

## Chapter 3

### Holistic Education – a panorama

*Remember this.... You are a spiritual being in an interconnected reality*

#### **Questions:**

*What does Holistic Education look like and feel like?*

*What is the field of Holistic Education?*

*What are the essences of Holistic Education?*

*What are the implications for someone aspiring to be a Holistic Educator?*

#### **Introduction**

Holistic Education is something that snuck up on me. First through my own exploration of the field of spirituality, then my introduction to Wilber in the early 1980's, then being inspired by the GATE visioning of Phil Gang in the late 1980's and then an introduction to an entity called 'holistic education' in the early 1990's. Since then the literature in the area has grown exponentially as well as the number of practitioners, schools, and university courses.

My husband (Roger Stack) and I established a Tasmanian network for Holistic Education (HENT) in the early 90's, hosting discussion groups, disseminating newsletters, establishing a web site – [www.hent.org](http://www.hent.org) and discussion list, and then being invited to run workshops and conference sessions locally and internationally.

This web site, mainly due to the phenomenal efforts of Roger, has grown to over 300 pages, linking Holistic Education with similar concerns in education and other fields across the world. Roger has written papers and been in discussions to inform the curriculum visioning of the *Essential Learnings* (K-10), resulting in the inclusion into the statements of some key Holistic concepts, including the notion of a spiritual self and a sense of connectedness and wholeness. He is now a state-wide leader in the re-visioning process of Year 11/12 curriculum and is bringing Holistic and Integral concepts and processes to that discussion.

My role in this has been as a researcher of lived experience – making meaning of principles and pedagogies in practice, whereas Roger is more the theorist, mapping the area. Together we compliment each other, bringing both structure and meaning, learning from each other, and then being able to be involved in rich dialogue with others as we borrow from each other's experience. Yes, I am a structuralist too, but we think about it in different ways – perhaps a yin/yang complementarity. So my understanding of Holistic Education has been very much shaped and informed by my husband's view and vice versa.

So now I am in the position of summarizing the field of Holistic Education in a mere 30 pages. It is a very messy and complex field, often contradictory and usually very rich – so it is hard to extract essences without losing that richness. But never-the-less I am going to have a go at it. It forms such an important part of my thinking as a teacher. In order to make better sense of it, I am going to use Integral Theory and Spiral Dynamics to help me organize it.

### **What does Holistic Education look like and sound like?**

Imagine you are looking at a landscape comprising holistic schools and holistic educators. What would it look like, sound like or even smell like? What do you notice about the way teachers and students are interacting? What is the focus of learning that is going on? How is the curriculum arranged and who has control of it?

Would there be commonalities between these holistic schools or classrooms? Would these be informed by the same philosophies and world views? Would we see similar pedagogies? Would we see similar metaphors for the teaching and learning process?

How would you know that what you are doing is holistic or formed part of the holistic spectrum of possibilities?

### **Exhibit A**

*Here in this government high school (years 7 to 10) they have decided that students learn best through contextual projects or questions and have repackaged their previous curriculum (which was broken into disciplines) into question or problem centred modules which may include multiple disciplinary approaches. They are explicitly teaching systems thinking and encouraging students to bring to these focus questions big picture understandings rather than fragmented understandings. They*

*have a common starting point for the students in a class, then encourage students to generate their own questions and go on their own negotiated journey of exploration. They are using the terms holistic, integrated learning, transdisciplinary learning and student centred and student directed learning to describe what they are doing.*

Is this holistic? What are the underpinning paradigms of the teachers in this school?

### **Exhibit B**

*Now, let us enter this maths class over here in a government college for 16-18 year olds. There is a slightly stale smell as the classroom is air-conditioned with the windows shut. The teacher is standing at the board explaining ratio. Later she gives the students a worksheet and goes around and helps them.*

*As the class gets busy we find her sitting next to Joshua, a refugee from Sudan. She is asking him how he is going in his other classes and at home. She knows that he has to sometimes baby-sit his two sisters while his parents are working and often has to miss school. He is really concerned that he is missing key lessons. The teacher knows he doesn't have any friends (it came out of an earlier lesson on surveys) and is very shy. So she encourages another student, Brian, to sit with him and take him through what he has missed. Some weeks later he comes in with some DVDs that he shows to Brian while they are supposed to be working. The teacher is about to say something to get the boys back on task and stops suddenly as she realizes that perhaps this moment of connection between Joshua and Brian is far more important than maths.*

*This teacher considers herself informed by holistic principles but feels that she is being squeezed by curriculum requirements and can't articulate these principles in the way she teaches.*

Is this holistic? What expectations does the teacher have about what it means to be holistic?

### **Exhibit C**

*Now let us enter this alternate primary school set in the bush with sweeping views over a bay. Specially designed buildings offer lots of light and provide an organic and vibrant working area. We smell the eucalypt trees which shelter the buildings.*

*Here there is a very specific curriculum for all grades that has been followed since the school's inception with little room for student negotiation or change by the teacher. What informs this curriculum choice?*

*We discover that it is based on a very precise and well articulated notion of what it means to be a spiritual being on Earth – how the soul incarnates or unfolds fully into the physical body through 7 year cycles which conclude after 42 years. We find out that to assist the soul/body in a healthy unfolding in each stage that the teacher needs to understand and come to know the student deeply and to provide experiences in line with the curriculum which assist the unfolding. Thus teachers will stay with their classes for 6 years. In the cycle 7-14 years much focus is placed on developing the feelings and artistic sense of students as this resonates with the needed soul energy. Extending the soul beyond its capacity at any stage enables disease to develop in later life.*

*In this school the teachers see their interaction with students as an opportunity for self understanding and transformation; since coming to know another really well requires knowing oneself. This school is one of thousands of Steiner schools around the world, and they are considered by many to exemplify a holistic school, though criticized by some as recipe driven.*

Is it holistic?

