow, and are grouped under three main headings: Teaching Philosophy and Style; Advantages and Challenges of Holistic Practice; and The New Zealand Curriculum and National Standards (and their effect on teacher practice. The chapter closes with the students' views and the evidence these present that appear to support the use of holistic practices in their classrooms.

Chapter six completes this study with a discussion about the findings and their implications for my own, and other teachers' practice, and possibilities for further research in the future.

## Chapter 2:

# What's the Big Idea?

### Introduction:

In order to understand how holism has influenced education or might do so in the future, it was first necessary to investigate the history of holism as a world view. This could then become the basis of a closer examination of research and writings about holistic educational practices around the world, in order to develop a picture of what holistic education might look like in a New Zealand primary school classroom in the 21st Century. However, finding this material proved challenging as specific information about the holistic paradigm tended to lie buried in the diverse writing of philosophers about life and the universe, or was surrounded by almost unreadable scientific jargon. It eventually became clear that one of the best resources for finding useful information about holism relevant to teaching practice was in medical journals, especially those related to nursing, where holism has become increasingly accepted within mainstream medical thinking and practice (Shroff, 2011), opening opportunities for research and academic writing on the topic.

A preliminary survey of literature on the topic of holistic education showed that there was abundant material on educational practices and pedagogical approaches, but that the task of identifying material pertaining specifically to holistic education was a daunting one. Many researchers appear to shy away from using the labels 'holism' or 'holistic education', while others use the expressions so broadly that they become almost meaningless. This meant that a more comprehensive search was required to successfully glean information pertinent to this investigation.

Thus in order to identify specific information about holism in education, the search parameters were broadened to find relevant and up-to-date material. Search terms such as 'integrated curriculum' and 'whole child' proved helpful in uncovering holistic conventions being employed in New Zealand classrooms and around the world, mostly by individuals or

small pockets of innovative teachers. There was evidence that some of the schools implementing holistic models for teaching and learning, did so outside the mainstream education administration in their regions (J. P. Miller, 2007). Although these 'alternative' schools clearly demonstrate successful implementation of holistic education, this study remains focused on the possible integration of holistic practices in *mainstream* New Zealand primary school classrooms.

## **A history of Holism:**

Michael Esfeld (1998) acknowledged that although the term 'holism' has been used in both philosophy and quantum physics over the past few decades and has become popular in other areas such as health and religion (Letcher, 2013b), its roots are found much earlier in human history. A number of researchers, including Esfeld, have identified South African Biologist, Jan Smuts, as the first to coin the term *holism*, from the Greek word *olos*, meaning whole in *Holism and Evolution*, when it was published in 1926 (Ansbacher, 1978; Becht, 1974; Clarken, 2006; Esfeld, 1998; Freeman, 2005b; Jolliot, 2012; McEvoy & Duffy, 2008; Owen & Holmes, 1993; Taylor et al., 2008). In the preface to the first edition of this book, Smuts described holism as "the principle which makes for the origin and progress of wholes in the universe" (Smuts, 1927, p. ix), and as a result of the ensuing dialogue with other contemporaries about this idea, holism eventually became accepted within mainstream philosophy in the years following its publication (Owen & Holmes, 1993).

These researchers clearly identified a time in modern Western history when holism began to be accepted as an alternative way of understanding the world and approaching philosophical thinking, from the prevailing reductionist paradigm of the time (Healy, 2009; Letcher, 2013b; Owen & Holmes, 1993). These same scholars also acknowledged that, whether defined as such or not, holism did not begin with Smuts, but reaches back through history at least as early as ancient Greece (Letcher, 2013a; Owen & Holmes, 1993; Taylor et al., 2008).

The ancient Greeks believed that understanding nature as a whole was necessary to fully understand humans as individuals (Owen & Holmes, 1993). Heraclitus (c.500 BC) saw all things as being connected, creating a whole made up of fragments and the narratives used to understand them (M. P. Meyer, 2008). Although this seems somewhat of a contradiction, it was Heraclitus's acceptance of discord or disunity alongside harmony that underpinned his holistic philosophy in such fragments as "[c]ouples are things whole and things not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one" (Heraclitus, c.500 BC, cited in Evans, 1999, p. 22).

Plato (c.400 BC) also demonstrated holistic thinking in that he too "affirms the importance of connectedness... [and] ...combines symbolism with abstract reasoning" (Hampton, 1994, p. 237). Hampton (1994) also notes that although some scholars have reservations about Plato's holism, his attempts to encompass the breadth of human experience including the spiritual, and to explain these in rational terms, is fundamentally holistic in its aim.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) is also acknowledged for his holistic ideas, primarily his notion of substantial holism. Scaltsas (1994) notes that this form of holism focuses on particulars as the ultimate subjects rather than as parts of a subject.

Being a subject is being a unifier of the elements that belong to a substance. That is the cornerstone of Aristotle's *substantial holism*: the unification takes place by the reidentification of the elements according to the principle of the substantial form – not by relating the elements into a cluster (Scaltsas, 1994, p. 7)

...as modern science is wont to do.

It seems then, that although perhaps not formally recognised as such, a holistic view was generally employed in Greek culture to provide an underlying framework for understanding life and its meaning from pre-Socratic times through until the 17th Century when Descartes (Owen &

Holmes, 1993) created a scientific method based on the four Cartesian Rules (of clear and distinct ideas based on evidence, of analysis by dividing problems into manageable parts, of progression from simple to complex, and of synthesis through reflection) (Johnston, 2006). Heidegger argues that Plato's teachings were not as holistic as many scholars suggest either, but were precursors to Descartes's ideas, as he tended to focus primarily on visible 'things' (W. J. Richardson, 2003). As a result Western society has taken on the belief that individual entities and their properties should be examined in isolation, in order to understand them. These ideas have thus become embedded within Western scientific and philosophical thought and have led to a focus on what is visibly present - the 'whatness' of a thing. It is this sense of isolation that ignores the relationships between entities, that has created an environment where 'things' have become viewed as entirely for human consumption (W. J. Richardson, 2003).

Shroff (2011) adds substance to Owen and Holmes' (1993) recognition of the historical roots of holism, positing that despite pockets of non-holistic thought, a holistic worldview was, in fact, a universally dominant way of thinking until about four hundred years ago, and although some differences in the outworking of holism are apparent between regions and times in history, key concepts have remained constant: "... entities and systems in the universe, including humans, are considered part of a unified whole, which cannot be understood by the isolated examination of its separate parts" (Shroff, 2011, p. 245).

## **Historical Holism in the Western World**

Having determined that as a rule, holism was 'buried' some 400 years ago, at least within the realms of the Western World, researchers acknowledge that pockets of holistic thought still surfaced in Europe at times, particularly during the Romantic period of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries (J. J. Baker, 2007). Educational philosophers of the time were experimenting with holistic practices, while writing about their beliefs (Forbes, 2012; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2008), and these works

provided impetus for the poetic writings and views of some of their contemporaries.

Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg, a German poet and idealist from the late 18th Century, who wrote under the pen name 'Novalis', is credited with being one who kept the holistic embers burning, as he opposed the fragmentation that was overtaking the academic world of the time (Gjesdal, 2009). Along with contemporaries such as Hölderlin and Schelling, Novalis countered the "reductive and mechanistic views of nature and mind" (Taggart, 2001, p. 18) proposed by scientists such as Newton, that nature was made up of individual, random particles which collided with one another, but were devoid of life in and of themselves. He posited that life, whether human or not human, was linked through an energetic current that was common to all, and brought unity within the natural world. Coleridge, another of Novalis's contemporaries, added to this premise with his suggestion that the world is constructed within a person's mind, in order for him or her to make sense of it and to provide a platform for the creative thinking of the artist (Taggart, 2001). Novalis sums this thinking up in his own words, "... 'the truest essence of Romanticism is to make the individual moment or the individual situation absolute, to universalize and to classify it' ... [which] reads as No. 970 of his *Fragments* (Minor edition, Jena, III, 363)" (Peyre, 1999, p. 33), suggesting that in this way all natural things correspond with one another in a meaningful way, such that nature as a whole is spontaneously self-organised (Stone, 2008) – a clearly holistic view of the universe and the value of the natural world.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) was another author and philosopher of this era, who also encouraged a holistic world view, and is best known as the "father of the Storm and Stress movement in German literature" (O'Flaherty, 1958, p. 39) . What makes Hamann unique, however, was that after a conversion experience in London, in 1758, he rejected the enlightenment views of the time, instead embedding his philosophy within a scriptural and theological context, where God (of the Bible) is central and "the world is a speech to creation for creation" (Kinnaman, n.d., section 2). It was this recognition of the role of language in creation that led Hamann to suggest that language is central to all thought

and reason. Taking this position further, he also argued that if attempts to understand nature were made with reason alone, and without acknowledging God as creator, then nature would be misunderstood (O'Flaherty, 1958). As such, Hamann's holism was 'faith' based, and focused primarily on language. It was not the language of rationalism and mathematics, but rather the language of emotions and of poetry, that provided connections for man with God (Butts, 1988; O'Flaherty, 1958).

## **Non-Western Holism**

In non-Western cultures, the universality of holistic thought is even more apparent. Obvious examples include Chinese medical traditions (J. P. Miller, 2005; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001), the traditional Indian vision of human wholeness (J. P. Miller, 2005), African cultural ideas which, view "...the cosmos [as] one, a spiritual totality. Spirit is not separate from matter, as everything is connected" (Shroff, 2011, p. 245), Egyptian art and language (Letcher, 2013a), American First Nation philosophies around one-ness with the Universe (Shroff, 2011) and Māori healers' views of hauora - wellbeing (Durie, 1985; Mark & Lyons, 2010).

Many of these views, though effectively supplanted by pervading Western analytical, scientific thought (Mahmoudi et al., 2012), as Imperialism swept the world, have undergone a resurgence in recent times and have even made inroads into mainstream Western cultural thought, particularly in the areas of philosophy, health care and science (Ansbacher, 1978; Kronick, 1990; Owen & Holmes, 1993; Shroff, 2011). Freeman (2005b) provides some insight into this resurgence of holism as he notes that in the period between the world wars, holism developed beyond Smut's original ideas in a number of different schools of thought.

## **Holism Defined:**

Despite the continued resurgence of a holistic or integrated worldview during the 20th Century (Letcher, 2013b) there remains debate around its usefulness as a frame of reference in the spheres of philosophy

and science, particularly in biology, quantum physics and astronomy, as well as in the field of medicine. The tenet that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' (Becht, 1974; Healy, 2009; Lemkow, 2005) is, perhaps, the sticking point for many scientists who have been 'brought up' in a "western culture [focussed on] rational knowledge, objectivity and quantification" (Owen & Holmes, 1993, p. 1692). This mind-set ignores human values and experiences (Owen & Holmes, 1993), as it considers the world to be a series of objects or elements that can be best understood by reducing them to their smallest constituent parts (Bekoff, 2000; Healy, 2009). This process, commonly known as reductionism or atomism, suggests that in understanding each of those parts and how they function, one is then able to understand the whole and how it functions (Healy, 2009), and is generally recognised as stemming from Descartes' Cartesian philosophy, developed in the first half of the 17th Century (Esfeld, 1998; Johnston, 2006).

Holists disagree with this premise, arguing that an explanation of the workings of the elements of a system or entity is often at best insufficient, and at times misleading, in explaining how and why the whole functions as it does (Brown, 2007), as these elements must be interconnected in some way in order for the 'whole' to exist (Letcher, 2013b; R. Miller, 2005b). Healy's (2009) proposal clarifies this idea further in that he does not "assert that a whole has features that none of its components has, [rather] holism should be understood to claim that the whole has features that cannot be reduced to features of its component parts" (Healy, 2009, p. 397). Or as Ron Miller (2005b) notes, the characteristics of individual components within an entity fail to fully explain the essential qualities that can be found in all living things and the natural systems that surround them.

To make matters more complicated, holists themselves do not agree on a clear definition or understanding of holism as a working theory, as there are a number of differing aspects or approaches (Esfeld, 1998; Freeman, 2005b; McEvoy & Duffy, 2008; Mohanty, 1984; Owen & Holmes, 1993) that, at times, seem to stand in opposition to one another (Block, 1995; Gähde, 2002; Moulines, 1986). Owen and Holmes (1993), when describing holism in terms of its role in nursing, identified three types. Charles Rosenberg (1998 cited in Freeman, 2005b) suggests that there are four unique

conceptual styles, while Moulines (1986) posits that there are five distinct philosophical versions. Freeman's comment that "what is 'holistic' depends upon where you stand" (2005b, p. 154) perhaps clarifies this apparent incongruity, as he explains that the holist's view is influenced by the scale of the context within which he or she is working. Moulines (1986) agrees, suggesting that this question is the crux of the issue, as the lack of a shared understanding of the 'integrated whole' under investigation is the very reason that holism is rather easily dismissed by its dissenters. The five approaches that he identified provide a snapshot of the variance that exists in different perceptions of what constitutes the holist's 'whole', although even these do not give a full picture of the scope of the differences that exist. In Mouline's examples, the integrated entity or 'whole' is identified as 'B':

- (I) Kuhn-Stegmuiller's holism: B is an empirical theory in the precise structuralistic sense.
- (II) Duhem's holism: B is a group of theories within a discipline
- (III) Duhem's holism: B is a discipline.
- (IV) Quine's holism: B is the whole of science.
- (V) Hegel's holism: B is the whole of culture.

(Moulines, 1986, p. 319)

More recently, researchers such as Michael Esfeld (1998) have attempted to address the conflicting issues that serve to undermine the validity of holism, by identifying the weaknesses in specific versions in order to isolate these from those theories that have more robust, fundamental underpinnings (Ross, 1982). Esfeld (1998) went as far as endeavouring to determine the elements that appear to be common threads between the different theories. One robust category of holism, which has its roots in quantum physics, is relational holism (Esfeld, 2001), a term first used by Teller (1986) when describing the relationships between different elements and entities in the universe. This identification of the interconnected relationships between elements within a given context is recognised by Esfeld and others as being the most common thread that, at one level or another, runs through the many different schools of holistic thought (Ansbacher, 1978; Bergmann, 1944; Esfeld, 1998, 2001; Letcher, 2013a,

2013b; Moulines, 1986; Sober, 1980; Teller, 1986). Lemkow (2005) acknowledges Arthur Koestler's contribution to this shared understanding of holism in coining the Greek term '*holon*' to describe these relationships as it recognises that within nature (at least) all entities are made up of parts and are equally parts themselves of a greater, interconnected whole (Lemkow, 2005; Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Perhaps, after all, the simplest explanation of holism is the clearest – an understanding that the whole (in whatever form it takes) is more than the sum of its parts (J. P. Miller, 2007; Summers, 2004) .

## **Holism in Healthcare**

It is this very idea of interconnectedness which has enabled holism to permeate the realms of health care, and nursing in particular. From as far back as the 19th Century, exemplary nurses, such as Florence Nightingale, have modelled and encouraged their colleagues to consider the 'other' influences that might be at play in a patient's health and/or recovery, such as relationships with others and the state of the patient's mind and spirit (McEvoy & Duffy, 2008; Owen & Holmes, 1993). McEvoy and Duffy (2008) confirm that the link between healthcare and holism is a logical one, which is clearly evident when analysing the Greek words that holism, healing and health derive from – holism from *holos* meaning whole, and both healing and health from *heles* meaning to make whole. Thus the underlying concepts of healthcare and holism are clearly interrelated at a linguistic as well as a practical level (McEvoy & Duffy, 2008). Even in this setting, however, the issue of defining what holism actually means in practical terms continues to cause confusion (McEvoy & Duffy, 2008; Wright, 2008). Ideologies have become so diverse that some researchers have categorised the practices that certain practitioners consider holistic, as coming from a non-holistic, reductionist methodology - holism's antithesis (Jolliot, 2012).

In attempting to bring some clarity to the confusion around the true meaning of holism and holistic health care, researchers have developed some broad definitions which seek to embrace the varying understandings

that exist. Stephen Wright (2008), in his plea to the nursing fraternity not to 'dumb down' holism, writes that "...holism suggests an inter-connectedness and interaction with creation, where everything is held in a subtle web of forces that bind the universe together (divine power, quantum mechanics, electromagnetic forces – take your pick)" (Wright, 2008, p. 26). This explanation dovetails nicely with the two perspectives identified by another researcher, Christina Jackson, that:

Holism can be viewed from 2 different perspectives. One is that holism involves the interrelationships of the bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions of persons, recognizing that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (synergy). The other perspective is that holism involves understanding the individual as an irreducible, unified whole in mutual process with the environment. (Jackson, 2004, p. 71)

These two perspectives, both individually and when considered together, bring a sense of connection between the philosophical view of holism as an entity which is more than the sum of its parts (Becht, 1974; Healy, 2009; Shroff, 2011), and the more practical application of a holistic approach to nursing. Thus, the suggestion that holistic healthcare is not so much about specific methods as it is about the context of the care that is provided (Saks, 1997 cited in Frisch, 2001) may give the clearest picture of what holism in that setting really means.

## **Holism in the Judicial System**

The judicial systems of a number of Western countries have also embraced holistic practices. Since the rise of formal government within the Western World, in the 12th Century, crime has become somewhat dehumanised as the state has become the central player in the process of punishment and retribution rather than the victims and perpetrators of the crimes themselves (Daniels, 2013; Sarre, 2007). This tendency is changing, however, as many judicial systems around the world attempt to incorporate a more holistic view of the social relationships that are inherent in and

potentially affected by the crimes being addressed (Clear, 2005; Fields & Narr, 1992). This process, known as restorative justice, seeks to ensure, amongst other things, empowerment, redress, or at least involvement in the process, for the 'victims' (Daniels, 2013; Haith, 2000; Philpott, 2013). Restorative justice, as with many other holistic practices, can be found in the histories of many indigenous cultures, such as Indian, Māori, traditional African and Native American people groups, where the practice has been utilised successfully for hundreds of years (Hand, Hankes, & House, 2012; Latha & Thilagaraj, 2013; Takagi & Shank, 2004).

Formal components of restorative justice have been identified by researchers such as Latha and Thilagaraj (2013) who note that: "there are four potent features of Restorative Justice: repair, restore, reconcile, and reintegrate the offenders and victims to each other and to their shared environments and communities" (p. 309). A key element of such a holistic judicial system is the importance of community, the relationships that exist within them and the effects of crime on those relationships and the individuals that make them up (Daniels, 2013; Haith, 2000; B. Hudson, 2006). Such systems focus on redressing the wrongs inflicted upon the 'victim', rather than simply punishing the perpetrator, as normally occurs in the mainstream Western legal system (Alexander, 2006; Hand et al., 2012; Philpott, 2013; Sarre, 2007). Such redress is facilitated through a process where the offender meets with his or her victim, and possibly the victim's family and/or community members, in a carefully managed environment. In this safe setting the victim is given opportunity to communicate how he or she has been affected by the crime. This process is designed to promote self-empowerment in the victim as he or she expresses, and is then able to let go of, negative feelings associated with the offence being addressed. It also enables the perpetrator to gain an understanding of how his or her actions have affected others – in many cases leading to penitence and a desire to make restitution (Daniels, 2013; Takagi & Shank, 2004).

Another common outcome of the restorative justice process is forgiveness of the offender by those who have been 'victims' of the crime, thus bringing healing to both parties and further strengthening the sense of empowerment afforded the 'victim' through the restorative justice process

(Philpott, 2013). In Native American terms, the Restorative Justice process is designed to restore balance and harmony to the victim, the perpetrator and the community in which they live (Hand et al., 2012) and when successful, research would indicate that this is the case (Daniels, 2013). Research evidence further suggests that as part of the process of regaining balance involves the perpetrator gaining an increased self-understanding (Hand et al., 2012), such holistic justice methods decrease the risk of recidivist reoffending (Daniels, 2013; Takagi & Shank, 2004).

Restorative justice has been successfully used in New Zealand over the past few decades, beginning with Family Group Conferences for young offenders, which was included in the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 (Ministry of Justice, n.d.). Lynch (2012) notes that the principles of this system include using diversion rather than incarceration, acknowledging the victims' needs and interests, and encouraging input from the offender's family and community. The success of these conferences led to restorative practices being extended to adult offenders and officially recognised as part of the formal judiciary system in 2002 through the Sentencing Act 2002, Parole Act 2002, and the Victims' Rights Act 2002 (Ministry of Justice, n.d.).

These practices are significant in New Zealand as they resonate with Māori and Pasifika communities and their traditional value systems (Carruthers, 2012; Vieille, 2012) that address offending in terms of relationships, removing the anonymity of the victims and encouraging accountability by the offender (Vieille, 2012). The Ministry of Justice (n.d.) notes that “although restorative justice processes are not unique to Māori, they have strong alignment with Māori values such as reconciliation, reciprocity and whanau involvement” (para. 5). Embedded within these values is a sense of collective responsibility by the community to restore the harmony and relationships, rather than to punish the offender (Vieille, 2012).

The acknowledgement of the role of Māori tikanga in judicial issues is in contrast to earlier practices which were basically mono-cultural and did not resonate with other cultures, including Māori. In the 1980s, research was undertaken to address the over-representation of Māori within New Zealand's justice system. One researcher, Moana Jackson:

argued that Māori justice practices had been marginalised through colonial practices that imposed British law. He observed that Māori practices and philosophies were denigrated to the point where they no longer operated in many Māori communities to a meaningful extent. (Tauri & Webb, 2012, p. 2)

Jackson further suggested that the best solution for Māori could be a separate, self-governed judicial system based on Māori understandings (Justspeak, 2012; Tauri & Webb, 2012), which include spirituality and the restoration of mana, for all involved (Quince, 2007). The inclusion of elements of Jackson's findings in current restorative practice suggests that his research may have had some influence in shaping today's judicial policies.

Restorative practices have also been successfully used in New Zealand schools since 1999 when the Ministry of Education contracted a team from the University of Waikato to develop a restorative conferencing system, hoping it would reduce the number of suspensions (Drewery, 2007). These conferences include the victim/s, the offender/s, and their whanau, and while addressing the offence, they also seek to acknowledge the young person's positive qualities, in order to ensure their *mana* is left intact. All parties are involved in deciding on a "clear and do-able plan that has the support of all, with clear responsibilities for reporting and follow up" (Drewery, 2007, p. 206). Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) note that the commonality between these and restorative justice conferences is the care of those involved and the importance placed on restoring relationships, as opposed to the punitive outcomes of mainstream traditional justice systems.