## **Exhibit D**

*Now we enter another classroom. Oops. No-one is there. We go back down the steps and discover the students all blindfolded holding onto a rope walking down a corridor filled with student art work and the smell of paint. The teacher is asking them to imagine being blind and not seeing light, colour, shape ever....not knowing what a sunset looks like, or clouds floating across the sky, or the face of a friend as they express joy or sadness.*

*We come out into the open and the students are now taking off their blindfolds, most gasping as if they are surprised and as if they are seeing something they didn't expect to see. The teacher is asking them (perhaps a bit redundantly) to really look, really see this miracle of light. What sort of class is this? Mindfulness training? Religious studies?*

*They are now holding different lens and diffraction gratings up to the light, playing with rainbows. We see that some are really struck and really thinking. Some have a sense of childlike wonder and curiosity, eyes shining... others are quietly talking, retelling their experience and their insights. Are we seeing their souls?*

*We find out that this is a Year 12 pre-tertiary Physics class and this lesson is an introduction to light. Soon they will be learning Snell's law and calculating refractive angles but for now they are asking questions like "What really is light?", "How do we really see?", "Why are there so many colours?", "Why are things the way they are?", "Why haven't I noticed this before?"*

*Why has the teacher done this? She tells us: "Light is really something to wonder about, to have awe... our whole universe is like that really... but often when we teach a syllabus that awe is left out... we just teach the mechanics; the how, not the why. As students get into the nitty gritty I want them to take with them the big questions, to remember that physics is just one way of perceiving the world and that there are others... that with mindfulness we have the capacity to see and experience so much more richly. It would be nice to follow the path of all their questions and explore in an open ended way, but I have an exam to prepare them for getting into university, so this is a way of me bringing a sense of soul within a very specific and tight curriculum and inviting them to continue their exploration of soul for themselves."*

So is this class holistic? What informs this teacher's beliefs about soul and learning?

Do we measure holistic by what informs teachers or schools in their teaching and design of curriculum and the way they articulate their intent? Or by what we see happening in students? Or how teachers themselves are undergoing transformation and self-realisation? Or...?

**So what is *holistic* and how is it being used in the context of education?**

**Holistic** is a phrase being coined by many people or schools, as well as being used in curriculum descriptions. You will find it in medicine, business, ecology and many other fields. *Spiral Dynamics* (Beck and Cowan 1996) uses holistic to describe a particular vMeme

(*Holistic* is Turquoise, second tier) as well as to describe an integrated experience that a person might have of a particular vMeme.

In education it can refer to education of the whole person, a certain set of pedagogies, principles or philosophies, a state of integration, integrated curriculum, consideration of many holon levels or consideration of whole systems.

The people who use the term could be coming from various worldviews or cultures. We might see some schools who claim to be holistic focusing on democracy issues, giving students lots of freedom in their learning. Others, like the Steiner schools, have considerable structure based on esoteric principles of child development.

The main advantage that the term holistic has is that it is not precise and can be used in many different ways. And that to understand it we need to engage in dialogue with the users to find out what they mean. And in the process, we connect a little more deeply.

However, what might be common amongst the plethora of expressions of **Holistic Education** is the belief that *we are spiritual beings in an interconnected reality*. If you apply this requirement to the way it might be popularly used you begin to realize that more often than not it is being used in a more systems context – whole and integrated, rather than having an underlying spiritual philosophy. Holistic Education doesn't pin down exactly what *spiritual* means and therefore you might see Holistic Education in Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, Confucian, esoteric, or non-sectarian contexts, to name a few.

Key thinkers in the field of Holistic Education are Ron Miller (1990, 2000) in the US, Jack Miller (1993, 1994, 1996, 2000) in Canada, Ramon Gallegos Navo (2001) in Mexico and more recently Yoshiharu Nakagawa (2000) in Japan.

Ron Miller (2000) describes the origins of Holistic Education as a counter response to spiritually denuded mainstream education. Roger Stack (personal communication, 5/7/2006) has mapped (see Fig 3.1) its genealogy based on Ron Miller's work, including some additional fields of influences. From this map you can see that Holistic Education is informed by many leading educational thinkers.



We could also look at how these thinkers might be loosely placed on Wilber's quadrants. For example, *Parker Palmer* (1983, 1998) has a key concern for teachers' interior spaces (**I**), *Nel Noddings* (1992, 1984) is interested in care in schools and creating caring communities (**WE**), and *David Orr* (1994) is interested in making explicit the feedback from systems so we can learn directly from the ecologies we are in (**ITS**).

**Possible location of various educationalists or theorists using Integral Theory (open to challenge)**

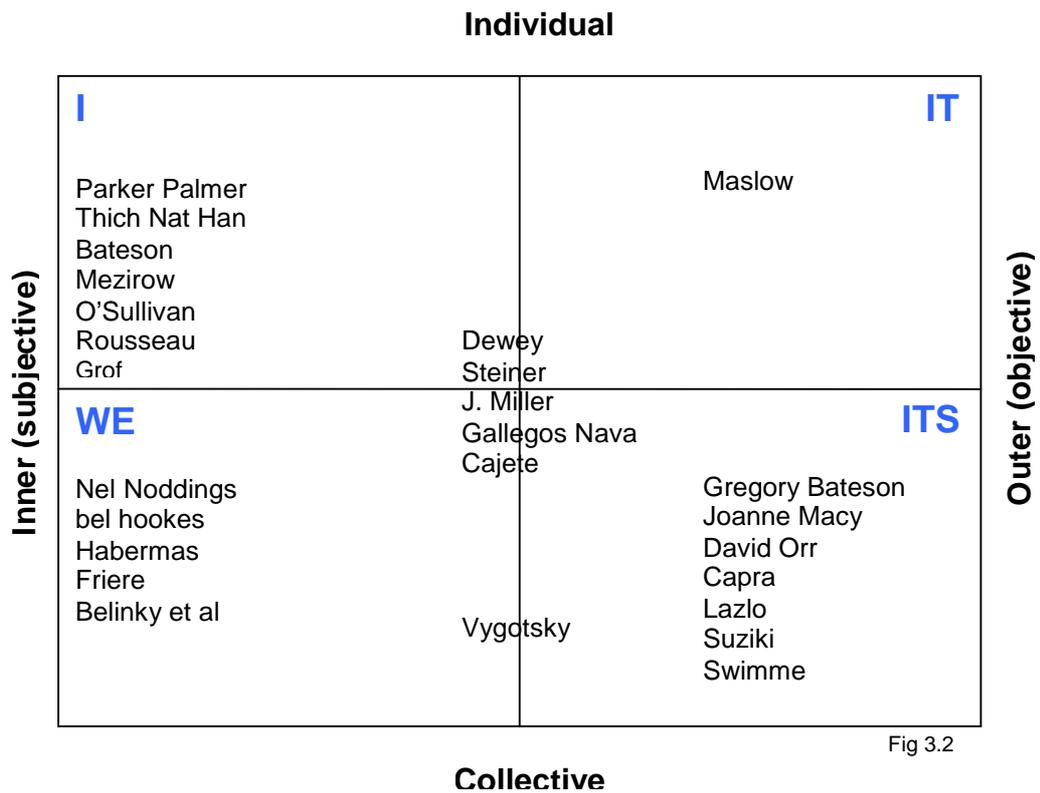


Fig 3.2

**How is Holistic Education practiced?**

You might see Holistic Education being practiced by individual teachers in mainstream schools, in specially visioned schools, in curriculum frameworks or encouraged through teacher education programs. Some practitioners might be focussed on doing the best they can within their classes and within the educational system they are constrained by, while others are challenging the very conception of educational principles and structures which inform those systems. Often Holistic Education seems to be more focussed on the spiritual aspects rather than others, mainly as a counter response to their absence. Here are some examples:

### **1. Teachers or programs within mainstream schools.**

There are many examples of teachers applying holistic education principles to teaching of classes within mainstream schools and the magazine *Encounter* is a good resource of such examples. Examples of programs might be Rachael Kessler's (2000) rite of passage program in US schools and Rachel Naomi Remen's program in Medical schools to help doctors reclaim their humanity (Remen 1999). We might see classes using autobiography, creating inner city forests and writing poems to trees.

### **2. Whole schools or curriculum**

Examples of holistic schools might be the Schumacher school in England based on the insights of Krishnamurti (1983), Steiner schools, democratic schools like Boorabong, Queensland and South Western University in the USA.

*South Western University* provides a Master of Art Therapy course over two years. In the first year students explore themselves and the nature of self transformation through art work, study, performance and taking on the role for one month of a famous person who was involved in transformation work. It is a deeply soulful and personal experience. In second year they learn psychological theories and come to understand them through the lens of their own transformative experiences. This school produces highly sought after graduates who have deep sensitivity as well as intellectual understanding – integrating heart, mind and soul.

Holistic schools are not just about delivering holistic programs; the very way they are run is based on holistic principles. For example, a key aspect of Steiner education is teachers using contemplative practice to understand their students while engaging in a deep study of anthroposophy – an esoteric program designed by Steiner. The Boorabong School which believes in students choosing what they study also have democratic processes for selecting teachers – the students are key deciders.

### **3. University courses for teachers**

Examples of these are Masters programs for teachers which are being run by Jack Miller (OISE, Canada) and Ramon Gallegos Nava, (Guadalajara, Mexico) and undergraduate teaching courses which are being run by Greg Cajete (New Mexico, US) and Atsuhiko Yoshido in Japan.

**Jack Miller's** program requires teachers to start their own contemplative practice and to observe the effects it has on their teaching, and the way they see their students. His notion of Holistic Education is that it has three key themes: balance, inclusiveness and connectedness. He recommends pedagogies which assist students in connecting self with body, nature, others, and inner self.

**Atsuhiko Toshido's** (2000) program at Osaka's Women University looks at how practices from Japanese culture – calligraphy, tea ceremonies, ancestor reverence, festivals – can be renewed and revisioned to provide opportunity for mindfulness, connection with others and connection to a greater reality. Thus helping connect a disconnected generation of Japanese back to their roots. His student teachers take up calligraphy and other arts, experiencing for themselves the discipline, grace and reflectiveness that these practices bring to their lives.

**Greg Cajete** has been working at creating whole-school curriculum for the Navajo nation in the USA (pop 400,000) and developing a teachers' course which centers Navajo teachers in their culture and develops self knowledge before completing a degree course at a mainstream university.

Through much dialoguing with tribal groups he was able to pull together the essences of tribal custom and create a vision of what it means to be a Navajo Indian in the Western world... combining holistic education thinking with the values and practices of his culture to create an educational framework. Two triads of *Mythic*, *visionary*, *artistic* and *environmental*, *communal* and *affective* are integrated in *spiritual/ecology*. Students are assisted on a path of growth and transformation in a context of community and ecological values.

In his book, *Look Towards the Mountain*, Cajete (1994) lists 42 elements characteristic of indigenous education. Many of these are inspiring principles for any Western holistic educator to consider.

**Ramon Gallegos Nava's** course in Mexico has three major pillars – perennial philosophy, grand pedagogy and new paradigms. His students come from education, business, ecology, activism, health. He encourages his students to embark on a journey of meditation and self knowledge – to free themselves of mental models and to be able to act in the moment with discernment.

He introduces his Masters students to the wealth of Western knowledge about education which he has categorized in Fig 3.3. He uses the multiple intelligences on the bottom axis and Ken Wilber's consciousness evolution holons on the vertical as a way of seeing where a researcher might be mainly located.