In all, restorative justice practices acknowledge the importance of relationships and an understanding that each individual is part of a vast network of interwoven relationships, which must be addressed and restored to harmonious functioning for justice to be fully realised (Hand et al., 2012; B. Hudson, 2006). As such, although not yet universally implemented within the Western judicial world, this form of justice fits comfortably within the parameters of a holistic worldview.

It is worth noting that an investigation into the successful inclusion of holistic practices in patient care and judicial systems was not unintentional, as the roles of the associated professions, particularly nurses and social workers, have many similarities to those of the teaching profession. All three groups of professionals deal with vulnerable clients, many of whom are children, and they all believe “in service to the public and [have a] sense of calling to the field ... both of which are related to a sense of dedication to the profession” (Hall, 1968, p. 97). Thus, the holistic practices being implemented in these two areas provide a window into the possibilities for holism in education.

## **Holism in Education – Some Pre-Cursive Points**

Before undertaking an in-depth discussion of the history of holistic education and modes that operate in current times – as I go on to do in the following chapter - it is helpful, therefore, to consider alongside health and justice, some general points about the broader sweep of holism in education.

As with holism in general, researchers recognise that holistic forms of education may date back in history to at least the days of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who taught not by standing in front of his students and disseminating knowledge, but rather by asking questions that required them to think about their beliefs and their thinking – metacognition – and in so doing to ‘know thyself’, and to thereby find the gaps or errors in their understanding and replace these with new knowledge and/or understandings (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Uhl & Stuchul, 2011). John P. Miller (2007), a well-known proponent of holistic education suggests that as with holism in general, holistic education, while spanning much of history in one form or another, has been redefined in terms of curriculum content in each period of history, apparently in response to the culture of the day.

Again, as was noted of holism as a philosophy or way of viewing life, Jack Miller and Four Arrows (2012) acknowledge the role that holistic education has played in non-Western cultures throughout history. Miller

goes as far as to state that he believes “that holistic education as a practice started with Indigenous peoples; in other words, the original vision of holistic education was an Indigenous one” (Arrows & Miller, 2012, p. 45), which saw connections between man and the earth, and the meaning inherent in the universe (Mahmoudi et al., 2012) . Miller (2012) goes on to compare this to Ghandi’s view of education, which stressed the importance of body, mind and soul being developed together in order to create a balanced education (Guttek, 1997 cited in Arrows & Miller, 2012). Similarities and influences from non-Western cultures do not stop here, as is evident in the teachings of Confucius from some 2500 years ago, which show strong correlations, particularly in the area of values, to those that underpin modern holistic education (Hare, 2009). And in African tradition, education is based on an understanding that humanity is an indivisible family and as such individuals are part of that indivisible whole (Bailey li, 2008).

In New Zealand, prior to the arrival of Europeans, education of Māori children was holistically shared by parents, grandparents, and members of the wider community. It began with the mother chanting over the child in the womb and continued throughout childhood with a combination of on-the-job and formal learning, much like a modern apprenticeship, that prepared the child for their future role in the *iwi* (Calman, 2013). It appears, therefore, that the foundation of holistic education is actually a global and ancient one (Hare, 2009).

## **Holistic Education – A Definition**

There appears to be no single overarching definition of holistic education. A plethora of definitions have been proposed, some of which align with each other, while others approach the phenomenon from very different angles. As such, it is necessary to consider different definitions found in literature on the topic in order to arrive at a more comprehensive definition. As a starting point, John P. Miller suggests, holistic education is based on three basic principles – balance, inclusion and connection (J. P. Miller, 2007).

Ron Miller (2006), a frequently-cited proponent of holistic education, states that it must start with and be responsive to the learner, while remaining sensitive to the world that surrounds him or her. He goes on to give the following description of the aims of holistic education, focusing primarily on the facet of connection: “Holistic education aims to reconnect each person to the contexts within which meaning arises: the physical world, the biosphere, the local community, the culture with its many layers of meaning, and the Cosmos itself” (R. Miller, 2006, p. 29).

John Miller (2007), takes this idea of connectedness further, and describes it as an antithesis to the fragmentation that he believes has overtaken our western world and education system, saying that:

The focus of holistic education ... is on relationships: the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationships between mind and body, the relationships among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and the community, the relationship to the earth and our relationship to our souls.” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 13)

By contrast, Clarken (2006) focuses on the area of balance as he notes that holistic educators believe the child’s body, mind and soul must be considered equal parts of a balanced person. As such he states that “holistic education is a more defensible, practical and effective approach to developing well-balanced and healthy people who can be valued contributors to society according to their potentialities and the opportunities available to them” (Clarken, 2006, p. 15). Taylor et al. (2008) concur, yet broaden the areas they consider must be included to bring wholeness and fulfilment as a person, “addressing the physical, emotional, psychological, and metaphysical and emotional needs of children” (p. 192).

Other partial definitions can be found in literature regarding holistic education. One such focus is Vygotsky’s (1978 cited in James, 2006) identification of the need for social relationships to facilitate learning (Taylor et al., 2008). In this setting the community aspect of learning is paramount, and the learning or knowledge is shared by the group (James, 2006).

Mahmoudi et al. mention a number of partial descriptions of holistic learning, including the development of “a pedagogy that is interconnected and dynamic and thus is in harmony with the cosmos”, “the relationship between the whole and the part” such that the learning is “rooted in a larger vision”, and a focus on the student as an active learner who is “connected to his or her surrounding context and environment” (2012, p. 179). These holistic foci, the authors suggest, stand in opposition to an education system that fragments learning and simply prepares students to be part of a future workforce. By contrast, holistic learning gives context to learning and has potential to truly prepare learners for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

In attempting to give an all-encompassing definition of holistic education, Miller (2007) defers to Ghandi’s concepts on schooling, as embodying the fullness of what holistic education means. Ghandi’s (1980 cited in J. P. Miller, 2007) definition makes links between the bodily organs, the intellect and the soul, as he suggests that development of the body stimulates the mind, but that these two alone are not enough; their growth must match an awakening of the soul in order to create a balanced person. This spiritual awakening involves educating the heart and it is the combination of heart, body and mind that constitute a whole child. As a result, suggests Ghandi, these three must be educated as one, not in isolation, if learning is to be balanced and effective (J. P. Miller, 2007). This combination of body, mind and soul, educated in a caring community of teachers and learners, appears consistent with Durie’s (1985) ‘Tapa Wha’ model of wholeness, and emphasises the need for the learner to be at the centre of any holistic model of education (Rennie, Venville, & Wallace, 2012).

One definition that stands out as encapsulating holistic learning was not found in literature about education, but rather in the subject of holistic healthcare. Freeman states that “the very concept of ‘holistic therapy’ is oxymoronic; at best there can be a holistic approach, combining, when needed, a variety of therapies” (2005a, p. 155). This premise suggests that effective practice requires responsiveness to the situation and the learner in order to be effective. “In this sense, a holistic “curriculum” is not a pre-

established plan that the teacher brings to the classroom. Curriculum emerges from the interactions between teacher, student and world” (R. Miller, 2006, p. 33). It would seem that holistic education must stem from a similar mind-set to holistic health care; no one technique or unique pedagogy is sufficient to define what is involved, but rather it is an approach where educators must choose from a collection of theories of learning, and use these to match their practice to the needs they see before them at any given moment (Taylor et al., 2008).

Put another way, holistic education is not a method but a paradigm, a way of seeing the world of learning, a group of principles that may be applied in different ways in response to the moment or situation (R. Miller, 1992 cited in Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Thus, teachers who seek to utilise a holistic pedagogy within their classrooms must have a toolbox of holistic practices and principles from which they can select the appropriate tool for a particular student or group in the learning situations in which they find themselves.

# Chapter 3:

## Growth of an Educational 'Ideal'

### Introduction

Holism, as a philosophy, worldview or way of thinking has had fluctuating levels of influence on Western civilisation throughout history. As has been demonstrated, these influences have made inroads into the realms of medicine, justice and education in current times. In order to understand holistic education and the role it may play in 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching and learning, it is necessary to look at its development through history and the various forms that it has taken, particularly in the Western World.

### History and Development of Holistic Education

As far as modern, western holistic education is concerned, researchers appear to agree that, although some elements clearly stem from the ancient Greek philosophers, particularly in the use of metacognition to encourage students to find answers to their own questions, more formal practices have their roots in the teachings and educational theories of the romanticist dissidents of the 'Enlightenment' period of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Forbes, 2012; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Taylor et al., 2008). Theorists such as Jean Jacque Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Bronson Alcott, Leo Tolstoy and Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel feature in discussions concerning education in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, while names such as A. S. Neill, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Dr Bruce Copley, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are found in literature that focuses on holistic education in the twentieth century (J. P. Miller, 2007; Taylor et al., 2008). This is by no means a definitive list, as many theorists, philosophers and educators have influenced educational thought; these are merely those names that tend to recur in research and literature on holistic education.

### ***The 'Romanticists'***

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), is considered by many scholars, to have been the initiator of a holistic education movement that developed through the 19th and into the early 20th Centuries (Forbes, 2012; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007). His theories on education stemmed initially from his belief that children were born 'good' and therefore needed protecting from what he considered the corrupting effects of civilisation (Forbes, 2012; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Rosenberg, 1990). Another fundamental element of Rousseau's concept of child development and learning was that play was the key to a child's education, and as such should be incorporated within educational settings and also imitated in learning experiences to give the student the most natural forms of learning possible (Forbes, 2012). This concept was fleshed out in his suggestion that new concepts and understandings are best taught by experience, and that the teacher's role is to act as a manipulator to "seduce the child into learning" (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 70) and to thinking that they are in control of the learning rather than the teacher being the authority figure in the classroom (Forbes, 2012). Rousseau considered this type of education a natural approach to child rearing. In 1762, he published 'Emile', in which he described his views on child development and education through the story of an imaginary model child's upbringing (Forbes, 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Rosenberg, 1990). Although education is the key feature in this book, Rousseau suggested that rather than being an educational tool, it was more a vision of his dreams for education (Rosenberg, 1990). He states, for instance, that "[o]ne of the underlying principles of Emile's education is that he be totally unaware that the educational process is going on. He must always be free to do what he wants, when he wants, within the bounds of his capacity to do so" (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 21). Miller (2007) acknowledges the importance of Rousseau's ideas to the holistic education movement that followed, as he suggests that they have been inspirational to many 'alternative' educators since that time.

Following closely on the heels of Rousseau was another Romantic educationalist, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) who set out to improve the lot of poor and orphaned children (Forbes, 2012; J. P. Miller,

2007), and to educate them in such a way that they became ethical and caring adults (Eisler, 2005). He too developed theories of education, many based on ideas from Rousseau's teaching, although unlike Rousseau, he put his own theories into practice as he taught in schools for most of his life (Forbes, 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007). Pestalozzi's theories had three distinct foci – intellectual, moral and physical education (Forbes, 2012) – supplemented by a firm belief that learning within the classroom needed to be in the form of meaningful activities which teachers provided in response to their intuitive understanding of the child's needs (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Pestalozzi is himself recognised as a master of empathy, with an acute ability to adjust his teaching style to match the student's unique learning needs (J. P. Miller, 2007). Forbes (2012) notes that Pestalozzi's overarching belief that 'life educates', a phrase used in his final published work, is the holistic belief for which he is most commonly associated.

Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852) was another important holistic educator, best known as the founder of the Kindergarten movement (Forbes, 2012; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2008), and was also a student of Pestalozzi. Although Froebel worked from the same premise as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, that children are innately good, he did not view civilisation as the source of evil, but rather emphasised the need for connection with one's family, community and beyond, in order to develop fully as a person (Forbes, 2012; Froebel, 1885) - a principle which is found in many modern forms of holistic education. Froebel also mirrored his predecessors' thesis that learning is most effective when it is experiential, taking this concept one step further in his kindergartens, as he suggested that all learning should be in the form of play, and that, where necessary, play should be fostered by those who facilitate the learning environment (Forbes, 2012; Froebel, 1885). Again, this model is evident in a number of areas of education in New Zealand today, especially in childhood settings such as Kindergarten and Playcentre, and is clearly recognised in *Te Whariki*, The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (MoE, 1996).

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), recognised by historians as a transcendentalist, spent much of his life in the field of education, and was

particularly interested in the soul and spiritual development of the children he worked with (J. P. Miller, 2007, 2010). Ingman (2011) concurs with this assessment, noting that “Alcott, perhaps the most outspoken American transcendentalist on the topic of education, recognised the importance of both lived experience and spirituality as central tenets of education” (p. 149). Along with his contemporary transcendentalists, Thoreau and Emerson in particular, Alcott believed that education occurred as a result of the learners’ interaction with learning resources rather than the information itself (Ingman, 2011). J. P. Miller (2010) considers Alcott to be the pioneer of spiritual education, the main aim of which was, Alcott believed, to assist his students in their quest to know themselves by drawing out their ‘inner spiritual core’ through Socratic type questioning.

In 1834 Alcott, with the assistance of his friend, Elizabeth Peabody, opened a school in Boston, most students of which were from well-known Boston families. Here he was able to put his teaching philosophies into practice (Felton, 1969; J. P. Miller, 2007). Alcott used discussion as a form of education, drawing ideas and opinions out of the students, in much the same way as Socrates had (Felton, 1969; J. P. Miller, 2010). These discussions with his students comprised an important part of Alcott’s pedagogy, and included the topic of spirituality which was unusual at that time in history as it was not usual for an adult to discuss religion with a child (Felton, 1969). Another key feature of Alcott’s pedagogy was that he taught reading and writing together as one ‘subject’. Contrary to popular contemporary practice, Alcott’s students were taught to print letters before they learnt written script due to the dexterity needed in terms of hand-eye coordination to form script, which he believed younger children did not possess, and were encouraged to write down their own thoughts and ideas rather than the more common practice of copying from a book (J. P. Miller, 2007). This experiential, whole language technique is one that has been emulated by later holistic educators including Steiner, Montessori and New Zealand’s own Sylvia Ashton-Warner (J. P. Miller, 2010). Sadly Alcott’s ideals, though admired at first, became the downfall of the school he founded, as a discussion about the birthing process and his inclusion of the child of a mixed race family in his school turned the parents of his students

against him, and the school closed in 1937 (Felton, 1969). Despite the failure of his school, Alcott's belief that "all teaching and learning should be connected to the spiritual centre, the soul" (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 77) remains a central tenet of spiritual education today.

It is worth noting at this point that, although modern researchers recognise these theorists and educators as being holistic in their thinking and developing holistic education practices, they themselves would not have described their education systems in such terms, as the idiom was not yet in use. Other thinkers and philosophers who lived and worked in the years prior to the 20th Century have also been acknowledged by researchers for their influence on the holistic education movement in later years, although many of these have not been educationalists themselves. These include William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) – theologian and utilitarianist; Rufus Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) – essayist, poet and transcendentalist; Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) – poet, historian and transcendentalist; Francis W. Parker (1837-1902) – progressive educationalist and friend of John Dewey; and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) – educator and novelist, all of whom included within their philosophy of education an interest in the spiritual aspect of the child (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Taylor et al., 2008).

### ***John Dewey and Progressive Schools (Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century)***

John Dewey (1859-1952), has been considered by many 'a man ahead of his time' in terms of his ideas surrounding education. He is recognised, amongst other things, as the founder of the Progressive Education Movement that arose in the 1890s as a reaction to the inequity in the official education system of the time (Cremin, 1959; Gavin Loss & Loss, 2002; Kimpton, 1959). The movement itself, however, was not formalised until after the end of World War One, as the Progressive Education Association, in 1919 (Cremin, 1959). Despite the role his ideas played in the formation of progress education networks and his support of the movement as a whole, Dewey became one of the greatest critics of 'progressive' education practices that were taken to excess in some of these schools. He was particularly scathing of those institutions where adult guidance and organisation were in limited supply, as he believed that these

were necessary foundations for learning in order to help students develop independence in learning and life (Cremin, 1959; *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools : Essays by John Dewey*, 2010).

In many respects, the key to Dewey's view of education was a child-centred approach to teaching and learning, which focused on the whole of the child rather than academic aspects alone and the use of experiences that were relevant to the child, as the basis for learning (Forbes, 2012; Rennie et al., 2012; *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools : Essays by John Dewey*, 2010). It was these and other innovative ideals that became foundational principles of the progressive education movement (Forbes, 2012; Seaman & Nelsen, 2011). The main aim of these child-centred concepts was to create a 'familiar' learning environment and to provide experiences in the classroom that were as close to the child's everyday life occurrences as possible. Dewey believed that such a correspondence was necessary for a child to be able to make sense of his or her learning and to develop the skills of comparison and judgement that were necessary to be successful in later life (Cremin, 1959). A crucial element in creating such an environment was the way the physical learning space was arranged. Dewey believed that this space should not be set up in a defined, immovable layout, but rather should be flexible enough to be re-organised to suit each unique learning experience. Further to this premise, 'lessons' would even take place outside the classroom at times, in order to facilitate authentic connections between the learning experiences and the environment in which they naturally occurred (Beane, 1997; Forbes, 2012; *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools : Essays by John Dewey*, 2010; Waks, 2013). Forbes (2012) notes that many modern holistic schools claim this idea of flexible learning spaces as a key inspiration for the way they operate.

Another significant aspect of Dewey's philosophy which was evident in the progressive school movement, was the importance of building community within the school environment. The aim of this custom was to create genuine experiences and roles for the students such as one would find in a working environment, and to facilitate the development of democracy within the classroom and beyond (Beane, 1997; Seaman & Nelsen, 2011; Sloane, 2005). In Dewey's view, communication was

fundamental to creating these communities as it was a vehicle for co-operation and the development of partnerships between learners (Taggart, 2001) through the sharing of experiences that would produce mutual understanding (Saito, 2000). Furthermore, partnerships between children and adults was considered crucial in Dewey's progressive classrooms, as it was this relationship that facilitated the development of a child's personality and instilled in them the accepted customs of the society within which they lived (Saito, 2000). A further benefit of this child-adult relationship was the opportunity it provided for the adult's personal growth as he or she learned with the child (Saito, 2000; Waks, 2013). For Dewey, interpersonal communication was a key to human growth, which, he believed, would lead to maturity – the desired outcome of education and learning (Saito, 2000).

Dewey's ideas about education were influential in New Zealand, especially in the middle decades of the 20th Century, as interest in the progressive education movement grew, and the *New Education Fellowship* was established in this country in the 1930s (Abbiss, 1998). In 1937, a *New Education Fellowship* conference was organised where many of Dewey's philosophies, such as child-centred education, were espoused and influenced many, including Beeby, who would later become the Director of Education in New Zealand (Abbiss, 1998). Beeby (1992, cited in Abbiss, 1998) saw the conference as being "a new venture that was to mark a turning-point in New Zealand education" (p.89).

Although Dewey's pedagogy was child-centred at its core, he did not negate the need for a coherent curriculum, which provided experiences for the students, and opportunities for inquiry by the students, through which they made sense of new knowledge and related it to what they already knew (*Teachers, Leaders, and Schools : Essays by John Dewey*, 2010). Kimpton (1959) explains this concept of curriculum further as a process by which students are engaged in problem solving through challenging experiences, that promote thinking and give value to the learning that is occurring. This is one of Dewey's ideas that was misconstrued by some liberal educators, resulting in experiences that took the form of entertainment and amusement, rather than genuine learning opportunities (Kimpton, 1959), much to Dewey's disgust. Perhaps it was excesses such as these that

hindered 'progressive education' from truly becoming part of mainstream tradition, as although it influenced American schooling at least for some time, Dewey himself recognised that by the 1950s it had become, in many cases, simply a set of rules to be applied or added to already established classroom practices (Cremin, 1959).

### ***A. S. Neill and Summerhill School***

A contemporary of Dewey's, A.S. Neill put his own spin on holistic education as he formed Summerhill School, first in Germany in 1921 and then moved to England, where learners were truly the centre of everything that occurred – to the extreme that students themselves chose whether or not they would attend classes (Cassebaum, 2003; J. P. Miller, 2007). Another key element of Summerhill school was the inclusion of democracy, allowing student input in the decision making process, that created a somewhat self-governing environment (J. P. Miller, 2007; Stronach & Piper, 2008). However, although many decisions about the running of the school were made in community meetings, where each individual, whether child or adult, had one equal vote (Stronach & Piper, 2008), Neill recognised that unlimited freedom was somewhat of an oxymoron, as it was necessary for there to be some external constraints to ensure the safety and health of all (Darling, 1992; J. P. Miller, 2007). Anne Cassebaum commented, after a visit to Summerhill School, that this freedom "means being responsible for yourself" (2003, p. 578), thus indicating that freedom comes with definite responsibilities to self and the community of which one is a part (Darling, 1992). Miller (2007) further asserts that the most important element of Summerhill School, from Neill's point of view, was the emotional wellbeing of the students, and this was facilitated by Neill's own care of his students, and the sense of community that was developed within the democratic school environment that he had created.

### ***Montessori and Steiner***

Two other personalities whose ideas figure prominently in discussions around the development of holistic educational practices, particularly during the early to mid-20th Century, are medical practitioner, and one-time student of John Dewey, Maria Montessori (Thayer-Bacon,

2012), and Rudolf Steiner, philosopher and founder of the Waldorf School movement shortly after the end of World War One (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Though these two theorists came from diverse backgrounds, and approached holistic education from different perspectives, one significant similarity that made their theories stand out from other educators of their time, was their interest in their students' spiritual development and wellbeing (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). This factor was more obvious in Steiner's philosophy than Montessori's as he linked spirituality with creativity, and imbued much of the curriculum with his own religious beliefs – anthroposophy, which included the concept of reincarnation (Nordlund, 2013). Although not as visible as it was for Steiner, spirituality was indeed an underpinning philosophy for Maria Montessori as she believed in a divine life force that supported the mental, physical and spiritual aspects of each human being, and that a key role of the educator was to create a clear path for the natural development of each child's "spiritual embryo" (Mahmoudi et al., 2012, p. 180).