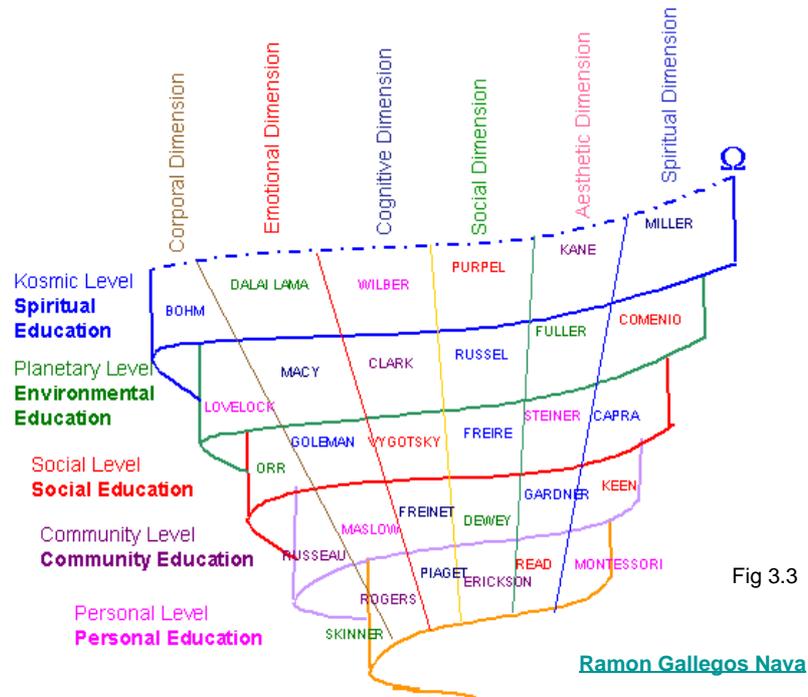


Fig 3.3

He sees a Holistic teacher as being able to see all these dimensions and being able to integrate the different pedagogies in the moment of classroom practice – the pedagogies are complementary, rather than contradictory.

He sees teaching as a pedagogy of love (Nava 2001). Like many holistic thinkers he sees that everything follows from the teacher having a love for the child and creating a learning space which is filled with love.

I visited Mexico in 2000 as part of the 8<sup>th</sup> *International Holistic Education Conference* and I met one woman in Ramon's course who was a midwife. She works with the family two years before the birth of the child and until the child turns 21 years.

I visited other Mexican teachers who were isolated holistic teachers within a school. One teacher had 50 Grade 1 students in her class. Her practice of Holistic Education was one of love – education with heart – which she expressed in her love and care for the children – finding time to see them fully, and allowing her love to be expressed in the moment –

turning on some music and the class dances. Her tape recorder was her prized possession... a marked contrast to the one sheet of toilet paper she handed to students when they left the room to go to the toilet. Her ancient culture – the Miztecs – was an important part of her identity and her sense of self.

I have met the key leaders in Holistic Education at various conferences; what strikes me is their heart, humanity, centeredness and vision. They walk their talk. A key to all holistic programs is the path to self knowledge that the teacher takes through reflective and contemplative practice. At the *Spirituality in Education Conference (Boulder 1997)* Parker Palmer said, “I need to create a spiritual space within myself so my students can share their gifts.” And this sums up much of what Holistic teaching is about.

It is also interesting that a key approach to Holistic Education across different countries has been a renewal of culture; bringing their culture and their spiritual heritage into a modern context.

In Australia we are multi-cultural society with many different worldviews, customs and spiritual beliefs. In common is the consumer based society in which we live. In trying to be spiritual or value neutral in our education we have in fact allowed the dominant value system of rationalism and consumerism to prevail. Yet, an 2004 on-line survey by Roger Stack (personal communication) of Hobart College students indicated that 70% of students have some spiritual beliefs. The challenge then is to find a way to fulfill the promise that our education system gives – to develop the whole person – spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, social.

How can non-sectarian spirituality be an embedded part of curriculum frameworks? Not additions...but like the Navajo Indian education model an energy which infuses every aspect and is the integrating and creative force.

### **What are the key principles of Holistic learning?**

The following represents a synthesis of various elements found in holistic programs, schools and teacher training courses:

<b>Fundamental Principles</b>	<b><u>Connectedness</u></b>	<b><u>Wholeness</u></b>	<b><u>Being</u></b>
<b>Key Concepts</b>	Interdependence Interrelationship Participatory Non-linearity	Whole systems Multiple perspectives Independence Multiple levels	Fully human Creative expression Growth Responsibility
<b>Key Values</b>	Compassion Community Ecosystems	Diversity within unity Sustainability Cultural identity	Love Responsibility Discernment Spirituality Wisdom
<b>Social Issues</b>	Cultural identity Globalisation Loneliness	Inclusion Ecosystems Poverty	Equity & equality Ethics Change
<b>Curriculum</b>	Inter-disciplinary Interaction	Integrated	Inquiry Identity Choice
<b>Perspectives</b>	Critical constructivism Contextual	Multi-faceted Multiple intelligences Cosmic	Constructive postmodernist Evolutionary Epic Metaphoric
<b>Needs</b>	Belonging	Self transcendence	Love Self actualisation

<b>Process</b>	Dialogical	Whole person	Experiential
	Relationships	Whole community	Reflective
	Collaborative	Whole of life	Questioning
	Co-creative	Systems thinking	Imaginative
	Co-operative	Meta-cognitive	Inspirational
	Sharing	Multi-levelled	Transformative
	Celebrative	Integrative	Journeying
<b>Outcomes</b>	Meaningful	Healthy	Expressive
	Positive relationships	Whole	Curious
	Friendly	Happy	Preferred futures
	Trusting	Caring	Participation
	Belonging	Empathic	Resilience
	Serving	Confident	Competence
		Independent	Purposeful Participation
<b>Teaching &amp; Learning Strategies</b>	Service learning	Whole language	Meaning quests
	IT&T integration	Project based learning	Vocational education
	Paradox & enigma	Experiential learning	Enterprise learning
	Community based learning	Open learning	Indigenous education
	Play	Whole brain	Storying
		Integrated Studies	Visualization
<b>Contexts</b>	Ecosystem	Whole space/time	Subjective
	Community	Objective	Symbolic

Fig 3.4

What do we mean by connectedness, wholeness, being? Each of these could be examined philosophically, from different religious points of view or from the living meaning that Holistic Educators make of them in the presence of their students.

Although various holistic educators use different sets of words;

- Inclusiveness – balance - connectedness (Miller 1996)
- Creativity – care - criticality (Prentice 2003)
- Affective – communal - environmental (Cajete 1994)
- Love (Nava 2001)

there are some shared essences which transcend cultures and languages. These words come from not just our minds, but from our hearts.

I was asked to introduce the idea of Holistic Education to an interested group of teachers at a Tasmanian College in 2001. In the end it was a much smaller group than what I had expected. There were only the four of us, so I put away my CD which canvassed different aspects of Holistic education and its relevance to the curriculum.

“What is Holistic Education in a nutshell?” one teacher asked. “What one word could describe it?”

This was putting me on the spot and I answered tentatively, “Connectedness?”

“What do you mean by that?” she asked.

I replied, “Well I could answer you in words or I could show you.” She asked me to show her. So I gave everyone a smartie or a piece of mandarin and invited them to do a mindfulness exercise. Please feel free to join in...

*Put your smartie or mandarin on the palm of your hand and just look at it.... See how it changes with the light as you move your hand .... Be aware of your breath and your shoulders and begin to breathe deeper. Now stroke your smartie or mandarin and feel the textures... be aware of the sensation on your finger tips. Feel it on your cheek. Now lift it to your nose and smell it....take a deep breath in and other that smell to enter your lungs. Now put it on your tongue and just feel it there... what tastes and textures? When you are ready, bite into it and just be aware of the new taste sensation. When you are ready chew it and swallow it. What space are you in now? How is your breath? How are you feeling? What did you see?*

We were now in a different space... calmer... more aware. How did people feel? More connected, more peaceful, more aware of themselves and the space they were in. What did they see? They were surprised at how rich the experience was, how much there is to something if you take time.

What does connection mean now?

“This reminds me,” said one teacher “of when my nephew was a baby and I was lying back in a chair with him on my chest. There was such a moment of connection. I was filled with love that I had never experienced before. It just felt like there was a flow of energy going from him to me and me to him. It was overwhelming but also felt like a miracle.”

And so we began to share our stories of moments where we had felt connection... connection to others, to nature, to ourselves (the good times and the bad). What did they feel like, why they were so important to us? We were connecting to our memories; we were remembering, re-storying, re-appreciating our experiences. As we did so we became connected with each other, opening ourselves up to being more vulnerable, feeling that each person was holding us mindfully and compassionately in their hands and their hearts. We were in a place of deep listening, where the meaning is more than words, rather an experience of another’s whole being – their feelings, their soul. This is a place of great kindness and warmth.

But what has this to do with teaching? Now the group moves into discussing the connections we felt with our students. What it is like to build relationships... the times when we felt something important had happened with a student, or when things were challenged. What were the dilemmas in creating close relationships with our students? Is it OK to love them or to experience a loving relationship? How did we deal with student depression, sense of failure and low self-esteem? What were our students yearning for? Deep connection? To be seen by others? What does it mean to be seen?

There is a Zulu traditional greeting where you stand before another and gaze directly in their eyes while seeing them with your heart. You say “I see you” and the other says “I have been seen.” Then the other person says “I see you.” And you reply “And I have been seen.” Try it. It is one of the most powerful ways of connecting to another person, even strangers, that I have ever experienced.

So what does it really mean to see our students? To come to know them and for them to know that they are known?

Yes Holistic Education tries to go beyond words into the depth of the experience. Real experience that lives between you and me, now in this moment.

So what perhaps then is my aim as a holistic teacher?

*I come to know you  
Because that helps me  
understand how you learn*

*I come to know you  
Because that helps me  
help you on your journey*

*I come to know you  
Because I care  
and want to be part of your journey*

*I come to know you  
Because in that moment  
I know myself*

*I come to know you  
And discover in you  
a shining spiritual being*

*and in that moment  
you see your true self  
through my eyes.*

*And the universe dances with joy.*

## Worldviews and underpinning metaphors

A key aspect of Holistic Education literature is that the authors ask us to look at what are the underpinning metaphors and worldviews which inform our current curriculum conception and pedagogies.

*Why do we think it is best to put students into grades and levels? How do we think students learn? ...*

*sequentially? Why is normative assessment so widely used? Why do we split the curriculum*



Fig 3.5

*into disciplines, topics, lessons?* Where do these ideas come from? What sort of research methodologies were used in finding out? (Do they include all of Wilber's 8 indigenous perspectives or just a privileged few?)

Perhaps underpinning our curriculum there is a legacy of worldviews that we no longer hold. And these worldviews are so messy and intertwined it is hard to know what comes from what. Mixed in with 17<sup>th</sup> C positivistic and reductionistic notions are 20<sup>th</sup> C notions coming from feminist, postmodern, spiritual, indigenous or ecological perspectives.... and then there is everything in between! As we develop new ways of seeing the world it seems this new understanding broadens what we do, rather than questioning the very foundations that we base education on.

For example, both Doll (1993) and Davis (2004) trace normative assessment back to the time of the positivists who rejected the previously held notion of education as helping to form *the ideal man*. The *ideal man* came from Plato's notion of ideal forms which projected their 'shadows' on our physical reality. The positivists said that the reality of the ideal forms was something they could not measure. What they could measure was man as he was, particularly using statistics and bell curves. So the *normal man* replaced the *ideal man*. An empirical solution, but perhaps not one that on reflection many people today would agree with. How many of us just try to be normal and how many of us aspire to higher ideals? Who does norm referencing serve now and what might be other ways of meeting these needs?

"Our values and sense of self are anchored in our frames of reference. They provide us with a sense of stability, coherence, community, and identity. Consequently they are often emotionally charged and strongly defended. Other points of view are judged against the standards set by our own points of view. Viewpoints that call our frames of reference into question may be dismissed as distorting, deceptive, ill intentioned, or crazy."

Mezirow (2000)

Worldviews not only leave footprints all the way through our education system, but permeate our own personal value systems.... they shape our metaphors for teaching and how we behave with our students. Davis (2004) has also explored metaphors for teaching, tracing their genealogy as follows:

educating	disciplining	instructing	schooling	facilitating	emancipation	improvising	conversing
nurturing	indoctrinating	informing	inculcating	mediating	liberating	occasioning	listening
fostering	inducting	edifying	conditioning	mentoring	empowering	structuring	mindng
tutoring	training	directing	training	modelling	giving voice	framing	caring
	guiding	lecturing	remediating	initiating	pedagogy	participating	
Mysticism	Religion	Rationalism	Empiricism	Structuralism	Post- structuralism	Complexity Science	Ecology
Gnosis		Episteme		Inter-subjectivity		Inter-objectivity	
<b>Western Worldviews</b>							

Fig 3.6

Davis's categories appear to align with the 4 quadrants – gnosis (**I**), episteme (**IT**), inter-subjectivity (**WE**) and inter-objectivity (**ITS**). While some of the teaching metaphors which we use are perhaps ones we would not *wish* to use if we knew their origins, we can see from placing the metaphors on the quadrants that each might have a place within certain contexts.