Montessori is perhaps best known for her work with younger children, her employment of child-sized furniture and her use of 'hands-on' didactic tools for learning, which she first used successfully with disabled and then very young children. Montessori's theorising that this method should also work with able students of all ages led to the creation of schools based on her methods, and to the birth of the Montessori Education system (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). One facet of Montessori schooling that is often criticised – though this is most likely out of a lack of true understanding – is the freedom given the students to choose their learning activities. However, similar to the freedom of A.S. Neill, this freedom was afforded within parameters, such as limiting the number of activities available for students to pursue at one time, and requiring that those available had to be introduced by the teacher before they could be used (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). Montessori asserted that if students were given a suitable environment and the time to follow their interests to completion, within these constraints, they would learn self-control and independence alongside the knowledge and skills needed to progress in their learning. This learning took the form of play – termed 'work' by Montessori, to deflect from outside suggestions that students spent all

their time playing and not learning – using the didactic tools developed and supplied for that purpose (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). Mahmoudi et al. (2012) suggest that for Maria Montessori keeping the student's intelligence alive was paramount, and that therefore, rather than forcing them to learn specific items of knowledge or skills, the key to effective learning was to provide a nurturing environment where their intelligence could naturally evolve.

By contrast, Steiner's Waldorf schools were, and still are, known for their focus on the child's stages of development broadly following a pattern similar to that later defined by Piaget, and the use of art, music and rhythm to facilitate learning (Nordlund, 2013; Ogletree, 1974; Prescott, 1999). Whereas learning is predominantly student directed in the Montessori system, a much more structured approach is undertaken in Waldorf schools where lessons tend to be focused on one subject or integrated theme over an extended period of time, using a hands-on and artistic medium of instruction (Nordlund, 2013; Ogletree, 1974). Although there is structure involved in Steiner's version of education, it is evident that the child remains the centre of the learning and that imagination through play is encouraged as a tool for developing the each child's unique creativity (Nordlund, 2013). Researchers such as Ogletree (1974) and Prescott (1999) agree that there is one significant philosophy that underpins Steiner's Waldorf education system: the importance of the relationship between the teacher and his or her students. In this system, under normal circumstances students have one teacher for their entire primary or elementary school years, and a relationship is developed between the teacher and his or her student that is almost that of a third parent (Ogletree, 1974). This teacher takes on responsibility for the student's academic success and development as a person throughout the time they are working together (Prescott, 1999). Such a long-term personal connection between student and teacher is significantly different from the student-teacher relationships evident in mainstream western education.

One distinct common denominator of the holistic education inspired by Montessori and Steiner, which mirrors shades of Dewey's educational philosophy, is the use of hands-on, kinaesthetic activities as a vehicle that helps students make sense of their learning (Mahmoudi et al., 2012;

Ogletree, 1974; Thayer-Bacon, 2012). These take different forms – didactic tools in the Montessori system, and arts and crafts in the Steiner system – yet serve the same purpose of providing an authentic tool for learning, that engages and motivates the students and provides a platform on which to build understanding and skills. These two movements also stand out as unique from other historical holistic education factions, as both have remained active and visible throughout the world of education into the 21st Century (J. P. Miller, 2007) .

### ***Sylvia Ashton-Warner (A New Zealand Approach)***

In New Zealand education circles one name stands out as a visionary and holistic educator, particularly in the area of literacy, whose works span the middle decades of the 20th Century, and who is recognised both here and in international circles; Sylvia Ashton-Warner (Middleton, 2008, 2012; Thompson, 2000). Ashton-Warner worked in what were first termed ‘native schools’ and then ‘Māori schools’, which were designed to “assimilate Māori into Pakeha (British) culture” (Middleton, 2012, p. 274) in the late 1930s through to the early 1950s. In this setting, she developed a system of literacy education that made the written English word more accessible to the Māori students she taught (Thompson, 2000).

Literacy was accessed in Ashton-Warner’s classrooms through what she termed ‘key words’ that were particularly pertinent to the children with whom she was working, and were already part of their imagination, life and vocabulary. The words were written on cards that the children used as aids as they practised reading and writing them (J. P. Miller, 2007). Middleton (2012) notes that amongst other obvious key words such as “mummy” and “daddy”, two words that Ashton-Warner believed were keys for all children were “ghost” and “kiss” as she determined that these two words were ‘captions’ for Freud’s two great inner drives – fear and sex. Other key words varied from child to child, as the inclusion of a word was dependent on the level of emotion it carried for the child, not the length or difficulty of spelling it (Thompson, 2000).

Once students had a ‘bank’ of key word cards they began what Ashton-Warner termed ‘organic writing’, which she also described as

captions of their inner world, although no longer in simple word form, these were now in sentence or story form (J. P. Miller, 2007). Such sentences and stories were then illustrated, and made into readers for the children, so that the medium of instruction for reading also came out of their own words and understanding of the world (J. P. Miller, 2007) thus providing a stepping stone of understanding that created a scaffold for these students to understand the reading process and enabling them to move successfully onto the commercial readers of the day (Thompson, 2000).

Such a process, Middleton (2008) notes, was a forerunner to the whole language and language experience approaches for teaching literacy that have been used in New Zealand classrooms in the latter years of the 20th Century. Even mathematics in Ashton-Warner's classrooms was organic and holistic in nature as she revealed links for her students between the natural world and the world of numbers, and often took the lessons outside so as to make use of the resources available in the world of nature (J. P. Miller, 2007). As a final comment on Sylvia Ashton-Warner's contribution to holistic learning, Thompson (2000) states that:

Perhaps the most important of Ashton-Warner's accomplishments was to personalise literacy education, and, just as important, she did so in New Zealand's early bicultural educational context. She accomplished this by legitimizing the role of emotion-both in the teacher's teaching and in the learner's learning. Reaching into the mind of the child through personal communication, she was able to identify the child's feelings, interests, and knowledge upon which to build literacy learning. (p. 95)

### ***Edwyn Richardson (Another New Zealand Approach)***

Ashton Warner was not the only New Zealand educator experimenting with holistic practices in the 1950s. In Oruaiti School, Northland, Edwyn Richardson (2012) was providing his students with real life learning experiences mostly integrated with the arts. His book *In the Early Worlds* (E. Richardson, 2012), originally published in 1964, gives

many examples of the personal experiences he offered his students that helped “create creativity, an awareness of their surroundings, and a sincere appreciation for beauty and art” (Benders, 1971, p. 487).

One of the key elements of Richardson’s (2012) classroom was that students were allowed to continue with a piece of work for extended periods of time, until they were intensely satisfied with the finished product and had a sense of completion. Particularly in writing, this process allowed students to rework their pieces multiple times if necessary. The process was enhanced as students shared their writing with their peers, who would then dramatise the story or poem and critique the final product (E. Richardson, 2012). Even writing was grounded in real-life, as students wrote about their home-life or the experiences provided by their teacher.

Most importantly, Richardson’s (2012) practice centred around a belief in the innate creativity of children, and a desire to see this developed through their educational experiences. A large portion of the narrative in *In the Early World* revolves around the discovery of clay in the surrounding country-side, experimentation by Richardson and his students to develop usable modelling clay, and the pottery works they then created. Neither teacher nor students were pottery experts, and so they learnt alongside one another. The learning involved in this process was authentic, followed the students’ individual interests, strengths and competencies, and integrated learning across many different areas (E. Richardson, 2012). Phillips (2012) notes that Richardson’s creative learning experiences exemplified the child-centred approach being advocated by other pioneers such as Ashton-Warner and Beeby, and stands in contrast to modern practices where students are required to “state goals and are evaluated through criteria and standards that conform to ...expectations dissected from the forms and structures of adult thinking” (Phillips, 2012, p. viii).

### ***The Latter Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

Although interest in holistic forms of education had waxed and waned during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, with differing pedagogical foci taking precedence at different times, the term itself was not used to describe these theories and practices until around 1979 (R. Miller, 2005b).

Through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, holistic teaching and learning continued to waver in popularity as the world underwent numerous changes – the Space Age that began in the late 1950s, changes in political movements and powers throughout the world, the social upheavals of the 1960s and 70s and the development of computer technologies and the Internet, especially in the final two decades of the century.

There is some suggestion that holistic education as a movement arose from the social and counter-cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 70s, as a reaction to the narrow focus of conventional schools of the time (Kesson, 2011; R. Miller, 2005b, 2010) although this is not universally agreed upon and potentially ignores the contributions of earlier innovative educators. In education, the 1960s saw the development of what John Miller describes as a precursor to 21<sup>st</sup> Century holistic education in the form of George Brown's confluent education. This form of schooling sought to create connections between the learner's self and the subject being studied, between one subject and another, and between the subject and community (J. P. Miller, 2007), and to "connect the cognitive and affective domains" (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 145) within the learner. The process itself provided authentic links between different subject areas within single learning experiences. Despite Browne's efforts, holistic learning at the time struggled to find a place in the education world as resistance to Dewey's progressive education movement during the 1950s had once again focussed education on individual disciplines and curriculum areas (Beane, 1997).

Holistic education movements in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had, on the whole, been outside mainstream education in private schools, but in America at least, this began to change in the 1970s with mainstream experiments in Open Education. J. P. Miller (2007) observed that: "open education was an attempt to implement a more child-centred approach in schools through a variety of techniques such as centres of interest, classrooms without walls, team teaching, individualized instruction, and more choices for learners" (p. 79).

In New Zealand, a movement that included some of the elements of open education – open plan classrooms – became popularised in the 1970s

and early 80s as teachers sought to work collaboratively and to have more flexibility in the way they used their classroom spaces. Although teaching in some open plan classrooms continued to follow traditional methods, many included more holistic practices as the focus changed from the traditional 'chalk and talk' pedagogy of earlier decades to a more 'child-centred' style of teaching and learning, (Cameron, 1986; Shield, Greenland, & Dockrell, 2010).

Open plan classrooms also became popular in other Western countries, including Australia, England and the United States from the 1960s through to the early 1980s, despite resistance from some quarters. Opposition included concerns about lack of adequate training for teachers (Rodwell, 1998), the high noise levels and difficulties created by large groups of children in single rooms, (McDonald, 1997 cited in Hickey & Forbes, 2011) disagreement about what open education actually meant, and by association, how effective learning would be in open-plan environments (Rodwell, 1998). These concerns, along with political pressure in the 1980s to return to more traditional values in education, led to the eventual demise of the open education movement and many open plan classrooms (Shield et al., 2010).

Thus, although open-plan schools and classrooms still existed beyond the mid-1980s, many were restructured to recreate single unit classrooms and return to the more linear-cell format that existed before their inception (J. P. Miller, 2007; Rodwell, 1998; Shield et al., 2010). However, despite political pressure and physical changes to classrooms, one legacy of the open school movement that has endured is the increased voice of the student and diminished authoritarian role of the teacher, as a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning has remained (J. P. Miller, 2007).

In 1985, David Meier wrote about the changing world of education, that he believed was moving from a linear or industrial, assembly line style of learning to what he considered a geodesic or new age worldview, where learning was not isolated to one subject or discipline at a time, but where there were many connections from one piece of learning or subject area to another that could be utilised to enhance overall learning experiences. No longer was uniformity the aim of education, he suggested, but rather

teaching must become responsive to and appropriate for learners with different needs, backgrounds and learning styles (Meier, 1985). This new age learning was clearly holistic at its heart, as it was primarily focused on wholeness, and saw learning as beginning with a whole and diverging from there into varying parts (Meier, 1985; Taylor et al., 2008). Meier (1985) saw a move to a geodesic/new age form of education as a paradigm shift in the way teaching and learning was undertaken.

Ron Miller (2005b) claims that the holistic education movement did not spread significantly until the late 1980s and credits the increase in its scope and popularity to the publication in 1988 of John P. Miller's book, '*The Holistic Curriculum*' and his own founding of a journal in the United States called '*Holistic Education Review*'. This is not the only contribution that John Miller and Ron Miller have made to the world of holistic education, as the former also created a teacher's guide to integrated studies in collaboration with J. R. Bruce Cassie and Susan Drake that was published in 1990 and he has continued to research and write on the topic since that time (J. P. Miller, Cassie, & Drake, 1990). The latter has also written extensively on the subject, including a book titled '*What are Schools for? Holistic Education in American Culture*' (J. P. Miller, 2007) and he maintains a website that addresses the issue of holism in education, [www.pathsoflearning.net](http://www.pathsoflearning.net).

Furthermore, Miller (2005b) recognised that although this movement remained somewhat marginalised at the end of the 20th Century it has been the subject of an increasing number of articles, dissertations and books, and the topic of a few teacher training programmes and conferences in the closing decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This increased activity provides some hope for those who advocate holistic education; their philosophies and pedagogies may yet become part of mainstream education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Chapter 4:

# Holistic Education in the New Millennium

### Introduction

As the 21st Century has progressed through its first decade, change has continued to escalate as the world has progressed from the industrial age to what is now considered the information age (Feldner, 2000; Sutherland, Robertson, & John, 2004), where the world has become one great global community (Rennie et al., 2012). Rennie et al. (2012) note that:

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly significant that we live in a connected world. The era of social networking via hand-held devices makes a difference to how students communicate with each other, both in terms of content and how language is used.

(p. 13)

And as a result it has been necessary for education to adapt in order to keep up with the ever changing technologies, access to information and the world where these students are growing up. Thus, the theories that underpin teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must be relevant to today's world, and the practices employed by teachers must engage students and enable them to direct their own learning (Brodhagen, 2007). Hence both holistic educational theory and the practices that accompany them must be considered when examining their relevance for today's classrooms.

With a trend towards globalisation and its associated access to information has come an increased call for individualised education programmes for students that allow them to follow individual pathways through the use of information technology. Researchers have noted that students of today are highly engaged when using information technology and as a result are able to continue exploration of questions that interest them for long periods of time, both at school and at home (Sutherland et al., 2004). As a result, these students are empowered to educate themselves

as they are motivated by the knowledge that they are finding answers to their own questions rather than having arbitrary ones imposed on them by their teacher or the system (Brodhagen, 2007).

In this way, the technology that opens the door to the information world of the Internet serves as a pathway to holistic learning that is truly student-led as it fosters their desire to ask questions and find answers. Where students are encouraged to follow their own interests, concerns or questions in ways that make meaningful connections to what they already know, they see their learning within real contexts and, as constructivist learning theorists suggest, they are then able to use these connections to effectively internalise their learning (Beane, 1997). Thus, although many holistic teaching and learning practices from previous historical periods remain relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner, the addition of information technology must become an integral part of a contemporary holistic approach.

## **Educating the Whole Child**

When searching for material on the subject of holistic learning, one phrase that appears with great regularity is 'educating the whole child' (Forbes, 2012). Hal Nelson (2009) uses decidedly holistic rhetoric when describing whole child education as he affirms the need for teachers to consider the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of students, suggesting that these can be more effectively catered for in programmes where the arts are given prominence than in those where academic subjects take precedence.

Ken Robinson (2011), a somewhat outspoken critic of current education practices throughout the world, agrees with Nelson's analysis, arguing that today's "systems of mass education are built on two pillars. The first is economic... The second is intellectual" (Robinson, 2011, p. 49). He suggests that many of the ideas concerning the labour market, on which the economic foundation is based, are now "hopelessly out of date" (Robinson, 2011, p. 49). Similarly the intellectual pillar focuses on a narrow view of

intelligence and ignores other important abilities, particularly those used for innovation and creativity (Robinson, 2011) which need to be developed so students are empowered to meet their full potential as people.

Parents, too, see the value in educating the whole child, not simply their intellect, suggests Molly McCloskey, as for them the aim of education is that “each student becomes academically, socially, and emotionally well-rounded (2011, p. 80). Parental support is important, McCloskey (2011) argues, noting that strong partnerships between teachers and other primary influences in students’ lives, most especially their families, exert a powerful, positive influence on their learning.

Students themselves are important partners in whole child education, and in order to facilitate this role, it is necessary for them to understand their inherent value, not in terms of their academic prowess, but simply in terms of who they are as a person. This will occur in an environment where affirmation and acceptance is experienced by all students (Wing Han Lamb, 2001). Lamb adds that this has positive educational implications, as:

...the affirmation and joy experienced at this level not only supplies the experience of internal harmony, but it also ushers in genuine creativity, because such a person is freed from instrumentality and the need to please another in order to establish her own worth. (Wing Han Lamb, 2001, p. 214)

One example of a successful whole child teacher is Alex Robinson, school band and orchestra director at Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Virginia, who, at the time of writing had recently been nominated for ‘teacher of the year’ by students, parents and teachers at his school (Arlington, 2014). The key aspects of Robinson’s teaching that have made a difference for his students, and that fit the whole child education ‘profile’ are that he focuses on the students as people, not simply as potential musicians (Sussman, 2010). Robinson describes what he does in his own words: “My job is not to teach kids how to become musicians, but to teach them to appreciate music and understand how it fits into society” (cited in Sussman, 2010, p. 32). Robinson also notes that his teaching goes beyond music to real life skills such as punctuality and respect, which he requires

from all his students and practices himself, as it is these that students will carry over into their adult lives, whether they continue as musicians or not (Sussman, 2010).

The lesson to be learnt from Robinson and other exceptional whole child teachers is that successful whole child education is not so much about teaching techniques, it is rather about the relationship between the teacher and the student. It is about providing students with a supportive environment, and opportunities to feel good about themselves for who they are and what they can accomplish across the many domains of learning, both academic and creative, that are available to them (McCloskey, 2011; Nelson, 2009; Wing Han Lamb, 2001).

## **Current Theorists and Theories**

Many researchers who were prominent in holistic learning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century have remained active in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. John and Ron Miller have continued to refine their research and thinking, and to publish material that is helpful to educators interested in holistic education. Other prominent researchers of this century include Yoshihara Nakagawa (2011) of Ritsumeikan University in Japan, Leonie Rennie, Grady Venville and John Wallace (2012) who have focused on integrated curriculum, and Christopher Uhl and Dana Stuchul (2011) who have written of '*The Promise of a New Education Culture*'.

John Miller released a second edition of "*The Holistic Curriculum*" in 2007 in which he notes that although holistic thinking seemed to be making inroads into mainstream education in the 1980s and 1990s, the new century has seen a swing away from the holistic ideals of developing well rounded human beings. The focus of education has instead shifted towards testing and preparing students to function in today's global economy (J. P. Miller, 2007). Despite this shift in Western education, Miller notes that holistic education has spread to other parts of the world, particularly Asia, and that holistic educators, such as Nakagawa (2011) have "initiated grassroots movements in their own countries" (2007, p. vii).

John Miller (2007) highlights the important role of the teacher in modern holistic learning environments, pointing out that for learning to be successful, the teacher's presence is of paramount importance. He notes that when most adults remember teachers who impacted their lives, it was their presence rather than their teaching techniques that made them memorable. Caring, another facet of this presence that Miller speaks of, is echoed by Uhl and Stuchul (2011) who write of the need for teachers to move beyond their prejudices to see the potential in each and every child and to create classrooms where kinship amongst students and between the teacher and students is cultivated. The attachments formed through such caring echo Ron Miller's concept of connectedness as a key to holistic learning (R. Miller, 2006).

Ron Miller echoes many of John Miller's sentiments as he continues to hold a spotlight on holistic practices around the world, and is recognised by other researchers in the field as one of the key leaders of the current movement (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Like John Miller, he has kept his research current, with large quantities of his writing made available to the public through his website, *Paths of Learning* (2014). A key focus for Miller is the importance of holistic learning and education as a philosophy or worldview rather than as a method or specific pedagogy (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; R. Miller, 2005a) and this is a point that he emphasises elsewhere. One other theme that Ron Miller continues to promote is spirituality in education. He notes that although holistic education must, by its nature, encompass spirituality, it is not about injecting religion into schooling.

A holistic perspective is not based on doctrine, faith, rituals, prayers, priests or the other formal signs of religious belief. Rather, holism is an intellectual and moral effort to re-discover the primal mystery that gives rise to the religious impulse in humanity. (R. Miller, 2005a, p. 5)

One final point raised by Miller that is significant for education in this century is that, although holistic education is not going to change the nature of schooling and the world on its own, "the rise of a holistic education movement over the past 25 years is a positive sign that a growing number of people in many parts of the world are embracing a worldview that

challenges modernity at its roots” (R. Miller, 2005a). Thus, holistic education has the potential to become part of the solution to the things that in his view are ‘wrong’ with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. Rennie et al. (2012) agree with this sentiment contending that the delivery of “a curriculum that achieves both balance and connection [will provide] students with powerful knowledge to negotiate and improve the global community in which they live” (p. 120).

### ***Multiple Intelligences***

Another modern educational theory that has holistic undertones is Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory, based around the premise that learning must be designed with each individual in mind, as different individuals function more successfully in some domains than in others (Taylor et al., 2008). These intelligences, of which there are seven or eight (perhaps even nine, depending on which author one is reading), include visual-spatial, logical-mathematic, linguistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, (sometimes) naturalist and (rarely) existentialist or moralist intelligences, each of which works within an individual in conjunction with others, at different levels of strength (Gouws, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011; Taylor et al., 2008).

There is some disagreement amongst educational researchers about the value of the multiple intelligences. Muijs and Reynolds (2011) note that although widely integrated into some education practices, the theory and some of the areas within it are difficult to assess. J. P. Miller (2007) expresses concern that separating intelligence into parts is reductionist at heart and therefore contrary to a holistic approach; and (Fox, 2005) suggests that some of the so-called intelligences are more logically considered part of one’s personality.

Despite these negative assessments, other authors see great potential for the use of Gardner’s theory, as it provides a platform for teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students (Taylor et al., 2008), by providing individual learning experiences each can relate to most easily. As such, the teacher can “match teaching to the ways learners learn, to encourage learners to stretch their abilities and develop their intelligences

as fully as possible, and to honour and celebrate diversity” (Gouws, 2007, p. 64).

Recognising that students have different areas of strength and process information in different ways, lends credence to the provision of multiple activities to support specific learning and for students to self-select the activity that works best for them or even to choose their own, as well as for cooperative work, where students’ strengths can complement one another’s in order to raise the level of learning and standard of outcomes (Taylor et al., 2008). In other words, the multiple intelligences allow teachers to use their knowledge of the children to adapt learning and assessment so that it is a ‘best fit’ for each individual, and to give them the freedom to choose how they will learn and how they will present their work (Gouws, 2007). This appears to be truly empowering for the students.

### ***Constructivism***

Interestingly, there are correlations between these holistic underpinnings for learning and more ‘traditional’ constructivist learning theories that tend to be a predominate form of academic instruction in mainstream schools. Constructivism is based on the premise that “learners actually construct knowledge for themselves, rather than coming from the teacher and being ‘absorbed’ by the pupil” (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, pp. 78-79). As is the case in holistic practices, the children are recognised as “active participants in the learning process” (Hughes, 2008, p. 59). Thus, the teacher’s job is to provide activities and experiences that actively engage the learner and enable them to make their own links to their prior knowledge, in the process constructing new meaning and understandings (James, 2006). Perhaps constructivism too, has holistic foundations.

Child development theorists are often cited by educators when seeking to justify the implementation of constructivist practices in their classrooms. Those most often cited by researchers include Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Hughes, 2008; Lourenço, 2012; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Piaget’s (1896-1980) constructivist cognitive theory of development and learning was developed by observing children and how they solve problems (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). His purpose was to determine how

children think, and the resulting recognition of 'stages of cognitive development' (Hughes, 2008) and schemata (ways of making sense of the world) focused on children making links between the known and the new to create new understandings and skills. (Taylor et al., 2008). Muijs and Reynolds (2011) note that although Piaget's theory has been influential in education, there are weaknesses in the theory, particularly that the stages of development are too rigid, underestimate what children can achieve and don't allow for individual children's differences (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011).

Vygotsky's (1896-1934) sociocultural theory took children's interactions with others into account, suggesting that these played important roles in development, especially in the area of language acquisition and understanding (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Vygotsky's term "zone of proximal development" described the difference between what a child could achieve independently and what they could achieve with the help of an adult or more able peer (Bozhovich, 2009). This assistance was termed *scaffolding*, and is often used in education today, as teachers seek to 'scaffold' individuals, groups or the class as they grapple with new learning (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Muijs and Reynolds (2011) claim that it is Vygotsky's theory that has "strongly influenced the so-called constructivist theories that have followed since then, and has influenced classroom practice" (p. 26). It is interesting to note that although Piaget and Vygotsky's theories are said to be prime examples of what underpins today's reductionist-tending classroom practices, Lourenço (2012) points out that in reality both the theories were non-reductionist in essence. If such is the case, these theories could also be included within a holistic worldview, as both respond to the learner's world and needs.

## **Benefits of Holistic Education**

Of course, a discussion of the history and practices of holistic education will be of little value unless there are identifiable advantages for the students. Although there are those who assert that holistic learning is difficult to implement and even suggest that it is counter-productive to students' learning (to be discussed later), most literature and research

gives a strong message that the potential benefits for students far outweigh any negatives associated with the approach.

One of the most evident benefits of holistic learning, found in a wealth of literature on the matter, is that of increased student motivation. J. P. Miller (2007) cites a number of examples of children being excited, and thus motivated, by 'doing' and interacting with the real world. Uhl and Stuchul (2011) point out that in traditional schooling many students believe that learning is hard work and that when forced to learn something that is not of interest or has any clear purpose to them, true learning does not occur. These authors compare 'real world learning' to that of very young children who learn to walk and talk out of a desire to interact with those around them. Thus, they assert, "the same is true of all significant learning. It is the energy of desire that drives the learning process" (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011, p. 10).

Peterson (2007) claims that children's experiences should be the basis of learning, so that it is relevant to their lives, their families and their communities. Thus, in the holistic classroom, where the students' own issues and concerns become the platform for learning (Beane, 1997), a genuine connection is made that provides the desire, mentioned above, that motivates students to pursue answers and solutions (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011). Taylor et al. (2008) see this same principle as using a child's interests as the platform for learning because enthusiasm plus motivation leads to accomplishment. Furthermore, as students address real problems in their learning, they are being equipped to deal with experiences in the real world and are encouraged to develop a habit of learning that will be life-long (Glenn, 2011).

As motivation also leads to action, another positive outcome of holistic learning is that the students become active, critically thinking participants in their learning (Hare, 2006; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Holistic education, suggests Ron Miller, responds to the learner, assisting the process as he or she engages with the world and reflects on the experiences it offers, assimilating and responding to the learning it provides them. It is not controlled by the teacher, but rather facilitates it, allowing the student to

ask their own questions and find answers to them. In essence, it is supportive rather than directive (R. Miller, 2006).

A basic tenet of holistic education is that each student will be accepted as unique, with individual strengths and needs. Acceptance and respect modelled by the teacher, is thus nurtured as it develops in the learner (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Eisler (2005) suggests that this culture of ethical and caring relationships also prepares students to be participants in true democracy.

As noted earlier, holistic education is underpinned by the concept of connectedness (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2005, 2007; J. P. Miller et al., 1990). By contrast Ron Miller suggests that traditional education has eroded the sense of connection to the world that individuals need for their lives to be meaningful and fulfilling, while that holistic approaches work to reclaim that lost sense (2006). Such connections, J. P. Miller et al. (1990) suggest, are relationship based. These relationships are both internal, between types of thinking, their mind, body and soul; and external, as relationships between the individual and their community and the earth, and form the basis for much of the learning that occurs in a holistic learning environment (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011). As a result, a clear benefit of holistic education is that it counters traditional practices where relationships are ignored or even destroyed (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011), and instead helps the learner become aware of and examine the relationships in his or her life, providing the “skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate” (J. P. Miller, 2007).

Mahmoudi et al. (2012) sum up the benefits of holistic learning saying that:

Holistic education is an approach to pedagogy that can meet the needs of all types of learners, that can be a source of fulfilment and gratification for teachers, and that prepares future citizens who will contribute a concern and mindfulness for others, for their communities, and for the planet. (p. 185)

## Addressing Concerns

Holistic learning in its many forms is clearly not completely straightforward however, and is therefore not without its problems or critics. One difficulty highlighted by researchers is that the integrated approach used in many holistic learning environments can become something of a *potpourri* of ideas, where structure may be lacking and knowledge piecemeal. This may result in learning which lacks depth, or where one curriculum area can take precedence over others, thus causing an imbalance in the knowledge and skills covered (W. Baker, 2007; Burton, 2001).

Curriculum integration is the facet of holistic education that seems to have been most criticised of all the holistic practices identified by researchers. Wiggins (2001) agrees with Burton's concerns that though there are many levels of integration, some forms simply use one curriculum area as a servant of another, rather than deep and meaningful learning occurring in both areas (W. Baker, 2007). He notes that this is particularly common where the arts are used to support learning in other curriculum areas, with the arts losing out, and suggests that instead of such a one-sided approach there should be a reciprocal relationship that provides in-depth skill and knowledge acquisition in the arts as well as in the other learning areas involved.

Another worrying issue for some educators is that of vocabulary – the concern being that where the same word has different meanings in diverse learning areas, and when these areas are integrated, confusion may result (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Confusion is also a potential issue for teachers who were trained to teach single subject areas in isolation from one another, and are then asked to work in an integrated or holistic learning environment. This is problematic as these teachers must make a paradigm shift, and intensive professional development is often needed to facilitate such a change in thinking and practice (W. Baker, 2007). All in all, an overriding concern of many who question the use of holistic teaching and learning approaches is that this style of teaching requires a lot of extra work and flexibility by the teachers involved (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011) and depth

of knowledge in each of the curriculum areas being integrated in order to facilitate meaningful connections between them (Hinde, 2005).

Wiggins (2001) has voiced concerns that despite the popularity of holistic learning and curriculum integration there is a lack of evidence that integrated education actually improves learning outcomes for students. There are also concerns that themes of learning that are driven by student interests lack the rigour necessary to ensure educational value and coverage of necessary learning (Beane, 1997). Rennie et al. (2012) cite Hatch's observation that "opponents [to such learning practices] argue that worthwhile knowledge resides in robust understandings of the nature and concepts of disciplines, like history, science and mathematics, and being able to use that knowledge in the ways of the disciplines" (Hatch, 1998 cited in Rennie et al., 2012, p. 13).

Perhaps more troubling to those who oppose holistic learning approaches is the difficulty of formally and/or scientifically evaluating learning in these settings (Taylor et al., 2008). Brodhagen (2007) added that for some students, especially those who are high achievers, the integrated setting and the cooperative learning that is often a part of the process, makes it difficult for them to know if they are doing well, as they too find it challenging to measure success in such learning environments.

Alongside the challenge of effectively assessing students' learning, concerns are raised that it is therefore difficult for management to hold teachers accountable (Taylor et al., 2008). Au and Scheu (1996) note that in the United States, the pressure on teachers to prepare students for standardised tests that are often the only form of assessment being used and that are focused mainly around literacy, discourages them from employing holistic teaching practices as these are more difficult to assess. Tarver (1986) takes this assessment and accountability debate further, stating that "pure holists contend that truly meaningful learning is too elusive to be measured; if that is the case, then there is no scientifically acceptable way to evaluate the approach" (p. 373).

Although these concerns are valid and it is appropriate to question the effectiveness of any teaching and learning practices, those who

advocate holistic learning believe that they have defensible answers for each one.

J. P. Miller (2007) counters arguments concerning teacher accountability, by noting that teachers who employ holistic pedagogy are in fact more accountable than those who are not, as they are accountable first and foremost to their students, to provide the most effective learning experiences possible. These teachers remain accountable to the institutions within which they teach, not to a limiting bureaucracy; rather to act with integrity, to be non-judgemental, to foster a culture of transparency, and to help create a sense of community within the school. Once again the holistic concept of connectedness comes into play here, as accountability for the teacher extends to providing open access to the classroom for members of the wider community (again fostering transparency). Finally, Miller asserts, the holistic teacher is accountable to the planet, the cosmos, to nature itself and to maintaining the balance and connectedness of the natural environment (J. P. Miller, 2007).

Muijs and Reynolds (2011), though not advocates of holistic learning, refute the suggestion that holistic learning is shallow, as they suggest that this type of approach provides greater opportunity for metacognition than traditional learning. Furthermore, they suggest that cross-curricular learning is more realistic than single subject learning as it more closely mimics problem solving in the real world, drawing knowledge and skills from a variety of disciplines in a holistic way (J. P. Miller et al., 1990; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Hargreaves and Moore (2000) undertook a study of curriculum integration and its relevance to classroom practice and found that well planned integrated studies helped students develop knowledge and skills that were of more value in today's world than much traditional learning and that such units "advanced the rigour of classroom learning" (p. 112), thereby acknowledging that teacher knowledge and skill in applying the approach are critical factors.

Rennie et al. (2012) address concerns that there is lack of evidence holistic learning improves student outcomes, citing a number of studies that have considered this very issue. These studies, they suggest, indicate that high quality deep-seated integration led to improved outcomes for the

students, but that as with all learning approaches, this was less obvious where the integration was shallower or less well planned (Rennie et al., 2012).

Although there is validity in the argument that teachers need to be trained in the pedagogy of holistic learning, this should not be a barrier to its implementation as there is a raft of material available including the *Teacher's Guide to Integrated Studies* (J. P. Miller et al., 1990) which provides a step-by-step explanation of the process, a number of other books and articles by John and Ron Miller on the subject, and many more by other authors including Leonie Rennie, Grady Venville and John Wallace, Christopher Uhl and Dana L. Stuchul, and James Beane, whose body of research has provided valuable material for this study. Furthermore, both Montessori Schooling (Thayer-Bacon, 2012) and the Waldorf School movement (Nordlund, 2013) provide training in holistic teaching to their teachers. Hargreaves and Moore (2000) also note that, although planning and implementing such teaching practice is a lot of work of teachers, those who use these methods are quick to point out that the rewards, including their own learning, far outweigh the time and energy expended.

## **Pedagogical Approaches**

The NZCD, released in 2007 by the Ministry of Education, includes a vision for young people who will be, among other things “confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners” (MoE, 2007, p. 8) and adds that its principles “clearly put students at the centre of teaching and learning, asserting that they should experience a curriculum that engages and challenges them, is forward looking and inclusive, and affirms New Zealand’s unique identity” (MoE, 2007, p. 9). These principles are listed under the following headings: High expectations; Treaty of Waitangi; cultural diversity; inclusion; learning to learn; community engagement; coherence; and future focus (MoE, 2007), all of which have a distinctly holistic ‘flavour’ fleshed out by the statements that underpin them. These statements mention concepts such as supporting and empowering all students, recognising and affirming students’ identities, languages, abilities and

talents, encouraging them to reflect on their own learning to become active learners, to connect with their whanau and community and to explore issues focused on the future such as globalisation and sustainability (MoE, 2007). One statement, found under the heading of coherence, sounds almost as if it has come out of a holistic education handbook. It states that “the curriculum offers students a broad education that makes links within and across learning areas, provides for coherent transitions and opens up pathways to further learning” (MoE, 2007).

This curriculum document appears, therefore, to give New Zealand teachers a clear mandate to use holistic approaches in their teaching and learning, as described in this review, to meet the needs of the diverse group of students in their classrooms. To do this effectively, these teachers must be equipped with a toolbox of practices and materials that will support them in their endeavours.

## **The Holistic Learning Toolbox**

In order for a toolbox to be valuable, it is necessary that the tools are applicable to the task at hand. Definitions and descriptions of holistic learning pedagogies that have been used throughout history merely scratch the surface of what is available for teachers to provide the balance, inclusion and connectedness that Miller (2007) claims are foundational to holistic education. As Freeman (2005a) noted in relation to nursing that a holistic approach was made up of a variety of therapies including conventional ones, so in teaching a holistic approach can include practices that are also found in conventional classrooms. The following are some pedagogical approaches currently being implemented by holistically minded educators which appear consonant with the aspirations of the NZCD (MoE, 2007).

### ***Integration***

Integrated learning has undergone a resurgence of interest from earlier in the twentieth century in the western world and in New Zealand primary schools. It has become particularly popular since the early 1990s as a tool for ensuring coverage of ‘over-full’ curricula (Hinde, 2005; Rennie,

Venville, & Wallace, 2011). Although integration can assume many forms, and may perhaps be considered a poor cousin of holistic learning by purists, it is frequently mentioned in literature on the subject. James A. Beane (1997), who has written extensively on the topic of curriculum integration reiterates Dewey's notion that to be effective learning needs to be related to cultural values and be made relevant to students' everyday lives (Rennie et al., 2012; *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools : Essays by John Dewey*, 2010). It must help them to make meaning through connections, patterns and experiences to create that 'meaningful whole' that holists demand, and see beyond their own knowing to a more complex understanding and a global view of the world (Hinde, 2005; Rennie et al., 2012).

Researchers noted that early forms of integration tended to be *transdisciplinary* or *multidisciplinary* and therefore remained subject based whereas later forms of integration used real-world issues to create themes around which learning was organised, regardless of the boundaries between subject areas (Beane, 1997). However, even when subject lines are being crossed, problem solving and inquiry skills, viewed by many as being the domain of single subject learning, remain paramount, in order for the student to find the connections between subject areas and to make sense of the learning in relation to what they already know (J. P. Miller et al., 1990). Beane agrees with this assessment of curriculum integration as he notes that true integration doesn't simply reorganise lessons so that they cross the lines between learning areas, but rather that it "begins with the idea that the source of curriculum ought to be problems, issues, and concerns posed by life itself" (Beane, 1995, p. 616) and, as such, integration needs to happen within an area of learning as well as across discipline lines (Placek & O'Sullivan, 1997). Such themes for learning increase student engagement and motivation as 'serious' issues give life to the knowledge that is being sought. It is valuable not only to the learner, but may also be used to make a difference in the learner's social world (Apple & Beane, 2007) .

Some of the research into integration has investigated less broad applications of the concept, where perhaps only two or three subject areas with obvious overlaps have been combined, such as maths and physics or

English and drama, a process sometimes referred to as *pluridisciplinary* (Burton, 2001). However, this process has also been used to combine less obvious areas like history and science, where issues like the change in ethical understanding of science or the changing understandings of the universe over time can be explored, thus providing context from each area for the learning of the other (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). In Australia, this form of integration has been implemented with the teacher choosing a theme or topic for learning from one curriculum area and then planning a series of activities that also fit into the objectives of other learning areas (P. Hudson, 2012). Thus, learning in one area becomes a platform for learning in another. Burton (2001) describes this use of one learning area as a perspective for understanding another as *crossdisciplinary* integration.

Researchers such as Oliver, Schofield, and McEvoy (2006) and Placek and O'Sullivan (1997) have investigated the practice of integrating physical education (PE) with other curriculum areas as a tool for increasing students' activity levels and to provide authentic purposes for learning. One programme used in New Zealand schools that has attempted to integrate PE in short blocks of time within other curriculum areas is the "Take 10!" programme. Oliver et al. (2006) noted that although this programme showed some level of success in getting children active, they doubted how effective the actual skill training involved was, and that the lack of coherence between the other curriculum areas meant that it was not a truly integrated approach to learning. These researchers concluded that although it is possible to fully integrate PE with other subjects (as their research showed) and there is evidence that such a programme could be beneficial in terms of increasing the activity levels of children in schools, there are few programmes currently available to support teachers in such an endeavour (Oliver et al., 2006). Placek and O'Sullivan (1997) also found that in many cases where PE is supposedly being integrated with other curriculum it appears to be 'tacked-on' as an alternative tool to gain understanding of concepts from the other area, such as trajectories of flying objects in physics or learning dances and games from indigenous cultures as part of a Social Studies unit.

Integration of the arts as a medium for enhancing learning in other curriculum areas is a key feature of Waldorf schools, and is considered central to learning as it is the main medium within which it occurs (J. P. Miller, 2007; Nordlund, 2013; Prescott, 1999). Teachers in other western schools also integrate arts – visual, music, drama and dance – with other learning areas, and one key positive that has been noted in classrooms where this integration has been observed is the increased enthusiasm and engagement of students in the learning in all curriculum areas involved (Cosenza, 2005). However, although the arts are recognised by many teachers as having an important role in providing a well-rounded education for students, especially those with holistic views of teaching, in many cases where integration occurs it would appear that the arts take a *subservient* role, simply as a means of making the other curriculum area/s more interesting (Wiggins, 2001). Cosenza (2005) points out that thematic units are most successful for ensuring that the arts learning is not subsumed by learning in other areas, as careful planning allows for relevant and authentic skill and knowledge building within each of the curriculum areas being integrated, including the arts.

Thus integration covers a broad array of practices from those that maintain traditional subject boundaries but share similar concepts, to thematic approaches that make connections between subjects, through to those that focus on a project or problem that requires skills and knowledge from a variety of different traditional learning areas to be assimilated so that subject boundaries all but disappear (Rennie et al., 2012). J. P. Miller et al. (1990) note that central to all forms of integration is the teacher who must be integrated within themselves, caring and compassionate, if this tool is to be used effectively.

### ***Environmental Education***

A second form of holistic learning that is available to teachers and is becoming increasingly familiar in New Zealand primary schools is environmental education or education for sustainability (MoE, 2007), particularly in the form of the Enviro-schools initiative ([www.enviroschools.org.nz](http://www.enviroschools.org.nz)) (McMillan & Binns, 2011). Environmental education harks back to the connections indigenous people groups have

traditionally had with the land and all that it produces (Eames & Barker, 2011) and is somewhat driven by the current focus on the preservation of the planet (Eames, Cowie, & Bolstad, 2008; Shaw, 2003). Uhl and Stuchul (2011), in *Teaching as if Life Matters* advocate the need for learning that connects students to their natural environments, as they recognise that many students in 21<sup>st</sup> Century western classrooms live lives separated from the natural world – a phenomenon that was unusual in previous generations. J. P. Miller (2007) agrees and notes that working with the environment gives students a sense of the place, the ground on which they live, and as a result notes that gardening is a key as it gives students an opportunity to touch the soil, which helps cement those connections.

Advocates of environmental education note that especially for those students who are somewhat isolated from their natural surroundings, “experiencing nature can capture the imagination and focus the attention... [while being] outdoors motivates many children to explore and develop their scientific curiosity” (Shaw, 2003, p. 63). Not only does this type of education stir up new areas of interest for the student, it also gives them opportunities to be involved in real-life issues that affect both them and their communities, and to see that they can, and in fact must, make a difference to the world in which they live (Eames et al., 2008; McMillan & Binns, 2011; Shaw, 2003). This facet of environmental education alone is fundamentally holistic as it links to the understanding that individuals are connected to others around them, and to the natural world (Stone, 2008; Taggart, 2001). Ron Miller asserts that true holistic ecological education does more than teach students about the natural environment and the biological sciences; it also aims to “cultivate a direct, active, experiential relationship with the processes of life” (R. Miller, 2005b, p. 5).

Eames and Barker (2011) note that in Aotearoa New Zealand, environmental education has had at least three initiatives (in 1993, 1999 and 2001) that have provided teachers with skills to implement such education that is holistic, connected and action-orientated at its core. However, despite the obvious advantages of such educational practices, the push by the current government for a return to a focus on literacy, numeracy and standardised assessment has caused a shift away from such

holistic practices (Eames & Barker, 2011). Such a shift, at the expense of environmental learning, is somewhat oxymoronic as the NZCD clearly indicates the importance of its inclusion when it envisages seizing opportunities to secure, amongst other things, the environmental future of Aotearoa in the principle of future focus where the issue of sustainability is mentioned, and in the values, where it states that “students will be encouraged to value: ... ecological sustainability, which includes care of the environment” (MoE, 2007, p. 10).

These researchers sum up the importance of environmental education in New Zealand schools as they acknowledge the need for “environmental education in this country to equip our people with the education to be kaitiaki (guardians) of this land and to make good decisions for its future” (Eames & Barker, 2011, p. 189).

### ***Spiritual Education***

Traditional links to the land, as mentioned above, are imbued with spirituality as the cosmos is often seen as providing the source of energy and life (Arrows & Miller, 2012). Traditional Māori beliefs also embrace spiritual links to the land (Groot, Hodgetts, Waimarea Nikora, & Leggat-Cook, 2011; Mark & Lyons, 2010) and as such, spiritual education is another powerful tool for bringing holistic learning into New Zealand classrooms. In Waldorf schools, spirituality is also given a prominent place as this form of education is “based explicitly on the recognition that human beings are fundamentally spiritual in nature” (Oberski, 2011, p. 7), and not simply biological entities. Researchers are very clear that when discussing spirituality in education, they are not talking about religious beliefs or organised religion, but are discussing something much deeper (R. Miller, 2005b; Oberski, 2011). Instead, such education is about connecting students with their inner lives – a description of the spirit or soul – the energy from within that gives purpose and meaning and that is both vital yet mystifying (J. P. Miller, 2007), and helping them to find, as Adams (2009) asserted, “their place and purpose in the world” (p. 115). As a philosophy of teaching and learning, spiritual education closely mirrors the beliefs and teachings of Bronson Alcott, discussed earlier, who considered spirituality to be a central element of education (Ingman, 2011).