The *Essential Learnings* is moving towards a curriculum which is about giving voice, structuring, facilitating, participatory. Does Davis's model help us see the possibilities for Year 11/12 visioning of curriculum?

So what have we inherited in our education system and what might be a vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum based on a holistic worldview?

19 <sup>th</sup> Century education?	21st Century education?
<b>Learning is about...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Separateness</li> <li>○ Disconnectedness</li> <li>○ Events and facts</li> <li>○ Objective observer</li> <li>○ Impersonal</li> </ul>	<b>Learning is about...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wholeness</li> <li>○ Interconnectedness</li> <li>○ Shared meaning and stories</li> <li>○ Participation</li> <li>○ Personal</li> </ul>
<b>Engages...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Physical / Mental</li> <li>○ IQ</li> <li>○ Rational / logical</li> <li>○ Philosophic</li> </ul>	<b>Engages...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Physical/ mental/ emotional / spiritual</li> <li>○ IQ/EQ/SQ</li> <li>○ Multiple intelligences and learning styles</li> <li>○ Mythic, romantic, Philosophic, Ironic</li> </ul>

<p><b>Outcomes...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information/knowledge</li> <li>○ Skills</li> <li>○ Answers</li> <li>○ Qualification</li> <li>○ Worker</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Multiple literacies -&gt; deep understanding</li> <li>○ Competence and wisdom</li> <li>○ Questions, creativity, insight</li> <li>○ Journey, growth, transformation</li> <li>○ Enjoyment, meaning, purpose</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">Fig 3.7</p>
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We could ask how a holistic paradigm might inform the conception of an education system from scratch, but this system would flounder without teachers whose values and behaviours come from a holistic paradigm.

So how does a teacher move towards a holistic understanding (assuming that this is something to aim for)? It is not enough to *intellectually* adopt a holistic view. A sense of holism comes from deep experience of an interconnected reality. This can be developed through contemplative and mindful practice; whether alone, in communion with others, or in nature. It can be inspired through art, stories, wonder and love. It can be experienced in many different ways; from a sense of being fully present and centered to very deep transpersonal experiences.

*Breathe in,*

*Breathe out...*

*Feel your body in the chair, feet grounded.*

*Be aware of your posture.*

*Feel your breath.*

*Begin to watch yourself...*

*Your thoughts running past...*

*Let them go...*

*Breathe...*

*Take your time.*

Where are you now? What is this space you are in?

What do you see now, that you didn't see before? How might you act now, different to before? Can you sense me; my heart, my soul? Are we connected in this act of writing and reading, beyond time and space? Can I feel you?

Do you notice a change in perspective... a quietening of self, a more openness to what really is, rather than what you are used to seeing? A warmth in the heart?

We can deconstruct our worldviews and beliefs from the *eye of the mind*. We can transcend them from the *eye of the spirit*. But perhaps we still need the eye of the mind (and all the research) in order to differentiate what is going on in order to make systemic change. I have heard Parker Palmer say that “a transformed being in the world transforms the world.” Is that all that is really needed? Is it really only that simple?



*“I’m gonna wash that meme right out of my hair”*

Can I transcend my messy partially articulated intellectualization of my worldviews and gain a holistic perspective? What insight does this give me on how to be a physics teacher?

I am not sure if physics should even exist.

What insight does it give me in the design of our whole curriculum framework for Years 11 and 12?

Does it even matter what insights I have if the other teachers are in another place?

I feel such a sense of urgency about the state of the planet and our continued headlong rush in unsustainable lifestyles. Holistic Education is not just about this nice development of the soul of the child. It also must have something to say about creating a future on this planet together. We develop the child in the context of our communities, ecologies and current

values while at the same time our future lies with the actions of this child who we would somehow like to have different values and higher consciousness.

We know where technology is taking our children, but where is the spirit?

Can we plan a curriculum for a future that is a viable alternative to now? Does the answer lie in changing structures and content of our courses or in changing the very consciousness of we teachers? Or both? How can one help the other?

Perhaps it is time to vision. But how can I vision something I cannot see?

Greg Cajete (1994) lays out the Indigenous cycle of visioning:

### The Indigenous Vision Cycle

- **Centering place** - where the soul and intention of the vision is formed
- **Asking** for illumination
- **Seeking** for what we mysteriously yearn for and what we need and is missing. We need to expand our boundaries and go outside ourselves to find what is within.
- **Making** – creating something new as a result of the visioning, which has the power to effect the lives and souls of others
- **Having** – learning what our vision and creation mean and learning to accept and honour that part of ourselves – self understanding
- **Sharing** – where our vision becomes part of the life and spirit of the community
- **Celebrating** – the mystery of life and the journey that we each take
- **Being** – being joyous, thankful, reflective of the gifts of life and opening ourselves up to the centering place where our soul and spirit reside.

Cajete (1994)

What question would you ask to start your vision quest?

What is mine?

## **The curriculum planners enter the conversation:**

“Sue, I am finding myself jumping around here. Trying to think of the big picture... our curriculum review process and what might be the implications in designing curriculum frameworks, but at the same time thinking about my own practice, my own beliefs. And knowing that any framework we design is going to be interpreted differently by each teacher because of their worldview.”

“Yes. I found it is interesting that Holistic Education can be considered at so many levels – the classroom teacher to the design of whole curriculum. I was particularly interested in the Navajo nation curriculum – there is obviously a real value in having common values and cultural roots on which to begin. I know we have gone through our values and purposes at the beginning of our review, but I think we only scratched the surface, not really addressed the fundamental differences that teachers have in their worldviews. And because of that when we come to implementing the curriculum we are not going to get the leap in consciousness change we really need to be educators for the future. I feel such an urgency that we need to be more than just teachers of knowledge and processes, but also of consciousness... of mindful agency in this world of ours, so that we still have a world in 50 years time. We need a way of helping teachers go deep, to experience a consciousness shift for themselves... this seems such a crucial element of all Holistic Education teaching programs. By teachers experiencing their own transformation they are then able to assist students to transform and flourish.”

“But should teachers be forced to agree to a single worldview? Holistic Education requires teachers to take on a spiritual worldview. Is there room for different worldviews in a whole education system? It isn't very pluralistic of us to wish 'consciousness growth' on others, is it?”

“Good point... you can't force someone anyway... we are all deeply embedded in our own paradigms and ways of thinking and it is not an easy thing to just switch to a new one. We think we might be articulating what informs us, but so much of what we do comes from habit or deep experiences in our lives which underpin our intentions as teachers. Perhaps part of a process of curriculum renewal is about assisting people to be more reflective of those things that have shaped them... introducing new models or lenses that could assist in that process, like Integral Theory. So it is not so much about creating a curriculum framework, as a process to

support and encourage those teachers who wish to take such a path of self-knowledge. Perhaps the new framework needs to have room in it to enable people to grow into new ways of teaching?"

"And perhaps it also needs to support those teachers who don't want to take such a journey; who still value traditional teaching approaches – discipline knowledge and sequential learning? While we realize that discipline expertise is important, it is clear that such expertise is needing to move from just discipline knowledge of content, to better understandings of the epistemological frameworks that shape a discipline as well as abilities to talk across disciplines."

"Yes, for some teachers, just moving from *instructors* to *facilitators* of communities of practice will be a very big ask. How can we assist and honor those journeys?"

"And how do we know how to start? Are there road maps? Guides? Exemplars? What could help us in this process?"

### **What has been my path towards being a holistic teacher?**

Now with the hindsight of 15 years involvement with Holistic Education I can perhaps begin to see its shape and how it has shaped me. Keys to my own journey have been the following elements:

1. Coming with a **spiritual paradigm**, yet challenged to question this; creating a process of separating dogma from essence... trying to find those values and ways of being that transcend sectarian religion divides... searching for a universal spirituality. Searching for ways to incorporate spirituality in my teaching.
2. Searching for **new paradigms** and new ways of understanding the world – intrigued by the new sciences – deep ecology, systems theory, chaos. Looking for ways of reconciling the materialistic perspective of the world with the spiritual one... searching for an integrating theory.

3. **Self development** through meditation, interpersonal and relationship courses and healing courses ... building capacity for reflection, self-awareness, insight, mindfulness, ethical action.
4. Coming with non-traditional educational perspectives and experiences of **pedagogies** as a result of experiences as a scientist, development officer, national enterprise workshop participant, coach. I started my teaching and curriculum management roles in a new College which fostered experimentation, innovation and collaboration of pedagogies. Searching for pedagogies which are consistent with spiritual and holistic perspectives.
5. Searching for **educational theories** which might help me understand learning and teaching better. Asking what is the purpose of education and what assumptions do these theories have? Which theories are consistent with spiritual and holistic perspectives?
6. Building **relationships with my students** – coming to know and appreciate them... creating connections... being more present with who they are, where they are and tuning into where they want to go. Seeing them as mirrors to my own self and self-growth. Developing compassion and love and learning to be with them in a loving space. Building learning communities based on belonging, generosity and shared sense of purpose. The space I create with the students is the place where all my ideology and pedagogy is put to the test. In learning to see with their eyes I am challenged to see my ideologies and pedagogies in new ways, challenging my assumptions and intentions.
7. **Deconstruction of self** ....bringing postmodern lenses to understanding myself, my culture, my history.... What has shaped me – my thinking, being and habits? Realising that my actions are not just shaped by one or two paradigms, but many conflicting ones and to understand self one has to understand the system one is in, the world one is in. Self is deeply entangled. What does it mean to challenge those long term habits and characteristics that might inhibit my own growth?

“Central to the goal of adult education in democratic societies is the process of helping learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs, more critically reflective of their assumptions and those of others, more fully and freely engaged in discourse, and more effective in taking action on reflective judgments.”

*Mezirow (2000)*

8. **Being part of a global community** with similar aims to my own– to explore what it means to develop education which values the whole person, including the spiritual self. Learning from the different perspectives and approaches of others. Engaged in discourse and coming to shared understandings. Being supported and inspired to go on my own journey, yet being challenged to look beyond my own field of view.
  
9. **Leadership in teacher and system transformation** – I have had a strong drive not just to change my own practice but also to be involved in teacher and system transformation, encouraging other teachers to embark on a holistic journey. So as I have learnt for myself I have passed this onto others... whether through informal conversations, teacher workshops, major collaborative projects, acting as critical friend, or through the HENT website (founded by my husband and myself) and writing. Through the resultant feedback and playing out of my understandings with others, my own understanding deepened; helping me develop new questions and search for answers in new areas. It also forced me to look deeper at what shapes ourselves, our teaching and curriculum metaphors; what constrains transformation of ourselves and the system.

These elements have emerged as a result of my journey, rather than something I deliberately and explicitly engaged upon. In hindsight these elements could form questions for any teacher interested in embarking on a journey exploring the field of holistic education (see over page).

Where might you ask such questions from? Your mind, your heart, your soul? You might get different answers depending on what aspect of yourself you are drawing on.

In 1997, I ran a workshop for a group of about eight teachers on *Re-enchanting Education*, starting with a visualization deep into our hearts, asking what was it that informed who we were as teachers. It accessed something deeper than just thinking about it and what teachers described were key experiences of themselves as learners that shaped their thinking, values and motivations. These were deep experiences which gave energy and meaning to what it meant to be a teacher; always present but not necessarily recognized.

For example, one teacher told us how she remembered an incident where her music teacher called her out from the chorus. How initially she was excited thinking she might be asked to take on a solo role and how devastated she was when the teacher asked her to mouth the

words. Now as a drama teacher, she was determined to give students opportunities to really express and explore who they were.