Spiritual experiences are holistic in that they involve every part of a person's being; their emotions, their senses, their bodies and their relationships with others especially those to whom they are particularly close and where no agenda is attached to that relationship (Best, 2011). Sloane (2005) links the spirit and soul together in terms of their functions (while other writers tend to use these two terms interchangeably) and says that these functions are found in four areas of an individual's life – in thinking and understanding, feeling and emotion, active initiative and intention, and in sense and perception, and notes that each of these areas plays an important role in the development of one's understanding of the world. A concern raised by those advocating for the inclusion of spiritual education in today's schools is that where it is not actively pursued there is little place for feelings and emotions and that this creates an imbalance in the system and the students being educated (Sloane, 2005; Uhl & Stuchul, 2011).

In Steiner schools, this imbalance is actively addressed as the arts are used as a medium to enable learners to get in touch with their inner selves; their feelings and their soul (Easton, 1997), although this is not the norm in mainstream schools. J. P. Miller (2007) suggests a number of possible tools for educating the spirit and/or soul. These include the use of storytelling as a tool for connecting with others while nurturing the soul of the storyteller, meditation as a way of quieting and focusing the mind, and in response to an experience, journaling about one's feelings or even one's dreams. Each of these tools make up part of what Miller terms a "*curriculum for the inner life*" as they provide stimulation and opportunities for students to develop their inner-selves (J. P. Miller, 2007).

Literature and science can also be used as tools for educating the spirit/soul. In literature, students are able to relate to the myths and stories, find wonder, mystery and wisdom within them, recognise the interconnectedness of different people groups from around the world, and as a result increase their self-understanding and awareness of their place in the world (J. P. Miller et al., 1990).

Although spiritual education is not focused on religion as such, studies of world religions do have a role to play within this form of holistic learning, particularly as students begin to search for meaning in life as they

head into adolescence. In researching these various belief systems, students are able to find the commonalities within them and to make connections to their own beliefs and faith where appropriate (Kessler, 2005; J. P. Miller, 2007). Thus their sense of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world is increased (J. P. Miller, 2007).

### ***Democratic Schooling***

Democratic learning experiences such as those engaged in by students at A. S. Neill's Summerhill School, were not and should not be isolated to that setting (J. P. Miller, 2007), and provide another style of holistic education that is achievable in mainstream classrooms with a little thought and preparation by teachers (Beane & Apple, 2007). Uhl and Stuchul (2011) point out that in today's world, students are often persuaded that success is measured by status, power, money and fame. As a result, students find themselves complying with the expectations of others and finding answers to questions imposed upon them, rather than following their own learning paths. Those who advocate democracy in education, suggest that in truly democratic settings, this would not occur as students would have a say in what they were doing and what was happening, and the result would be a 'coming alive' to all that they could be in life (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011).

Beane and Apple (2007) point out that although those of us who live in the western world believe that we live in democratic societies, the meaning of democracy has been lost amidst the drive for political gain, and the benefit of some at the expense of others. Those who have the power now see democracy as a threat to their status, and so are inclined to oppose any suggestion of democracy in schools. The democracy discussed by researchers in terms of democratic education is not the political monster that distributes more power to the few and less to the masses, but has been termed participatory democracy (R. Miller, 2005c, 2007). Such democracy, as was seen in the free school movement, allows each individual an equal say in the decision making process and requires them to take responsibility for their own behaviour and the decisions that are collaboratively made (J. P. Miller, 2007). By contrast, the norm in mainstream schooling, where adults make the rules and manage the environment and learning, is

paternalistic rather than democratic, and therefore denies students any opportunities to be meaningful participants in this most well-known of social environments (R. Miller, 2007).

Democratic education, like democracy itself, does not happen by chance; rather it has to be planned and worked for (Beane & Apple, 2007). This leads to one of the apparent contradictions of democratic education, as ideally teachers will 'plan' to plan cooperatively with their students, allowing them input into what is being learnt. Learning in this environment has the potential to be extremely engaging for students as they have a sense of ownership of the direction of the learning and the very act of cooperative planning provides them with skills they need to function as active citizens in democratic societies (Beane, 1997).

Beane (1997) also explains that learning within a democratic classroom setting should be designed around dealing with social and/or world issues and that such learning experiences provide opportunities for collaborative problem solving, even with those whom one would not normally associate, thus providing a platform for students to develop important skills for life. It is in this environment that "knowledge comes to life for students and teachers ... [as] it is connected to something serious" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 151) and all members of the school and surrounding community are able to be meaningfully involved in the educational experience.

### ***Assessment for Learning***

Assessment for learning, which has constructivist associations, has become popular in western countries over the past three decades as policy makers have called for increased achievement standards (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In New Zealand it has become increasingly dominant since the instigation of the 'Assessment to Learn (AtoL)' professional development programme in 2003 (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008). Assessment for learning, Black and Wiliam (1998) inform their readers, is formative assessment that occurs during learning and is used as a guide for teachers so that they are able to adapt the learning to meet the specific needs of their students. Although not recognised as fundamentally holistic, assessment for learning

can be implemented as part of a holistic framework, as the students' needs and skills are central to the process.

An important rationale for the implementation of assessment for learning practices is that when employed effectively, the motivation and sense of autonomy of students is increased (Hume & Coll, 2009). However, this process is not a simple one, stresses Glasson (2009), as it requires high quality implementation of a series of strategies for it to be effective.

Black and Wiliam (2009) suggest five strategies, which are refined and adapted versions of strategies from their earlier research findings (Black & Wiliam, 1998) Those strategies are:

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and success criteria;
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding;
3. Providing feedback that moves learning forward;
4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another;  
and
5. Activating students as the owners of their own learning.

(Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8)

The first, and most important strategy began life as simply sharing learning intentions and success criteria with students (Glasson, 2009), but has developed to the point where some educators recommend co-construction with learners (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008). The purpose of these tools is that students know what skills, knowledge and/or understanding they are working towards, and how they will know if they have achieved these (Glasson, 2009). Unfortunately, with such defining of criteria, there is a risk that for some students their goal becomes finding the easiest way to meet the criteria, and they fail to push themselves to achieve more than meet the set standard even if they are capable, and are inclined to measure their success against their peers (Harlen, 2006). A positive effect of these criteria is that students are able to self-assess their learning and either make corrections or seek support to do so, and so are empowered to be active participants managing their own learning (Black & Wiliam, 2006).

Designing learning tasks that serve also as assessment tools includes effective questioning, a skill that has application for teachers beyond assessment for learning, as carefully constructed questions in any learning setting are useful for stimulating higher order thinking in students (Hughes, 2008). Muijs and Reynolds (2011) postulate that questioning is one of the most important tools used by teachers to encourage and support learning and should therefore be one of the most used. Such questioning serves a dual purpose as it helps students to articulate their learning, which often helps them to clarify their thinking, and also provides information to the teacher about what the student has assimilated and/or retained from the learning opportunity (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). However, notes Glasson (2009), the quality of the questioning is crucial if it is to be used effectively. It must be planned for, ideally using 'open-questions' that require higher-order thinking from the students rather than simple single-answer closed questions, and students must be given time to think before answering. These high quality questions must be supported by practices that include ensuring fair distribution around the classroom, prompting where necessary to encourage responses, allowing students to add their own questions, and should be used as a tool to discover faulty thinking or application of learning that can be remedied through feedback (Glasson, 2009).

Black and Wiliam (2006) indicate that questioning alone is not the only tool that can be used to formatively assess learning, as discussions between students or between the whole class and the teacher may also be used for this purpose. Such discussions need to be "carefully prepared and usually need to follow on from some prior activity" (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, p. 61), pre-reading by the students or presentation by the teacher or students. Muijs and Reynolds (2011) add that "in order for a discussion to be effective, it is important to keep it focused and to the point" and "the teacher needs to respond to pupil ideas in such a way as to encourage them to clarify and be more conscious of their thought process" (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011, p. 61).

Black and Wiliam (2006) mention a concern, that adapting teaching styles to effectively employ classroom dialogue as a teaching and learning tool takes a lot of effort by the teachers, and is often the part of formative

assessment with which teachers have the least success. Muijs and Reynolds (2011) concur and cite research by Askew, Rhodes, Brown, William and Johnson (1994 cited in Muijs & Reynolds, 2011) that suggests that in some cases teachers' questions impose their views on the students rather than facilitate meaningful discussion.

One aspect of classroom dialogue can make formative assessment part of the learning process. This occurs when the teacher is able to give oral feedback that provides scaffolding for students to revisit and refine their thinking during the discussion or after answering a question, so that it becomes part of the learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Black and William (1998) argued that formative assessment raises achievement for all students, but is particularly effective for those who find classroom learning more difficult as the feedback they are given focuses "on specific problems within their work and [gives] them a clear understanding of what is wrong and how to put it right" (Black & William, 1998, p. 145).

This positive evaluation of feedback comes with a caveat, however, that it must not include messages that might be interpreted as judgements against the learner's person. Rather feedback should be focused on the actual learning task, give clear guidance as to how the work may be improved and give no hint of comparison to the work of others (Black & William, 1998). Hattie and Timperley (2007) state that effective feedback must be able to answer:

... three major questions asked by a teacher and/or by a student: Where am I going? (What are the goals?), how am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), and Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress? (p. 86)

They add that the feedback information must be targeted, to provide the appropriate level of critique and scaffolding to help students to gain success in their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

With these guidelines in place, effective feedback can come in a number of forms including oral feedback, mentioned above. The seemingly

simplest style of feedback is through marking, although not in the traditional sense of giving a grade. The three questions listed above should provide structure for written comments which students are then able to use to improve their work (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Glasson, 2009). Muijs and Reynolds (2011) state that written feedback comparing the student's current work with their own previous achievements provides them with a picture of their progress and helps them to set appropriate targets for themselves. Black and Wiliam (2006) add that this form of feedback must be considered when planning the learning task and is most effective when the feedback requires students to complete follow-up tasks.

Peer assessment is the process by which students assess the work of their peers and give feedback to one another, most commonly when working in small group situations (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Black and Wiliam (2009) postulate that when students give feedback to one another, they become resources to enhance one another's learning, although this is not limited to giving feedback as any cooperative and group work may promote this role. In order for peer feedback to be effective, students must have a clear sense of what constitutes success for a given task and need to be instructed in how to use the three feedback questions mentioned earlier to structure their assessment of the learning (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Researchers also maintain that an advantage of using peer assessment is that as students give feedback to one another, they are encouraged to critically reflect on their own learning (Glasson, 2009; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011).

Reflection is also required if students are to assess their own work, using clear, easily-understood criteria that allow them to identify success targets and the steps required to achieve them (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). This type of assessment asks the child to be an active learner and requires the teacher to release some control of the learning (Glasson, 2009). As is the case with peer assessment, students must be trained in how to reflect on their learning, to measure it against the success criteria, and be given time to develop their meta-cognitive skills. In the long run, such skills empower students to be independent and increasingly self-regulated learners (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). One issue that teachers may

have questions about is the validity of self and peer-assessment, but research indicates that trustworthiness and reliability are not a problem as students are usually honest in their assessments of their peers, and tend to be hard on their own work (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

It is clear, when considering assessment for learning, that like more obviously holistic practices, this process ought to be fundamentally student-centred (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011) and, as Black and Wiliam (1998) asserted, interactive and motivating for students. Advocates of assessment for learning as a teaching and learning tool emphasise its role in raising student achievement (Glasson, 2009), especially for lower achieving students and those with learning disabilities (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The overall rise in student achievement levels where assessment for learning had been successfully implemented in the late 1990s has been the main reason that professional development in the use of this tool, has increased in the past decade (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008).

A 'big picture' concern, that has been raised by opponents of assessment for learning in recent times, is that the high stakes of achievement in some areas and the requirement for moderation of assessment, has led to a narrowing of learning intentions, increased specificity of success criteria, and coaching by teachers to ensure success, such that the result is a whitewashed form of 'teaching to the test' (Hume & Coll, 2009). This is of concern most especially because the result for some students is "learning without understanding", when meaning is not being constructed, and "assessment for learning becomes *assessment as learning*" (2009, p. 270). This narrows learning, and opportunities for variety, creativity and originality are diminished, or in a worst case scenario, become non-existent (Hume & Coll, 2009).

Furthermore, although it is impossible to deny research evidence that assessment for learning has had a positive impact on student achievement (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008), there remains a long 'tail' of underachievement in New Zealand schools (Hattie, 2011; Te One, 2011). To make matters worse, the 2012 PISA report suggest that New Zealand learners have declined in reading, writing and mathematics attainment when compared with other OECD countries and the number of students at the lower end of

underachievement has increased since the previous report in 2009 (May, Cowles, & Lamy, 2013). This then begs the question as to the effectiveness of assessment for learning and the AtoL programme, as it has been a key player in teacher professional development and classroom pedagogy over the previous decade (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008).

The concern here, is that the somewhat reductionist approach to assessment for learning, of breaking learning into independent specific learning intentions with readily measured success criteria, is counterintuitive to the natural drive of students to make connections between school learning and their world, so the learning is meaningful to them (R. Miller, 2006). Holistic educators would argue that to really make a difference for students, the answer is a change of focus of assessment from 'standards' and academia to an education that aims to "reconnect each person to the contexts within which meaning arises: the physical world, the biosphere, the family, the local community..., the culture..., and the cosmos itself" (R. Miller, 2006, p. 32). When this is the drive behind assessment for learning, it fits nicely into a holistic teacher's tool-belt.

### ***Other Holistic Tools***

Other tools that can be found in the holistic teacher's toolbox include problem solving and critical thinking, various forms of independent student inquiry, co-operative group investigations, and the whole language approach to literacy learning (J. P. Miller et al., 1990; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011; Taylor et al., 2008).

Problem solving and critical thinking are applicable in all curriculum areas and in cross-curricular settings (Taylor et al., 2008). Although the two may appear similar problem solving tends to happen in a sequential manner, whereas critical thinking uses a combination of strategies and skills to complete a given task. In basic terms, problem solving and critical thinking involve defining the problem, gathering and sorting information that will help solve it, leading to a conclusion or solution based on that information and then communicating the findings in one form or another (J. P. Miller et al., 1990; Taylor et al., 2008). The strength of problem solving as a learning tool, is that problems arise from unresolved situations or

questions (J. P. Miller, 2007) or from a moral dilemma, so that the learning is authentic and engaging for the students as they are able to use it to make sense of and find meaning in the world (J. P. Miller et al., 1990).

Student inquiry is often linked with problem solving and tends to follow a similar pattern to that listed in problem solving above (J. P. Miller et al., 1990). “The underlying assumption of inquiry learning is that children learn best when they are motivated to explore issues of importance to them, and that they can discover, understand and act on for themselves” (Fraser, Aitken, Price, & Whyte, 2012, p. 32). A key to student inquiry is the independence afforded them, as students formulate their own questions and then follow through to find the answers, rather than simply answering questions given to them from a prescribed curriculum (Campbell & Neilson, 2009).

“Co-operative learning uses small groups to enhance academic achievement and emotional development” (J. P. Miller et al., 1990, p. 107). Although the learning in these groups can take a number of forms, including problem solving and inquiry, the significant element is that the students develop interdependence as they learn to believe in their own ability to contribute and are able to learn from others in the group (J. P. Miller et al., 1990; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Students in this setting have the opportunity to develop other important skills including sharing, participating, communicating and listening that are necessary for them to contribute effectively to the group’s purpose (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). The authors note, however, that small groups are only effective when all members know their role and are actively engaged.

Although the whole language approach to literacy learning is not cross curricular beyond reading and writing it is clearly a holistic form of literacy teaching that has its roots as far back as Bronson Alcott’s Temple School (J. P. Miller, 2007). A fundamental of whole language literacy is that when making sense of reading, children learn by moving from what they know to what they don’t know, from the whole to the part, as children learn to make meaning from the text on the page (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). The literacy learning that occurs in a whole language classroom is not limited to reading and writing instruction, as such. Rather the classroom is

stimulating, filled with text and artwork that capture the children's interest. As interest grows, so does the desire to understand and learning becomes a process of discovery (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). As was the case in Sylvia Ashton-Warner's classrooms, whole language literacy learning encourages children to write and read their own and their peers' stories, as these are particularly relevant, attractive and understandable for them (Middleton, 2012; J. P. Miller, 2007; Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). Thus, whole language learning, as with other holistic strategies begins with the child and is interesting and authentically linked to their interests and needs.

## **Two Strong Threads**

Each of these tools has strengths and weaknesses that are apparent when examining them closely, and all have one common thread that makes the difference to how effective they are when used in the classroom. That common thread is the teacher. The holistic teacher is connected to his or her own inner life (J. P. Miller et al., 1990), cares about their students' wellbeing and development as a whole person connected to others and their world (J. P. Miller, 2007), and is willing to put in the hard work needed to make these tools work in the holistic learning environment they have created (Apple & Beane, 2007).

Although it would be fair to say that the sum of literature addressing teaching and learning does not provide a definitive judgement on whether one pedagogical style is better than another, proponents of holistic education clearly advocate that such a system produces more rounded and 'whole' human beings than traditional methods (J. P. Miller, 2005, 2007; R. Miller, 2006; Uhl & Stuchul, 2011).

# Chapter Five:

## Research Methodology and Findings

### Introduction

When I began this investigation, my intention was to gather student achievement data to show the degree to which a holistic style of teaching and learning raises standards in student achievement. However, as I read about holistic learning it became clear that such data does not provide a holistic picture of whether schooling is 'working' for a particular student or not, as it presents a rather narrow, reductionist view of success. Clearly, using a quantitative method was inappropriate, and so, I reconsidered my approach.

Furthermore, due to time and word limit constraints, it became clear that such a study was much too in-depth, and it was therefore necessary to narrow the scope of my research project. Consequently, I focussed my inquiry on the views of teachers and students in primary school classrooms, to find how much of what already occurs might be considered holistic in nature. I also hoped to uncover evidence of what appears to engage and motivate students, and helps them to recognise when they are successful in their learning. At the end of this process, I hoped to create the beginnings of a picture of what holistic learning might look like in a New Zealand primary school.

As a result of this decision, a proposal was put together to interview a diverse selection of teachers and a group of students from each of these teachers' classes, using semi-structured interviews, for which ethical approval was obtained from the University Of Waikato Faculty Of Education Research Ethics Committee.

## The Informants

Initially, I planned to interview the following selection of teachers and children: Two teachers from my own school – one who I knew was trying some innovative practices and the other, of Māori decent who and was introducing Māori cultural practices in her classroom, both of whom I had informally approached earlier in the year; a teacher from a new, purpose-built twenty-first century school that is implementing innovative practices; a teacher I had spoken to at a leadership course the previous year who's practice sounded holistic; a teacher from each of a Rudolf Steiner school, the local Montessori school, a Kura Kaupapa Māori; a local integrated Christian school; at least two other teachers from mainstream schools; and a close relative who is currently home-schooling her two sons, aged seven and five years.

However, arranging these interviews proved problematic as some of the planned informants were reluctant to 'pick apart' their practice, or were unable to give up the time to be interviewed. Similarly, some parents were unsure of how acceptable it was for their children to talk with a teacher they didn't know about what was happening in their classrooms, and so declined my request for them to be involved. Approaches to staff of the Rudolph Steiner School and the nearby Kura Kaupapa Māori were equally unproductive and it became impossible to interview the mainstream teacher initially proposed. Thus, the offer from a teacher in a Māori immersion unit to be interviewed, was a welcome addition, as I felt it was important to include a Māori perspective in my research.

The final sample of teachers interviewed were: Two teaching colleagues from my school, one of whom teaches a year two/three composite class and a second teacher (not the Māori teacher I had originally asked as she was not comfortable being part of this research) who includes environmental education for his class of year four/five students; the teaching staff at the purpose-built school as a group; a year five teacher at a private boys school; the new entrant teacher from the Christian school; the year five to seven teacher at the Montessori school; the head teacher of the Māori language immersion unit at a local decile one state primary; a year one

teacher at a mid-decile state primary school; and my home-schooling relative. (See Appendix K). In each case I interviewed a group of three to six students, with two exceptions: There were only two home-schooled boys; and I did not interview any new entrant students from the Christian school as their teacher felt they were too young to be involved.

## **Methodology**

The methodology adopted was a naturalistic qualitative approach. Such an approach “relates to the social world and the concepts and behaviours of people within it” (Anderson, 2010, p. 1) and so is a good ‘fit’ for this exploration of interactions within a classroom. This also seemed appropriate for a study of holistic practice, as Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) note that the strength of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to gain a holistic ‘picture’ of what goes on in a particular setting or situation.

Clearly research into what happens within a school classroom is an investigation into the social world. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) argue for qualitative research as a tool for investigating this environment as “the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated”. Anderson (2010) also acknowledges the advantages of qualitative research when exploring issues of education, suggesting that it “can sometimes provide a better understanding of the nature of educational problems and thus add to insights into teaching and learning...” (p. 1).

Qualitative research as a methodology, grew along with the spread of anthropology, which sought to understand the ‘other’ and the sociological setting within which they are located (Cooley, 2013). This too was my goal, to understand what was going on in these ‘other’ teachers’ classrooms, from the teachers’ and the students’ points of view. However, this was clearly not going to be an objective investigation because of my own vested interest and involvement in the topic. Not only has my personal view of holistic learning developed throughout the duration of this research process, my own experiences and responses to them as a teacher naturally affect how I view teaching and learning, and the responses of the participants. As

Cooley (2013) notes, such research is not without bias, as the researcher's feelings about the subject will affect the way they undertake the process (Holloway & Biley, 2011). Thus, rather than attempting to stifle my own perceptions, I decided to consider my own experiences and thoughts part of the data being gathered.

As mentioned above, the method of data gathering for this investigation was semi-structured interviews. DiCicco-Bloom (2006) notes that these are often used as the sole source of data for quantitative research, and are "usually scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events" (p. 40). Information concerning the research I was undertaking and the process I would be using for data gathering were outlined in information letters sent to the principal of each school (Appendix C), each teacher I interviewed (Appendix A), the child participants (couched in child-friendly language) (Appendix E) and their parents/guardians (Appendix G). Included in these letters was information about the participants' rights, particularly spelling out their right to withdraw from the study at any time, how the issue of confidentiality was going to be addressed and who to contact, should they have any concerns or questions. Attached to each information letter was a consent form for the participant (or the participant's parent/guardian). (Appendices B, D, F & H)

Semi-structured interviews are powerful tools for qualitative research as they "are not restricted to specific questions and can be guided/redirected by the researcher in real time" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). These interviews usually start with set open-ended questions, that allow for other questions or digressions during the dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). In this case, the participants were given a list of the questions that served as the basis of the interviews in advance (Appendices I & J), so that they did not feel 'put on the spot' during our dialogue, although within these parameters, discussions were free to diverge to other topics that appeared appropriate to the interviewee or myself.

The teacher interviews began with questions designed to provide background data. The data generated would be used to demonstrate that I was working with a diverse group of participants (Appendix K) and the questions would also serve to set the interviewee at ease. These included

questions about such matters as length of teaching service, age of students taught previously and currently and whether the teacher was in a management role at the time of the interview. The body of the interview was then based around twelve questions grouped under three main research topics: The interviewees' teaching philosophy and how it is worked out in the classroom; the advantages and challenges of this type of programme/pedagogy; and how this style of teaching fits with the NZCD and the National Standards. One final question: "Is there anything else interesting you would like to tell me?" gave an opportunity for teachers to share any other thoughts that had arisen during the interview process.

The student group interviews were less structured, in that they included only five questions.

1. What have you been learning about today?
2. How do you like to learn best?
3. Is there anything that you think makes it easier or harder for you to learn?
4. How do you know if you are successful in your learning?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your learning?

These questions were designed to provide 'jumping off points' for students to talk about what happened in their classrooms and how they felt about the learning. They were also intended to yield data to triangulate with those from the teacher interviews. No teacher interview or student group interview took more than one hour.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted using procedures approved by the University Of Waikato Faculty Of Education Research Ethics Committee. These paid particular attention to respecting the autonomy of participants, minimizing the possibility of any harm to them and ensuring that the potential outcomes of the investigation would justify my intrusion into aspects of their lives.

Obtaining the informed consent of each participant was important and involved obtaining consent from minors as part of that process. Therefore, the previously mentioned information letters with attached consent forms were developed and given to the school principals, teacher participants, child participants and their parents/guardians, respectively (Appendices A-H). These letters provided information about the study I was undertaking and explained what would be involved for the participants. The letters also addressed some ethical issues and gave information on how participants were being selected. Much care was taken in preparing the student participants' letter and consent form to ensure that the important points were included in language that was at a level even younger children could understand. I included the child-friendly letter and consent form as I felt it was important for the children to make their own informed choices about whether to participate or not, rather than simply having that decision made for them by their parents/guardians. However, the consent of a parent/guardian was still necessary for each child to participate.

It was important for participants to feel comfortable about how the data was to be used and stored, and information about this was also included in the information letter. The teacher participants were assured that the transcripts of their interviews would be returned to them soon after the interviews took place, so they could check them for accuracy and remove anything they did not want included or make other changes to make their meaning clear. The student participants and their parents were informed that their interview transcripts would be returned to their teacher to read and check, and then forwarded to them for the same purpose. This meant that both the students and their parents were clear before agreeing to participate that the information was being shared with their teacher, and this was reiterated to the students at the end of the group interview. This process provided a check that the interviewer had understood the interviews correctly. Participants were assured that their names and the names of their schools would not be included in the final report, as pseudonyms would be used and that any other information that might help identify them or their school would be disguised in order to ensure their anonymity.

An important ethical concern that needed to be addressed was the potential for participants to be harmed as a result of their involvement in this study. Analysing one's teaching practice and sharing those thoughts with a peer can be an uncomfortable experience and potentially harmful to the participant's wellbeing. In order to mitigate any potential discomfort on the part of the participants, it was made clear that they were able to decline to answer any questions, to halt the interview, to withdraw from the study at any time and to withdraw their information up to two weeks after they received the interview transcripts. With these safeguards in place, the potential harm to participants was deemed to be outweighed by the potential good from this research.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Participant teachers were given a copy of the interview questions with their information letters. In most cases the teachers appeared to have read and thought about the questions in preparation for the interviews. The teachers did not go through the student interview questions with the children prior to our group interview, but told the students they would be talking about their learning and what happened in the classroom.

During the interviews I took notes of points raised that I felt were significant to my study and also digitally recorded the whole dialogue. I then transcribed each discussion and forwarded the transcript to the participant/s for verification that I had transcribed the raw data correctly. I made no attempt to 'tidy up' the grammar or syntax so that it read well, to ensure that the transcript was as true to the original dialogue as possible. Student interviews were forwarded to their teachers to read and check with the students, as stated in the initial information letters, and were then forwarded to their parents if they also wished to read and or edit them, although it appears that none did. These transcripts did not identify individual students, or include their names.

Once all the data were gathered, I began the process of identifying key themes. I first read through each transcript in its entirety for a global impression and an overall picture of the main points raised by the participant

or group. These were noted. I then re-read the manuscripts focusing on one question or section at a time (i.e. Question one of all student transcripts, then question two for each, etc.), again looking for themes or overall messages in each section, across the different participants. Cohen et al. (2000) note that at this point the researcher must try to maintain a balance between an overall and holistic view of the interview and the need to fragment the data, to counteract the inherent danger that the analysis of each element of the interview might risk losing the overall synergy of the interview. This is one example where the whole is more often greater than the sum of the parts, and so care must be taken to preserve the integrity of the messages encapsulated in the complete transcript (Cohen et al., 2000).

Further analysis followed with repeated readings, colour-coded highlighting and the use of coding to reveal both repeated themes or messages and those elements that were unique to particular respondents, as some of these were independently important. Notes made during the analysis were also compared with the notes taken during the interviews. The collected notes and codes were then analysed again in order to identify emerging patterns or themes and to consider whether or not these were significant and relevant to the research topics.

## **Findings**

As mentioned previously, the interview questions covered three main themes. The resulting findings also fit under these areas: teaching philosophy and style, and how these impacted on practice; advantages and challenges of experimenting with holistic practices in the classroom; and how the New Zealand Curriculum and National Standards affects a teachers' pedagogical practices.

### **Teaching Philosophy and Style**

The first group of questions concerning teaching philosophy and how it worked asked about what underpinned the participant's teaching and what it looked like in practice, whether the participant thought their style was

holistic or not and why they had adopted that system (see appendix I, questions 1-4 for details).

These questions elicited some interesting thoughts from the teacher participants, some of whom noted the value of being asked to examine what underpins their practice, as this often becomes 'second nature' rather than being consciously considered when making teaching and learning decisions. It also provided an opportunity to consider whether what they believed and what they actually did in the classroom were in line with one another. They also observed that it was helpful and encouraging to read their students' interview transcripts, as it gave them a picture of their practice through the eyes of the children.

All of the teachers interviewed felt that their teaching philosophy and practice was at least partially holistic, although they would not have previously used that term to describe what they did or believed in terms of teaching and learning. Wayne had even asked his colleagues what they thought holistic meant, to which one replied:

What are you on about? ... You practice it every day. ('Wayne')

Natalie, the teacher from an integrated Christian school, felt her practice was holistic as everything centred on God and the bible:

Just that we concentrate on God as creator of all, and therefore everything that we do ... counts in what God has created us for. ('Natalie')

While other teachers noted that some subjects were more conducive to holistic teaching and learning, as they lent themselves more readily to integration and to incorporating students' interests.

For reading ... that's probably the most holistic of them all, of my programmes. ('April')

The four main themes that appeared in the area of teaching philosophy and style were building relationships with the children and their whanau as a foundation for knowing the students' learning needs, following the students' interests, giving students opportunities to direct their own learning, and providing authentic learning contexts.

### ***Relationships with Students and Whanau***

The first, and perhaps most important of these themes evident across the nine teachers' interviews was the importance of the relationship developed between the teacher and his or her students and their whanau. This was particularly emphasised by Wayne, the head teacher of a Māori immersion unit, as he recognised that the importance of relationships for Māori (Vieille, 2012) cannot be overlooked in the school setting. Wayne noted that at first he was unsure how to go about developing and maintaining positive relationships with the students and their parents, so that he could be clear about their learning needs and their whanau's aspirations for them.

We set up a whanau hui, and we have whanau hui regularly, here at Rūma Whā, where the parents are welcome to come in and sit with us to discuss their aspirations for the new year, their aspirations – what they want their students to get out of the time here with us. ('Wayne')

This theme was not restricted to the immersion setting however, as other teachers also mentioned the importance of knowing their students well, and of building relationships with them as individuals and with their parents and whanau. Susan was quite emphatic about how crucial it was to develop those connections with her students and how much she enjoyed getting to know them:

Mainly I believe that forming those relationships is such a huge thing and it's going to lead to a successful classroom. But ... I don't form them because I have to. I form them because I want to. ('Susan')

It seemed that for many of the teachers I interviewed, their relationships with the children were at the heart of what they did in their classrooms.

It's about building relationships with them so we know each other well enough for them to take risks. ('April')

### ***'Following the Child'***

Of course, these teachers were not suggesting developing relationships with their students simply to be their friends. Rather, in the process they were getting to know their students as individuals, their likes and dislikes, strengths, needs and interests. This was important, as their teaching was built upon a desire to "follow the child" ('Susan') (Montessori, 1963 cited in R. Miller, 2006), to:

Know their uniqueness ... every facet of their learning ...  
when their achievement, their learning isn't where it should  
be. ('New School' teacher')

Rodney took a similar stance, noting that he was, in many ways, constantly assessing his students to inform the direction of their learning.

I like to think that I assess the learner moment by moment on  
what is the most useful; thing for them as a person.  
(Rodney')

This knowing allowed these teachers to create learning opportunities they were confident would engage and excite their students, and follow their interests. It is interesting to note here that Judy had chosen to home-school her children so that she could follow their interests, as she believed that this would not be possible in a classroom setting.

Only having four kids, we have the ability to be able to tailor-  
make the teaching to their needs and their level rather than  
have to have them structured within 'this is what you must  
do'... ('Judy')

Susan spoke of developing learning experiences around the students' interests, but added one qualification, noting that:

Out of twenty kids in my class, eighteen might have been  
really interested ... and two of them not so interested ... it's  
just making sure I get them interested. ('Susan')

It was clear from the interviews that the level to which teachers were able to follow their students' interests and questions was somewhat dictated

to by the schools they were a part of. Verity noted that the tight timetabling in the private boys school made this difficult, although she found ways to go along with the boys' interests in topic.

We are very structured in terms of timetables. ... So you just have to think outside the square in terms of working around those things. ('Verity')

### ***Student Independence***

At the other end of the spectrum, Rodney's experience teaching in the Montessori environment was one where students worked mostly independently and so were able to delve into areas that interested them, with a high level of autonomy. Thus, the learning was responsive to their interests and their independence was being encouraged.

At any given moment there's independent work for the children to do. Or the kids might devise a little project around what they learnt. ('Rodney')

The students I interviewed from Rodney's class shared their experiences:

"We go on heaps of trips. Our group ... we filled out the RAMs sheet, we did everything... And we raised \$400 ... To buy the hutch, to get the bunny, the guinea pig. ('Rodney's' student).

We can use the kitchen and do baking. We can juggle, go on the computer..." ('Rodney's' student)

The level of excitement and engagement these activities engendered were clearly evident as the students spoke of them.

This high level of independence by students was also evident at 'New School' where a key aim was for students to be "taking control, being more involved insiders" ('New School' teacher) as the staff worked towards 'humanising education' for their students. Talking with the students from New School confirmed that they were increasingly taking control of their learning. One significant aspect the students talked of was their:

Passion projects. ...We had to get a wondering and then we had to write a pitch, and then the teacher would say if we could do it. ('New School' student)

The students also spoke of trust groups that allowed them varying levels of independence within the school.

And also we have trust groups – independent groups, monitored, closely monitored, supervised and guided. Which is people who have trouble with their work. ('New School student')

It was clear, from our discussion that students worked hard to be included in the independence group, as they wanted autonomy and freedom in their learning. A similar drive for independence was evident in the Montessori students:

You get freedom with your writing... We've got licences for coming up here. ('Rodney's' student)

The rest of the teachers who taught in state primary schools tended to employ a mixture of student-led and teacher-directed learning strategies, as did Rodney when it was appropriate or necessary.

Like last term when ... was away, one of the things I did to keep forty-two kids on track on my own, we had a whole class project... So that sort of traditional – right you guys that's what we're doing – has still got its place. ('Rodney')

For many of the participants, this revolved around requirements for them to cover certain areas in literacy and numeracy, and the difficulties this presented in terms of relating that learning to the interests being followed in other areas.

As much as possible. More so with literacy. With maths we experimented with this last year and we tried to link everything, but we found that you just couldn't get some of those basics... So we do have a separate maths programme that runs alongside and we link where we can. ('New School' teacher)

Ken did point out that he was able to follow students' interests more than he had been able to in previous years as his school had joined a Learning Change Network, which encouraged teachers to be responsive to "student voice", and so he had allowed his class to vote on the focus of their topic for that term, and had developed learning experiences around their choice to investigate plants.

I thought we should follow that and go deeper into looking at water. And then, somehow, we decided to have a vote, to give... (sic) Oh, it was because of Learning Change Network and giving the kids student voice. ... So anyway, we whittled it down to those two – plants or water – and they had a ... vote, and plants won. ('Ken')

The staff at 'New School' sought to encourage self-regulation in its students, as students and teachers alike spoke of the individual learning matrices that let students know where they were at in their learning and what their next steps were in reading, writing and maths.

All our students have, what we call, matrices in reading, writing and maths, and that lays out all the ... standards. ('New School teacher')

We've got matrices and that highlights what we can do and what we can't. ('New School' student)

The students were then able to opt into workshops that addressed the next learning they required or at times asked teachers for advice as to how to go about achieving their next learning steps.

Similarly, at the Montessori school the students spoke of recording their learning activities in diaries to ensure they were covering all that was required, rather than being told what to do by their teacher. Rodney confirmed that he too kept a record of what the students had done, rather than dictating what they would do.

And occasionally he might say, 'up to date journals on tables,' and he will look at your journal, if you've updated it. ('Rodney's' student)

It's all about record keeping. ('Rodney')

Although the other teacher participants spoke of their desire to develop life-long learners, "that learning is a life-long thing," ('Verity') there was limited evidence of student independence in their own or their students' interviews.

### ***Authentic Contexts for Learning***

In April's interview she used the phrase "keeping it real" on a number of occasions, in relation to how she interacted with her students and the learning experiences she was offering them. This was the fourth theme that became obvious across the nine teachers interviewed, as they worked to ensure that as much as possible, the learning was situated in authentic contexts. For Natalie, this authenticity was achieved by relating all learning back to the bible and what God had to say about the subject.

So the focus of whatever I teach is what does God say? ...  
Everything is based on Him and creation. ... So it's just taking  
us back all the time to the bible. ('Natalie')

This was another area that Judy cited as a reason for home-schooling her boys, as she felt she was better equipped to provide authentic learning for them than was possible in a class of twenty or so students. One son in particular enjoyed making inventions and being a spy, and so she developed learning activities around those interests.

[He] will have to answer five questions to get to the next clue.  
We normally do it if we're going on a long trip or something.  
We've reached this destination. He comes and gets a new  
spy card – follow the map direction to where we're going next.  
... It's making your day-to-day activities part of the learning  
too. ('Judy')

For Judy and her boys, it was the practical applications of their learning, such as cooking and finding one's way on a map, that made the learning come to life.

This authentic learning was not restricted to home-schooling and Christian schools, as was evident in both the teachers' and the students' interviews. The students at New School spoke of learning about and

designing a wetland for their school, Ken's students worked in a garden and had been learning about the links between Fibonacci numbers and nature during maths, Susan's students used what they'd learned about clouds to recognise when it was going to rain, Verity's boys had gained first-hand knowledge about conflict from a soldier, Wayne's students found their place within their Māori culture and April's students designed new rubbish bins for their school.

Writing reports about wetlands, because we're getting a wetland designed by a landscape architect, right over there... And we're writing about experiments we did to test what kinds of plants can grow, if there's any evidence... And we used a PH scale and litmus paper to test what the water is (sic)... ('New School' students)

...even maths, like with Fibonacci numbers. ('Ken')

Yeah and the nimbus is when it's pouring with rain. ('Susan's' student)

...s dad is in the army so he knew quite a lot about the army. ('Verity's' student)

...ensure that by the end of their school here (sic), that students know their iwi, whakapapa, and at the same time ... being the best they can be. ('Wayne')

The kids designed these most amazing rubbish bins... They blew me away (sic). Such a good idea... ('April')

These students were learning within real-life contexts because their teachers believed in the importance of authenticity for learning. Susan and Ken added that they too learned from and with their students in these types of, mostly hands-on, learning experiences.

... Those engaging, exciting activities – hands on... ('Susan')

...keeping your mind open that you can learn from the kids. ('Ken')

As well as these common themes, both Ken and Natalie acknowledged the importance of nurturing the spiritual as part of a holistic education. Ken pointed out that spirituality was one of the four pillars of the “Tapa Whā – spiritual, physical, mental and emotional realm” (‘Ken’), and so included this facet as part of his practice. He noted that when he allowed students time to pause and connect with their senses, they were better able to focus and get the most out of their learning.

And I’ve found that a lot of children have this coping mechanism, just by being able to pause, connect with their senses. (‘Ken’)

For Natalie, in her Christian setting, prayer played a key role in every part of school life, both with and for the students, to support them in their learning and in becoming all that they could be as human beings. “The main thing’s prayer” (‘Natalie’). Judy, too, in her home-schooling setting included the bible and prayer as a part of daily schooling, and there was a sense of spirituality in Rodney’s talk of connections to the earth, the ‘big’ stories and the cosmos.

## **Advantages and Challenges of Holistic Practice**

The second research topic focused on discovering the advantages and challenges of implementing holistic education within a New Zealand primary school classroom. These questions asked about challenges that had been faced when implementing current practice, students this worked better or worse for, and changes in students’ attitudes and learning as a result (see appendix I, questions 5, & 9-11).

These questions did not produce such clear themes as those in the first section, as results seemed to vary with the environments the teachers were working in. However, one clear positive that came through was that students were more engaged, enthusiastic and active in their learning when their teachers were able to implement their philosophies successfully. All teachers noted that there were pockets of students who thrived on this type of learning and others for whom it was not ideal. The other most obvious

theme that emerged was in relation to challenges they had faced, and the direction these came from.

### ***Student Engagement***

These teachers aimed to engage and excite their students, as mentioned above, and most recognised that this was happening when their programmes were running well. April noted that when she was well prepared, the children were able to select from a group of tasks and complete these independently, but this was not so effective when she had failed to organise the necessary equipment and guidelines adequately.

Being organised... So the kids have autonomy. That the environment's set up for them to have that (sic). Because if I'm not organised then they're continually asking me and that just defeats the purpose. ('April')

Judy, the home schooling mum, echoed April's thoughts, pointing out that the best learning experiences happened when she had taken the time to prepare for them thoroughly, usually the night before. She also felt that her holistic style of home-schooling meant that she was able to base the learning experiences on her sons' unique personalities, rather than using a one-size-fits-all method. Having said this, however, she also admitted that this was a difficult task as the boys were so different and at such different stages in their learning.

At ten, eight, six and four it's going to be a heck of a lot easier than seven, five, three and one. ('Judy')

Verity noted that being able to follow her students' interests in topic kept their level of engagement high, and also felt that being at a boys only school allowed them to "do boy things" that they might not be able to do at other schools.

It provides an opportunity to really go for things they're keen to get engaged in. The year two classroom were doing astronomy and they turned the entire classroom into a spaceship for a week. They had to crawl into it. Things like that, you wouldn't have the same buy in. ('Verity')

She further noted that in this boys-only environment, it was 'cool' to be academic, which had not been the case for boys at her previous co-ed school.

Natalie spoke of the positive results of being able to integrate Christianity into all the learning activities in the school, and to be able to talk about God's point of view and pray with students when issues arose. She felt this created a positive and caring culture in the school and also believed that the teachers' prayers for their students had a positive impact on their learning.

Especially those little ones, we pray regularly for, who are struggling (sic) and God is able to perform a miracle and change their little brains. ('Natalie')

This was clearly a positive that was unique to Natalie's situation, and one that she reiterated throughout the interview.

The teachers at New School felt that the steps they had taken to "humanise education", to talk with the students about their learning and their next steps and to include them in decision making had produced very clear positive results as their motivation to learn had increased.

Each kid knows where they're going and how they're doing in a more authentic, natural way, rather than being a token ... each child's learning is not a secret from them ... and as a result the kids are actually more motivated, because they see they're not arbitrary things we want them to learn. ('New School' teacher)

These students were so motivated that the teachers shared how they would get live chat messages from their students in the evenings and on the weekends, asking how to attack the next part of their learning. They noted at this point that it had become necessary for them to put in self-made boundaries to ensure that they had time away from teaching when they were away from school.

And they'll live chat with you. It's questions about learning though... Yesterday, Sunday afternoon, I saw one of the boys

working on his writing task ... and I was giving him feedback...

A lot of what we do is about balance. ('New School' teachers)

The students from Ken's class were quite outspoken about the positives of having a voice in deciding what their topic was going to be about. In response to the question about how they liked to learn best (see appendix J, question 2), one of the students replied, "active learning". When asked what active learning was the group explained:

It's like what we do – have a choice. Yeah, like students have a say, have a choice, instead of just telling you. ... But they decide if you have to do writing or stuff, but then you get to choose what to do (sic). ('Ken's' students)

These students were clearly motivated and excited about their learning, and they were able to explain what they were learning and why.

### ***Challenges from People***

The most common theme that surfaced in this series of questions was around challenges in instigating a more holistic learning environment. In some cases the participants noted that these challenges arose from the negative attitudes of other staff members who thought they should be doing the same as everyone else in the school. In other cases the negatives came from parents who appeared to misunderstand what was happening and to question its validity. Ken spoke of one parent who wanted his child removed when the class was doing anything of a spiritual nature, as he believed that was a parent's role, not the school's. This was not the case for Natalie, as parents sign a consent form at enrolment, agreeing that teachers can talk about God and pray with their child/ren. This, Natalie pointed out, is one of the advantages of being a school of special character.

The teachers at New School spoke of some parents' confusion about what they were doing, particularly in their first year, and some of the urban myths that had circulated about their teaching and learning practice.

Another challenge has been with our community and understanding our ways. At the start of last year ... parents were saying, 'When are you going to start doing maths?'

When are you going to start doing reading and writing?' Well we are, because the kids are doing statistical investigations to find out how many sausages... But they didn't recognise that different way, that there are different ways of learning. ('New School' teacher)

These teachers also mentioned that their old ways of thinking were a challenge at times, when trying to work in such a different system. As they were teaching in teams there was a need for give and take that had not been an issue when teaching as a sole classroom teacher. One teacher said it came down to:

...knowing what you would give up. Choosing the hill you'd die on. ('New School' teacher)

While another noted that there was a lot of:

... Letting go. Giving up that power... to other staff members and also to the students. ('New School' teacher)

These teachers had adjusted their thinking and practice a lot at the beginning of their time at New School, and had continued to make changes in response to the changing needs of the students.

Being responsive has been a huge advantage to having the best structures in place... So we might notice, just an example ... that children weren't as engaged as they were some time ago ... and within two days the structure in the hub changed completely. ... The kids roll with that very easily. ('New School' Teacher)

Ken agreed that for him, giving up power to the children was a major challenge, but that the benefits were worth it.

Being old fashioned I still have this thing about control... They're able to say what they need to do, what they've done well and what their next steps are. And not only that, but they actually make a conscious effort to do something about it. ('Ken')

I like active learning... Yeah, like the students have a say (sic), have a choice instead of just telling you. ('Ken's' student)

### ***Challenge of Workload***

The other challenge teachers found was the amount of work that was necessary to ensure the learning was successful, much as April mentioned earlier. Susan said that she often found herself working late into the night as she searched, usually online, for material for the students to use. She did temper this with an assurance that it didn't feel like work most of the time, as she became absorbed in her own learning in the process.

I find I do put in a lot of extra hours, but I find myself, in the evenings, at home on the Internet, trying to find new clips, new ideas, readings, websites students can go on to find information on their own and to get them engaged. But I enjoy doing it. I find myself starting to do something else and then all of a sudden I'm back into it, on teaching websites and what not. ('Susan')

Wayne mentioned that he was at school at 7.00am, didn't leave much before 6.00pm on most days and was often taking work home to 'mark' on top of that. He noted that finding balance was difficult as he could easily let school work absorb him around the clock, as he sought to provide the best possible learning environment for his students. Rodney spoke of struggling with similar tensions as Wayne, as he too remained at school till late at night.

I go over and beyond for our students... I'm usually here at seven o'clock in the morning... we've got meetings at night and usually they're not finished till five or six o'clock. Even after that I'm taking work home... ('Wayne')

So finding that balance is something I'm still looking for. ('Rodney')

One other challenge that Rodney spoke of was the students who were not so 'suited' to the Montessori environment in which he worked,

particularly boisterous, sporty children, who were therefore not as engaged in the learning.

I'm noticing that boys are less successful than girls... It's actually boisterous, rowdy people, individual learners who like to be hands on and like to be active and have (sic), are into screens at home and into Minecraft ... it just happens to be mostly boys ... have more trouble in this environment.  
(Rodney')

This specific challenge was not mentioned by any other teachers, so appeared unique to the Montessori environment. Rodney was concerned about this phenomenon, and was searching for reasons why it occurred and ways to help address the problem for those students.

So I have a bit of a personal question going on about that because I have done some, admittedly very short observations... (Rodney')

## **New Zealand Curriculum and National Standards**

The final set of questions revolved around coverage of learning areas, fulfilling the requirements of the New Zealand Curriculum and whether students were meeting National Standards. The first two questions in this section elicited mostly positive responses from the teacher participants, while the question about National Standards provoked mixed reactions.

### ***Holistic Curriculum***

There was a clear sense that the NZCD was basically holistic at heart, and so the holistic practices of these teachers fit comfortably within its framework. April, who had recently returned to fulltime teaching after having children, spoke of how the curriculum used to be very prescribed, but that now:

The achievement objectives are so flexible that they can fit your school. ... If you are a back-blocks farming school, you

could find learning experiences that fit in those AOs, as well as an inner city school. The needs are so far apart, but you can find learning experiences that fit those objectives. ('April')

This sentiment was echoed by the other participants. Verity felt that the curriculum was holistic as it was loose to interpretation:

...so therefore it does provide heaps of opportunity to lead them and go for it in any direction. ('Verity')

Wayne said it was a good fit for a Montessori teaching and learning environment:

I look at anything in the curriculum and I can easily see a Montessori thing for it, because the New Zealand curriculum's so broad and generous and good... ('Rodney')

Ken noted the inclusion of the tapa whā model in the health and physical education learning area and that sustainability, which he was passionate about, was woven throughout the curriculum:

...because sustainability is one part of it that's pretty big. And of course we've got the health curriculum strand and that's got the tapa whā model in it. ('Ken')

And Wayne acknowledge that Te Marautanga O Aotearoa, the Māori language version, added the Māori perspective to the curriculum:

So we follow Te Marautanga O Aotearoa ... and it encompasses things like whaka whenaungatanga, manaakitanga... So it's all tied in. ('Wayne')

### ***Effects of National Standards***

Feelings about the National Standards were clearly not as positive as towards the NZCD, although the teachers at New School had adapted these to create the students' matrices that had become a powerful tool for developing self-regulation of their learning.

It's based broadly on National Standards, but it's also personalised to [New School], so we call them [New School] standards. ('New School' teacher)

The students of New School also talked at length about the value of these matrices as it let them know exactly what they had achieved in their learning. One student talked of being at the year seven level in reading, but having a gap at a lower level that she needed to address. She was aware of what was needed and was waiting for an opportunity to learn the necessary skill and demonstrate what she had learnt.

They say everything you've done, that you've achieved. Because it shows you when you achieved them and how long it took you. It also shows you what you're heading up to achieving. Your next steps, what your next steps are... I have a gap in year 3 for something but it's because we haven't done it. ('New School' students)

Other than this one positive, a recurring theme was that National Standards tended to restrict teachers' freedom and ability to integrate learning. Verity noted that in the school where she worked, National Standards were more important to the parents than the teachers and that their influence on day-to-day learning was limited:

... We include them, as they are particularly important to parents, but they don't dictate our teaching and planning. ('Verity')

Ken was somewhat outspoken when addressing this issue and had worked hard to ensure that despite pressures to address the '3Rs' individually, links to the class topic and other real life opportunities were made to ensure as much authenticity as possible. He shared how his students wrote "Friday letters" to their parents, where they reflected on their learning for the week, and that the process had helped the students become more aware of their learning needs and strengths and that the parents looked forward to receiving them, as it kept them informed as well.

It's sort of forced upon us to address that, you know. A couple of years ago I started doing Friday letters. That is quite huge in keeping literacy (sic), plus the holistic side of things as well, because the children are having to reflect on what they have done. It's like self-regulated learners. ('Ken')

Susan agreed with Ken's assessment of National Standards, and was also concerned that for some students an awareness that they needed to meet National Standards resulted in their belief that the work was too hard. This was a major concern for her as she believed that the students' self-efficacy was as important as their academic success.

I'm well aware of national standards and it can be quite stressful... Those National Standards do put a bit of pressure on you... And I've had a couple of kids come out with 'it's too hard', which I know it's not. So it's just trying to get them past that ... and they can do it. ('Susan')

### ***Integration***

In terms of covering all areas of the curriculum, the theme that came through these interviews, perhaps more resoundingly than any other, was the importance of integrating the curriculum areas as much as possible. In Judy's home-schooling case, this was achieved by putting learning into real-life experiences such as cooking, raising money to buy a bow and arrow, reading to younger brothers and getting ready for Christmas. Natalie spoke of basing all learning around bible-based themes or God's character, to add the spiritual dimension that was central to their school.

Susan gave the example of an inquiry around clouds where the children did various forms of writing about clouds, read about the different types of clouds and carried out experiments around condensation. She noted that although not all curriculum areas were being covered each term, as each topic focused on different learning areas, an overview of the year would show that coverage had been quite thorough. More importantly, integration in Susan's class went beyond topic in the afternoons.

When I do my planning, say for writing and reading, we are still going through the readers, having my reading groups, they're going through the levels. I am targeting all the same skills that these students need to become good readers, but I am pulling in books or readings that are on the topic ... and that's the same for writing. ... At times I pull it into maths. ... Dance, I've been able to pull in. Drama, re-enacting floods

and trying to get across. ... And it doesn't just have to be in the afternoon, I can pull it into maths sometimes, into reading activities and science. ('Susan')

As was the case with other teachers, Susan was inclined to separate reading, writing and maths to ensure that these were covered adequately for National Standards. However, the example above demonstrates how she maintained links between these and other learning. This practice was echoed by other teachers in different forms, as they attempted to balance the demands of the standards with their belief in the value of integration as an effective teaching and learning tool.

We're covering all the different elements of the writing curriculum but it's all tied into the topic. ('Susan')

And things like maths can be far more integrated and holistic, and I suppose particularly maths could be the one subject that is really isolated, that I teach... ('Verity')

It's all integrated. We integrate all our topics and subjects together ... but we put a Māori spin on it. ('Wayne')

Student interviews confirmed the value of integration as a teaching tool. It is highly engaging for students and as such is not considered 'work' like other learning. Verity's students spoke at length about their investigation into conflict and war, and were keen to show off their resulting presentations. This was a topic that had gone over its planned timeframe as the boys had been so engrossed that Verity had let them continue.

We learnt a huge amount in the study ... we actually wanted to learn more and do more work. ('Verity's' student)

Similarly, Ken's students shared excitedly about the plants that they had grown as part of the plant study they had voted for. Susan's students were able to talk at length about the clouds they had learnt about, and explained how they had organised and managed a fundraising activity to buy a class plant. Susan had mentioned that she had been able to stand back and watch as her year one and two students handled money, including giving change, without any support, using maths strategies without realising that

was what they were doing. The pride in the students' voices as they talked about their achievements was almost palpable and they spoke with authority and confidence about their learning.

## **The Students' View**

The majority of the material gained through student interviews confirmed what the teachers were saying, with one striking exception. When the students were asked how they knew they were being successful in their learning their answers were at best vague and at worst revolved around issues such as position in the class or what their parents told them was in their reports at the end of the year. The one exception to this trend was the New School students' use of their learning matrices, although these only covered reading, writing and maths, so that even these students found it difficult to articulate how they would know if they were successful in other learning areas.

### ***Measuring Success***

When Verity's students were asked how they would know if they were successful in learning, they were adamant that for literacy and maths this was best measured by their rank in the class.

If we come at the top, like if we do the best, like I have a few times in a row (sic), we know that we are quite successful. ('Verity's' student)

You won the [New School] award. Being in higher groups... ('New School' students)

When the question was extended to their integrated topic, one student replied that:

You can't be successful in an inquiry because there are so many things you don't actually know. ('Verity's student').

This type of response was echoed to some extent by almost all the students interviewed, although with some discussion around what success might be most eventually conceded that if they know more at the end of a learning

experience or topic, or can do something they couldn't do before, then that was successful learning.

An alternative measure of success mooted by a number of students was that they were successful if they felt good about their learning, with apparently no regard for accuracy or skill.

I find if I think I've done well I'll feel really good about it.

('Rodney's' student)

If you believe you're successful then you can be successful. ('Verity's' student)

Rodney's students did suggest that they could check their work in an encyclopaedia, with a calculator, a library book or on the computer to find out if it was correct or not. With more probing and discussion, some of the students also noted that they could take their work to their teachers who might:

Just [say] 'good, you can go onto doing something else'.

(Susan's student)

[Or] if we did some stuff wrong he'll tell us to finish it properly. (Wayne's student)

[Or] she says, 'good job' or 'go back to your table and fix that...'. (April's student)

### ***What Works for Us***

Overall, the message from the students was that they knew their teachers cared about them and that although they were aware that their teachers were not perfect, they were pleased to be in their class. Ken's students were particularly positive about being in his class as they believed that:

He lets us do things other classes don't get to do. ('Ken's student')

As were Verity's students who noted that:

She makes it specific and fun at the same time. ('Verity's' student)

Furthermore, these students spoke about their learning with confidence, giving a clear message that the more true to life their learning was, the more relevant it seemed to them (such as working with money to be able to buy a plant), the more engaged and motivated they became.

Though the students did not name the Key Competencies in our discussions, it was obvious that the learning opportunities being provided for them by their teachers, was encouraging and facilitating their development in these important areas. Our discussions demonstrated the students' abilities to think about thinking, relate to others, use language symbols and texts, manage themselves and their learning, and participate and contribute within their classroom, school and wider communities (MoE, 2007). Clearly they were being prepared to be lifelong learners and to participate fully in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century world they are growing up in.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the first phase of this study, was to gain an understanding of what the literature says about how holistic education differs from traditional western teaching and learning systems, and to determine whether it is as viable an alternative as it initially appeared to be. The second phase, interviewing teachers and students, was to determine if holistic learning was occurring in New Zealand classrooms, and if so, what it looked like and what difference, if any, it made for students.

Having thus spent many hours reading about holistic education and analysing the messages presented by a variety of authors, it seems to me that the primary difference between holistic and traditional learning is philosophical. As Freeman notes, “to a certain extent, what is ‘holistic’ depends upon where you stand” (2005a, p. 154). Thus, as many of the tools in the holistic toolbox can be used in traditional environments as well as holistic classrooms, it would seem that the practicalities of implementing holistic teaching and learning is less of a barrier than changing teachers’ ways of thinking. If teachers’ paradigms can be changed to embrace a vision of schools as “complex living organism[s] that [are] evolving – changing through a sense of purpose, collaboration, and a deep sense of inner direction” (J. P. Miller, 2007) connected to the world in which they exist, rather than what is primarily a factory-like model separated from the outside world (Robinson, 2011), such a change should be achievable.

#### **Holistic or Not? That is the Question.**

The teachers I interviewed were all hard working and passionate about making a difference for their students, and their students’ comments unequivocally confirmed that their efforts were producing positive results in

terms of motivation and engagement for the majority of the learners in their classes. These were exemplary teachers who were not afraid to step outside the status quo and their comfort zones, or even to 'buck the system' if necessary, in order to meet their students' needs. As a result, many of the students I interviewed were motivated and active learners, who were able to clearly articulate what they were learning, the purpose of that learning, and (in some cases) how they would know if they were successful in learning or not.

Although most of these teachers may not initially think of their practice as holistic, or consider themselves holistic practitioners, many of the activities that they and their students described had a holistic 'feel', and the over-riding common denominator was the relationship these teachers had with their students, who were the primary focus of everything that occurred in their classrooms. It seemed to me that a holistic foundation was the commonality amongst the practices of these teachers; though they might not recognise it themselves, their settings were diverse and the how they worked was different in each unique situation.

This, of course, begs the question whether it is necessary for teachers to have a clearly defined holistic paradigm, in order to teach holistically, or if 'good' teachers will naturally provide a holistic environment for their students.

This question appears worthy of further investigation, especially in light of the changes occurring within the education sector at the present time as from nationally imposed requirements such as National Standards increasingly make it difficult for teachers to deviate from a more traditional style of teaching and learning. At the same time, there is increased implementation of information technology within classrooms and the increased level and scope of information now available to students, at the touch of a button, through the Internet.

In contrast to the changes being imposed upon educators by politicians and bureaucrats, it would seem, from my own teaching experience, discussions with colleagues in the staffroom and meetings at my school, and the interviews undertaken in this research project, that much

of the philosophical underpinning of professional development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century pedagogy – encouraging active learners, engaging whanau and lateral learning (Annan, n.d.) – is clearly holistic (although the term ‘holistic’ is certainly not used). This holistic undercurrent makes sense, in light of the holistic underpinnings of the current NZCD (MoE, 2007) and the legacy of New Zealand’s holistic educators such as Beeby, Ashton-Warner and Richardson (Abbiss, 1998; Middleton, 2012; E. Richardson, 2012). However, as the teachers’ interviews indicated, National Standards and the ever present awareness that achievement in the three Rs is seen as paramount by policy makers causes consternation and stifles teacher abilities to truly integrate learning in ways that make it more meaningful to students than to simply achieve standards.

What then is the answer? How can teachers in New Zealand primary school classrooms bridge the divide between the ‘ministry’s’ requirements and their own desire to provide meaningful and life-changing educational opportunities for their students?

Data gathered from the teacher and student interviews suggests that teachers who focus on their students’ interests and needs, and seek to implement learning opportunities that match these, while allowing the students to have a voice in the selection and application of learning activities, produced students who could see the value in what they were doing. The crux of the matter, the literature suggests, is one of relationships. “But in the end it is the relationships with the students that seem to count for most of these teachers” (Beane, 1997, p. 68), and certainly this was true of the teachers I interviewed, as the first common thread that ran through their teaching style and philosophy was a determination to develop strong relationships with individual students and their whanau. As ‘Susan’ noted:

... mainly I believe that forming those relationships is such a huge thing and it’s going to lead to a successful classroom. But it’s not... I don’t form them because I have to, I form them because I want to.

J. P. Miller (2007) agrees, pointing out that for holistic educators, like those who make a difference for their students in traditional education

systems, their relationship with the learner is the most important element in the learning equation. He adds that holistic teachers care about: their students' academic and creative development, ensuring they make connections between subjects and the learning, and subjects and themselves (through authentic learning contexts such as those being implemented by the teachers I interviewed); their physical development, which includes a positive self-image; their relational development, in how they communicate with and relate to others in their close and extended communities; and most importantly the development of their personal beings – their personal spiritual growth and their sense of connectedness to others and to the cosmos (J. P. Miller, 2007).

This importance of teachers building strong relationships with the students and their whanau, resonates well with the findings of the Te Kotahitanga Project (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003). “Students articulated how teachers showed they valued them as learners and as Māori, and they discussed how teachers had established positive relationships with them as learners, which they saw as essential for their learning” (L. H. Meyer et al., 2010, p. 3).

Of course, the positive results of these strong relationships and the innovations implemented to meet the identified needs of individual students, as the teachers sought to ‘follow the child’ (the second common denominator in the teaching philosophy and style of the teachers I interviewed), must be tempered by the amount of work being put in by these teachers in order to achieve the positive attitudes they were seeing. Susan, Wayne and Rodney articulated this challenge encountered by the teachers I interviewed, as they spoke of the long hours they spent preparing learning experiences for their students, sentiments echoed in literature about integration and holistic education.

[I'm] here at seven o'clock in the morning usually... [I'm] not finished till five or six o'clock. Even after that I'm taking work home and marking and preparing lessons for the next day, and all that kind of stuff... ('Wayne')

As Susan noted, however, these teachers do not begrudge the time they give to their students:

It does require quite a bit of work from you. I find I do put in a lot of extra hours, but... I enjoy doing it... It's not just that I'm the teacher... These kids are amazing ... and it's easy, every day to find out something new.... It's a neat profession. We're lucky like that. ('Susan')

These relationships take the teacher and students beyond a mere 'sage and follower' liaison, to one of friendship, of a kind. For these teachers, as for myself, the students in their classes become 'their children' and the resulting level of care for their well-being drives a desire to always provide the very best learning available for each and every one. As Apple and Beane (2007) attest, this type of teaching is exhausting, though extremely fulfilling, as those who choose this path truly care for their students and have opted to follow principles they believe in strongly. "In other words they have chosen to be exhausted as a result of something worthwhile" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 153).

Consequently, perhaps the greatest struggle for teachers trying to implement holistic practices in their classrooms may not be so much the pressures from colleagues and bureaucracy (although these were clearly issues that resonated as a challenge for most of the interviewees and are cited in literature), as a need to find balance in life, between the pressures from, or even passion for their teaching profession and their life outside of the classroom. This too, could well be an area for future research, as without balance, these teachers could quickly 'burn out' and be lost to the profession and the children whose lives they could positively influence.

## **Holistic Education – What's the Point?**

As noted in the findings from the teachers' and students' interviews, the first commonality amongst the advantages of implementing holistic practices was the increased motivation and engagement of students in

activities occurring in their classrooms, and learning in general, much of which was a direct result of the authentic learning contexts the teachers sought to provide, and the level of autonomy the students felt they had in directing their own learning (the final two themes identified in terms of teaching philosophy and style).

Clearly, although the issue of motivation is an important one for educators, the information gathered in this research does not provide data that addresses the question of whether holistic learning raises student achievement, as this was outside the parameters of the investigation. However, if holistic education's effect on achievement cannot be, or is not measured, what, then, sets holistic learning apart from other forms of education, at least in the eyes of the educational policy makers, for whom increased engagement does not necessarily provide quantifiable results and thus is not enough alone to make holistic education worth considering as an alternative to the status quo?

Holistic thinkers respond to the above question with the suggestion that although improved student achievement is a valuable goal for teachers, it is not enough in and of itself. Robinson (2011), points out that a basic problem with this goal is the narrow focus of achievement in modern schools, particularly literacy, numeracy and mathematics, science, and technology, while virtually ignoring the arts and interpersonal skills. What is needed, he suggests, is conditions where creativity and innovation are promoted and where classroom learning is more closely aligned with real life (Robinson, 2011).

Robinson (2011) makes a good point here, but does not address the question of how to measure success in these allegedly less 'academic' areas of learning, a gap noted by naysayers as a weakness in holistic practices. Even in the Montessori system, where creativity generally holds a higher status than in traditional schooling, Rodney noted that records of how much time is spent on learning in the different areas are kept, including those outside the traditional three Rs, science and technology, but not how well the students have 'performed' or achieved some sort of standard.

It's all about record keeping ... about how many lessons this kid has had in each curriculum area and how much... We have to tell it, obviously, whether they've had a presentation, whether they've practised it, whether they've mastered it ... It's not about performance, or grades or anything. It's literally about how much activity they have had in that area. ('Rodney').

The difficulty in measuring success in these areas was also voiced by one of Verity's students when he stated quite emphatically, that:

You can't be successful in an inquiry because there are so many things you don't actually know. ('Verity's student')

He appeared to believe that success had to be measured by some sort of formal assessment and that without such measures he and his teacher had no way of knowing if he had been successful in his learning or not. If this is so, or is at least the perception of many teachers, students and their whanau, how then is the holistic educator to address the issue of assessment especially in the 'other' learning areas? It is, perhaps, this difficulty with quantifying the success of holistic learning that elicited the negative responses from others, perceived by interviewees as a common challenge that must be addressed (or ignored) if they are to persevere with the holistic practices they believe make a difference for their students .

As noted earlier, holistic educators and theorists question the validity of commonly used and standardised assessment measures as being too narrow and therefore irrelevant in terms of life application. Forbes (2012) claims that the issue is the type of assessment being used, and this may answer the question of how to assess these 'other' areas. Assessment of holistic education by nature focuses on the development of competencies within the student, rather than traditional assessment's measure of performance (Forbes, 2012). This suggestion takes us back to the NZCD and the Key Competencies that underpin and support the learning areas. As the NZCD states, "More complex than skills, the competencies draw also on knowledge, attitudes, and values in ways that lead to action. They are

not separate or stand-alone. they are the key to learning in every learning area” (MoE, 2007, p. 12).

Although the teachers I interviewed did not specifically mention the Key Competencies in our discussions, their importance was certainly implied. The high levels of participation by students, the cooperative learning that occurred in their classrooms, the integration of learning areas (a common practice by the interviewees that facilitated adequate coverage across the curriculum) and the variety of learning experiences, levels of thinking and forms of presentation used by them indicated that these competencies were being developed and applied as part of the learning process. Perhaps for the holistic teacher in a New Zealand primary school classroom, it is these key competencies that should be the focus of assessment, appropriate to the levels of “[development] over time, shaped by interactions with people, places, ideas, and things” (MoE, 2007, p. 12).

As (Forbes, 2012) suggests, a focus on the development and assessment of competencies produces a child-centred learning environment using “more of a ‘bottom up’ approach than the ‘top down’ approach of performance based pedagogy, [with] less of a predetermined-outcomes form of pedagogy” (p. 242). The term ‘end in mind child’, which is regularly heard in professional development sessions at the school in which I teach, echoes these sentiments as we are repeatedly reminded that our teaching practice must first and foremost be developed with the needs of the child as the starting point. The problem here is that this is then tempered by a reminder that it is performance of predetermined outcomes that must be used to measure success, to satisfy the requirements of the policy makers.

This incongruity was echoed by the teachers I interviewed, as they acknowledged the ease with which they could fit holistic teaching practices into the broad requirements of the NZCD (MoE, 2007), and the contradiction of the narrow focus of National Standards (MoE, 2013a). The questions must therefore be asked: In light of the current education climate, are those teachers who wish to take a more holistic approach to teaching and learning able to continue to do so within the mainstream system? It would be a shame if positions became so polarised that such innovators felt it

necessary to walk away from mainstream teaching and the very students that they have sought to support.

## **Where to From Here?**

And so, with the afore-mentioned strengths and concerns in mind, one must ask whether it is possible to envision holistic education in a mainstream New Zealand primary school classroom, or if the obstacles to its broad application are simply insurmountable.

From where I stand, looking back on nearly two years of reading and research, as well as my own teaching experience over the last decade, I believe that despite the obvious hurdles, such a vision is possible. As mentioned earlier, the crux of the matter is not so much the actual practices being employed, as the heart of the one employing them. In essence, I believe that quality teachers are teachers at heart before and beyond their professional training and skill, and as such, are wired to teach with the 'whole child' in mind, provided authentic and relevant learning experiences that help their students make connections between new learning and the world in which they live.

My vision of a holistic New Zealand primary school classroom resonates with much of the rhetoric of current professional development foci connected to Learning and Change Networks around the country (one of which my school is a part), of students being active learners who are culturally situated members of their whanau and wider community and are able to make use of the technologies available in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century to integrate and enhance their learning (Annan, n.d.). It surprises me, therefore, that even my colleagues whose practice appears most holistic bristle at the mention of the term 'holistic education'. Perhaps the biggest hurdle to fulfilling such a vision is providing an understanding of what holistic teaching and learning is, that busy classroom teachers can easily grasp and relate to the excellent work they already do, with and for their students.

How, then, is this hurdle to be scaled? The problem is not a lack of material on the subject (although it is not always easy to find – as mentioned

earlier ), nor is the problem that teachers are entrenched in practices they are not willing to change (at least not in my school, where inquiry into our practice and change are the order of the day). Rather, it would seem that the terminology carries a stigma that needs to be clarified and addressed. Why the negative reactions? What 'turns teachers off' the idea? This too suggests an area for future research, to determine if there is a way to enable teachers to see beyond a somewhat blurry terminology, that even researchers cannot agree on (Esfeld, 1998; Owen & Holmes, 1993) and to embrace holistic education as a comfortable fit for schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Of course, one cannot forget the 'powers that be' who continue to require accountability in the form of student achievement data. Thus, to strengthen a vision of holistic learning in mainstream New Zealand classrooms, and to silence the critics of holistic practice, the question remains whether it is possible to quantify its success in terms of student achievement in the traditional learning areas, and in the arts, creativity and interpersonal skills (and perhaps even the Key Competencies).

Future research, therefore, might follow teachers implementing holistic practices in their classrooms over an extended period in order to measure the achievement data of their students, preferably in comparison to their previous results. Tentatively such research could be centred on questions such as: Does holistic education raise achievement of primary school students, especially in the core learning areas of reading, writing and maths? If so, how is this achieved? This could be followed or supplemented by questions such as: In what way does holistic education facilitate development of the key competencies in students? Does holistic education increase student achievement in the arts? And: How does holistic education facilitate students' interpersonal skills?

The scope for further research on this topic is clearly vast, which is not surprising in light of the scope of different forms of holism as an idea and holistic education as a teaching paradigm. It is fair to say, that in terms of a definition of holistic education, and a view of what it might look like in the future, the simplest definition remains the one that is most relevant – that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' (Becht, 1974; Healy,

2009) and as such, the purpose of holistic education must be to produce the most fully developed individuals possible (Forbes, 2012).

### **What Does This Mean for Me?**

In light of the learning that I have undertaken over the past two years, and my personal vision for a holistic classroom, I must confess that I stand in awe of those teachers who create truly integrated and holistic classrooms for their students. It is easy to 'spout' the theories, but much more difficult to put them into practice.

What has been confirmed for me is that my instinct to really get to know my students and to allow them to get to know me creates a solid foundation on which to provide relevant, authentic and engaging learning tasks. The challenge for me is how to take what I am currently doing one step further, and to incorporate the key factors that I have learnt about democratic and spiritual education into my daily classroom practice (two facets that I feel are currently lacking),

I believe that if I can achieve this goal, then I will provide my students with the best possible education I can offer. Will this make a significant difference to my students' National Standards achievements? I do not know, and will be interested to see. What I do know is that it will certainly equip my students to be the best people they can be, and it gives me a sense of excitement, for what they might achieve in the future.

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## Appendix A:

### Information Letter for Teacher Participants

XXXXXXX

Dear XXXXX

I am writing to formally invite you to participate in the research project we discussed. As you are aware I am studying towards a Master of Education through the University of Waikato, in which I am researching holistic learning as an alternative approach to engaging and motivating students, in order to raise student achievement. The purpose of this study is to develop a clear definition of a holistic approach to teaching and learning, and a picture of what this could look like in a primary school classroom. As part of this research I wish to interview a number of teachers who are experimenting with different styles of teaching and learning; in particular those approaches which appear to incorporate a number of subject areas or learning possibilities within a single, extended project, inquiry or experience. The aim of the interview is to gain an insight into the teacher's understanding of holistic learning and how it is implemented in their practice.

Although we as teachers work hard to reach all students and are passionate about raising achievement, data indicates that our current 'methods' are not working for some students. This research will be valuable as it will provide teachers with other possible approaches to teaching and learning.

This study will focus on discovering teachers' and students' beliefs about holistic teaching and learning. I am particularly interested in finding out about innovative, alternative approaches teachers are currently trying, that are of a somewhat holistic nature. Therefore, as I have been made aware that you are open to experimenting with alternative approaches with your class, I would like to include you and your students in my study.

As a participant in this study, I would be asking you to participate a one-on-one interview of approximately 1 hour in length, to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. The interview may be followed by an observation in your classroom, if you feel that this would be beneficial to my understanding of the information you have shared with me. Your involvement will be beneficial to you, as it will provide opportunity for you to consider your views of teaching and learning and to critique the success of the approaches you are currently using.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. I would also like to take photographs of displays around the room, and samples of children's work, should you feel these would help clarify or illustrate the information you share with me. The transcript of the interview and notes from my observations will be provided for you to check and edit if required. Any changes will need to be returned to me within two weeks. All data will be treated in the strictest confidence and stored in a secure environment. Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. Schools and participants will be referred to throughout the research using pseudonyms, and any identifying features or names in photographs or on work samples will be removed or covered up.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and the information you provide me with may be withdrawn from the study up to two weeks following your receipt of the final transcript. You may also decline to answer any questions during the interview.

I look forward to the opportunity to work with you on this project. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information, please contact me. My contact details are: Phone 04 9710376 or 0272898862 or Email, [sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz](mailto:sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz). If you have concerns that you would prefer to discuss with someone other than myself, please contact my supervisor, Carl Mika at 07 8384466 ext. 6151 or Email, [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz).

Should you choose to participate in this study, I have attached an informed research consent form, which I would be most grateful if you would complete and return in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and your students, and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "SHall".

Sherilyn Hall  
Student  
University of Waikato

## **Appendix B:**

# **Teacher Participant Consent Form**

Research project: Defining holistic learning and what it 'looks like' in New Zealand primary school classrooms

I consent to being a participant in the research project on holistic learning and understand that this will involve me:

- Participating in an interview of approximately 1 hour in duration
- Selecting a group of four to six of my students to be interviewed
- Being observed as I work with my classroom, if I feel this is helpful to clarify the information that I have shared in the interview

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcripts will be provided for me to check and edit if required. I also understand that should an observation occur, notes will be made and photographs of classroom displays, along with samples of students' work may be taken to support these notes. The observation notes will also be provided to me to check and edit if required. I have been informed that data will be treated with strictest confidence and stored in a secure environment.

I understand that both my school and I will be referred to using pseudonyms and that all identifying features and names will be removed from photos and work samples, or covered up where removal is not possible.

I am aware of my right to withdraw from this research at any time, to have my data removed up to two weeks after my receipt of the transcription and

notes, and to decline to answer any questions posed to me. Should I withdraw, I know that the information and data from observations and discussions will not be included in the study. In addition to being used for the purpose of this Masters thesis, I am aware that this research project, or parts thereof, may be later published in academic journal articles or presented at conferences.

Should I have any concerns, I understand that I am able to discuss these with the researcher, and if I have concerns that are not resolved, I am able to contact her supervisor, Carl Mika via email: [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz) or phone: 07 8384466 ext. 6151

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C:**

### **Information Letter for Principals**

XXXXXXXXXX

Re: Research project: Defining holistic learning and what it 'looks like' in New Zealand primary school classrooms

Dear XXXXX

I am writing to formally invite your school to become part of the research project we discussed. As you are aware I am studying towards a Master of Education through the University of Waikato in which I am researching holistic learning. The purpose of this study is to develop a definition of holistic learning and a clear 'picture' of what it might look like in a primary school classroom. As part of this research I wish to interview a number of teachers who are experimenting with different styles of teaching and learning, particularly those approaches which appear to incorporate a number of subject areas or learning possibilities within a single, extended project, inquiry or experience. I would also like to interview a group of students from the teacher's class, and if the teacher interviewee feels it would be helpful, to observe their classroom practice.

Although teachers work hard to reach all students and are passionate about raising achievement, data indicates that our current 'methods' are not working for some students. This research will be valuable as it will provide teachers with other possible approaches to teaching and learning.

This study will focus on discovering teachers' and students' beliefs about holistic teaching and learning, and experiences they have had in this area. I am particularly interested in finding out about innovative, alternative approaches teachers are currently trying, that are of a somewhat holistic nature.

The project will involve an approximately one hour interview with the participant teacher, followed by a group interview with four to six students from the class, which should last no longer than half an hour. These interviews could be followed by a classroom observation if the participant teacher feels that this would be helpful to clarify some of the information offered or ideas expressed during the interview. It is anticipated that the school will support this research by providing some in-school time and a place for the interviews to be conducted. The research will take place from mid-May 2013 through to the end of Term 3, 2013.

The interview will be audio recorded and photographs of relevant displays around the room, along with samples of children's work may be taken during any follow-up observation. Transcripts of the interview and notes from observations will be provided to participants to check and edit if required. All data will be treated in the strictest confidence and stored in a secure environment. Every effort will be made to ensure the anonymity of participants. Schools and participants will be referred to throughout the research using pseudonyms, and any identifying features or names in photographs or on work samples will be removed or covered up.

In addition to being used for the purpose of my Masters thesis, this research project, or parts thereof, may be later published in academic journal articles or included in conference presentations.

I look forward to the opportunity to work in your school. If you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are: Phone: 04 9710376, mobile: 0272898862 or Email: [sherilynh@dysterstreet.school.nz](mailto:sherilynh@dysterstreet.school.nz). If you have concerns that you would prefer to discuss with someone other than myself, please contact my supervisor, Carl Mika. Phone: 07 8384466 ext. 6151 or Email: [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz).

Should you choose to participate in this study, I have attached an informed research consent form, which I would be most grateful if you would complete and return in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

Thank you for your anticipated support

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "SHall".

Sherilyn Hall  
Student researcher  
University of Waikato

## Appendix D:

### Consent Form for Principal

I \_\_\_\_\_ give consent for  
\_\_\_\_\_ School to participate in the research project on  
holistic learning. The teacher participating in this project is

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I understand that both the school and the teacher and students involved will be referred to using pseudonyms and that all identifying features and names will be removed from photos and work samples, or covered up where removal is not possible.

I am aware that the school, teachers and students have the right to withdraw from this research at any time, and to withdraw their data up to two weeks after the teacher's receipt of the transcription and notes, and to decline to answer any questions. Should withdrawal occur, I understand that the information and data from observations and discussions will not be included in the study. Where withdrawal involves a student, their work and comments alone will be withdrawn. In addition to being used for the purpose of this Masters thesis, I am aware that this research project, or parts thereof, may be later published in academic journal articles or presented at conferences.

Should there be any concerns, I understand that I am able to discuss these with the researcher, and if I have concerns that are not resolved, I am able to contact her supervisor, Carl Mika via email: [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz) or phone: 07 8384466 ext. 6151

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# **Appendix E:**

## **Information Letter for Child/Student Participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Your teacher will have told you that I am looking at different ways that learning happens in classrooms, so that I can help teachers find new and better ways to work with their students. Your teacher will also have told you that he/she has agreed to let me come and talk with him/her and a group of students from your class about the teaching and learning that goes on. I may also come into your class to see what is happening, if he/she thinks that would be helpful for my research.

I will talk with a group of four to six of you together, and ask you questions about the learning that happens in your classroom. I will record our conversation so that it is easier for me to make sure that I don't miss anything important that you tell me. If your teacher thinks it will be helpful, I may ask to take copies of some of the work you have been doing in class.

Shortly after I have visited your school, I will send your teacher a written copy (transcript) of everything we talked about and I saw, so that he/she and you can check it is correct. You might agree to talk with me but change your mind later and that is okay. You have up to two weeks after the teacher receives the transcript of our interview to change your mind and let me know.

When I write about my research, I will not use your name, the name of your school or anyone else in your class's name. I might use some of the things you told me, but will use a made-up name, rather than yours. I will make sure your name does not show on any pieces of work or in any photographs, so that no one can tell whose work it is.

Although the things I learn from my research are mainly for my Masters thesis (a very long piece of writing), it is possible that one day some of what I have written might be published somewhere else, or I might talk about it at a conference.

If you have any questions, you can ring me on 04 9710376 or 0272898862 or email me at [sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz](mailto:sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz). You can also contact my supervisor, Carl Mika by email: [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz) or phone: 07 8384466 ext. 6151.

I hope that you are able to be involved in my study and I look forward to seeing you in your classroom soon.

Yours sincerely



Sherilyn Hall





Student researcher  
University of Waikato

# Appendix F:

## Student Consent Form

Defining holistic learning and what it 'looks like' in New Zealand primary school classrooms

I am happy for Sherilyn Hall to:

- Use my comments from the group interview  
- Take copies of my work  

I understand that if I don't want my work copied or my comments written down I can say so and they will not be used.

(Tick)

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G:**

# **Information Letter for Parent/Guardian of Child Participants**

Dear Parents and Caregivers

I am involved in research as part of my study for a Master of Education degree, looking at the teaching and learning approaches being used in our New Zealand primary schools.

Although teachers work hard to reach all students and are passionate about raising achievement, recent data indicates that current 'methods' are not working for some students. In my research I am looking at other possible approaches to teaching and learning, particularly in terms of more holistic approaches, that may help us meet the needs of those students. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to define a holistic approach to teaching and learning, what it would look like in a New Zealand primary school classroom.

The study will focus on discovering what practices are working in NZ classrooms, and which seem to be less effective, while investigating innovative, alternative approaches that are being used in some classrooms. The school principal and your child's teacher have agreed to be part of the research project, but I also need your approval.

As part of the research project, I will be interviewing your child's teacher and a group of four to six students from the class. I will be asking the students about their learning, what they enjoy, and what works best for them. I may undertake one follow-up observation in the classroom, if the teacher deems that it would be helpful to clarify some of what he/she has shared with me. During the observation, I may ask your child questions about his/her learning, take photographs of relevant displays around the room, and take samples of children's work. The name of the school and all individuals will remain confidential with pseudonyms used throughout

the project, and any names on displays or work samples removed or covered up.

Shortly after my visit I will provide the teacher with a transcript of the interview, so that he/she and the children involved can check them for accuracy. Your child has the right to withdraw from the research at any stage and the information they give me can be withdrawn up to two weeks after the transcripts are received by the teacher. Should you provide consent for your child to participate, please read through the enclosed letter with them and assist them in signing the form allowing me to use their comments from our discussions and take copies of relevant work samples.

The primary use of this research is for my Masters thesis, although it is possible that some or all may be later used for academic articles or conferences.

If you have any questions you may contact me or the principal, as appropriate. My contact details are: Email: [sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz](mailto:sherilynh@dyerstreet.school.nz) or Phone: 04 9710376, mobile: 0272898862. If you have concerns that you would prefer to discuss with someone other than myself, please contact my supervisor, Carl Mika. Phone: 07 8384466 ext. 6151 or Email: [mika@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mika@waikato.ac.nz).

I feel that this will be a valuable experience for the children in this class. Please discuss the project with your child, check that they are happy to be involved, and if so, ensure they sign the 'child consent form'.

It would be appreciated if you could complete the consent form below and return it and your child's consent form to the class teacher by XXXX.

Yours sincerely



Sherilyn Hall

Student researcher  
University of Waikato

# Appendix H:

## Consent Form for Parent/Guardian of Child Participants

After being informed about what is involved in the research project: “Defining holistic learning and what it ‘looks like’ in New Zealand primary school classrooms”, I give consent for my child to participate.

I give consent on the understanding that:

- My child’s name and identity will remain confidential at all times.
- My child’s comments from discussions and copies of work may be used as part of this project
- Notes from observations will be taken and may be used in the research, but will not in any way identify my child
- My child may withdraw from the study at any stage and have their data removed up to two weeks after the transcript of interviews is received by their teacher, in which case no further information will be collected from them, and previously collected material will not be used
- I have read through the ‘child letter and consent form’ with my child and am confident they understand what is being asked of them

Child’s name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# **Appendix I:**

## **Research Interview Questions - Teacher**

### **Some preliminary questions about you as a teacher:**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What year levels have you taught previously?
3. What year level are you teaching now?
4. Are you involved in any management or leadership in the school?  
If so, what role/s do you fill?

### **Questions about your view of what holistic learning 'looks like' in a classroom:**

1. What is your teaching philosophy? What underpins what you do?  
What are you passionate about?
2. Would you describe your teaching style, in general, as holistic?  
Why/Why not?
3. Please describe the teaching-learning style / method / system you use in your classroom
4. What led you to try this particular method / style / system?
5. Are there any challenges you have had to face in order for this system to work? What? How?
6. How, if at all, do you see a holistic style of teaching fitting with the expectations of the NZ curriculum?
7. How do you ensure coverage of all areas of learning?
8. How would / do you ensure students are meeting standards in literacy and maths within this system with a holistic approach?
9. Are there any students or groups of students that you see this style working better / worse for, than traditional learning experiences?
10. What differences have you seen in their attitude to and achievement in learning?
11. Why do you think that is the case?
12. Do you have any other pieces of interesting or helpful information about your teaching and the learning environment you have created, that could be helpful to my research?

## **Appendix J:**

### **Interview Questions – Student**

1. What are you learning about today?
2. How do you like to learn best? One activity / many activities?  
Reading? Questioning? Research? Hands on? ...
3. Is there anything that you think makes it easier / harder for you to learn?
4. How do you know if you are successful in your learning?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your learning?

## Appendix K: Research Participants - Overview

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Years of Service</b> (at time of interview)	<b>Current Year Level</b>	<b>Extra Information</b>
April	State contributing primary	15	1	Recently returned to fulltime teaching
Rodney	Integrated Montessori	11 years	5/6/7	
Verity	Private boys full primary	20 years	5	
Susan	State contributing primary	18 months	2/3	Attempting cross-curricula integration
Ken	State contributing primary	11 years	4/5	Integrates environmental education
Natalie	Integrated Christian full primary	48 years	New Entrant	
Wayne	Māori immersion Unit in state contributing primary	3 years	NE-6	Single class includes all year levels
New School* (9 teachers)	State contributing primary	18 months to 21 years	NE-6	Purpose built 21 <sup>st</sup> Century School – team teaching
Judy	Home schooling mum	2½ years	5/7 year olds	Interviewed via Skype

\*Teachers in 'New School' not individually identified