Another teacher told of how important it was for her to give her students a nurturing environment – she would cook food for them and encourage them to care for each other and create a real community. This came out of her own experiences of her family.

Another teacher told of the value he got from following an elite sport and striving for excellence, so he was keen to encourage students to do the same and had put in place a program in the school that was helping students experience success through discipline in a sport.

The session had the impact of helping two teachers clarify their own motivations, ending up in a change of direction professionally and personally. Even though we might be living in the mental world of teaching plans, educational theories and student assessment, perhaps our pedagogy is more informed by something that is sourced from deep in our souls and our hearts – our humanness – it is deeply embedded in our egos. So changing practice or conforming to new curriculum expectations could be in direct conflict with that self, setting up a deeply felt disharmony.

Perhaps through remembering deeply who we are and what shapes us can free us, and enable us to move on, while valuing who we were before.



*On the cusp*

*Four different responses to the opportunity for transformation*

## Some initial questions for potential holistic educators

*remember ... you are a spiritual being in an interconnected reality*

*remember then to ask these from the depths of your heart and soul as well as your mind*

1. How do you express your spiritual nature in your life and your teaching practice?
2. Who are you? What are your passions? What gifts do you bring to your practice?  
What do you think you are needing to learn and are growing towards?
3. What are your deep concerns and issues?
4. What tensions and paradox are you holding and how are you dealing with them?
5. What are your current worldviews and how do they inform what you think, do and be?
6. What is your current pedagogy and what theories and conceptions of learning are these based on?
7. What now is this dialogue between your practice, beliefs and deep being?
8. In what ways do you bring a transpersonal knowing to your understanding of self, others and the shape of the curriculum?
9. How do you gain feedback from your students and what do they help you learn about yourself?
10. How does the system and culture you are in provide constraints, opportunities, feedback?
11. What are your own questions?
12. Sit now in your own quiet space.
13. Where do you feel the urge to go now?

Are these questions all that is needed? Perhaps there is also a need to build the readiness, capacity and safety nets for one's own transformation, including a willingness to move and be surprised, having a supportive environment and self-building practices, and having a backup team! Perhaps there should be a balance between self-reflection and self-nurturing.

When there is too much self-reflection and dissonance can we get lost? Is it part of the growth process? Do we need to go deep into our own discomfort because this might be a spur to change?

Mezirow (2000) describes the nature of transformations. Transformations may be:

- focused and mindful, involving critical reflection,
- the result of repetitive and effective interaction
- the result of mindless assimilation -- as in moving to a different culture and

uncritically assimilating its ways of thinking.

- epochal - a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight
- incremental - involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view

How might we foster mindful transformation? What is mindfulness? Can this provide a supportive practice for the Holistic Educator?

I think that there are perhaps two aspects of mindfulness. Using Integral Theory there is an *inner* and *outer* aspect. The *inner* one is a place of presence and being - where one is fully mindful of the moment. (Thich Nat Han 1999). You can be fully in the experience as well as witnessing it. It can be a place of peace, interaction with others, sensitivity to the ecology you are in, a state of creativity and so on. The relationship between being in the present and witnessing it is like yin/yang and here is a descriptor I have used in describing the creation of my art:

The Taoist artist moves into a state where her yin and yang energies are fully aroused, becoming highly creative and dynamic yet also focused and receptive. In this state of extreme aliveness and awareness she communicates the essence of force that she sees.

Now the *outer* aspect of mindfulness, I believe, is applying a critically self-reflective process to what you are doing. This is Torbert's (2004) notion of *action inquiry* – where one is mindful of the actions you are doing and can stand back and reflect upon them and change them. It involves the mind and thinking, whereas the inner aspect is almost no-mind, a place of pure presence. The outer perspective draws one forth, sometimes disorienting, challenging, providing dissonance. It is the transformative aspect. The inner aspect is the nurturing aspect that provides the ground for such development.

Perhaps the following integral approach is helpful in explicating the different aspects of how we can be more mindful in our intentions and actions with others as we develop as Holistic educators:

## Mindful Practice of a Holistic Teacher using The Eight Indigenous Perspectives

### Individual

<b>Inner (subjective)</b>	<p style="text-align: right; color: blue; font-weight: bold; font-size: 24px;">I</p> <p><b>Inner:</b> connecting with my inner self, mindful practice, being a witness to myself.</p> <p><b>Outer:</b> reflections about self, values, meaning, purpose, theories, worldviews and being explicit about my intentions.</p>	<p style="text-align: left; color: blue; font-weight: bold; font-size: 24px;">IT</p> <p><b>Inner:</b> being fully present in my body, my actions, and the greater cosmos. Mindfully embodying my intentions into practice.</p> <p><b>Outer:</b> untangling my habitual actions and intentions and changing mindfully my practice.</p>	<b>Outer (objective)</b>
	<p style="text-align: right; color: blue; font-weight: bold; font-size: 24px;">WE</p> <p><b>Inner:</b> being fully present with others, being mindful of how I see and interact with others and the feedback I am getting.</p> <p><b>Outer:</b> untangling the deeply embedded cultural conventions and worldviews which shape my perceptions and interpretations and mindfully changing my practice.</p>	<p style="text-align: left; color: blue; font-weight: bold; font-size: 24px;">ITS</p> <p><b>Inner:</b> being fully present to the universe, being mindful of all the ways the universe is giving me feedback, doing right action for the moment (Wu-wei), synchronicity.</p> <p><b>Outer:</b> untangling my habitual responses to the systems I am in and being a mindful agent for change of the system.</p>	

### Collective

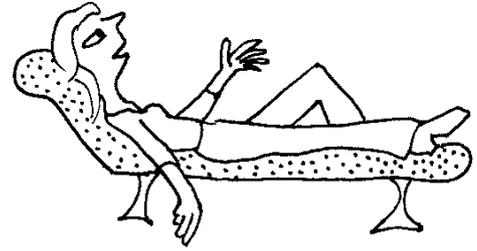
Fig 3.8



*I am the Tao, I am the flow*

## Interlude 1: 1999. Now Sue, what has been the nature of your holistic journey?

*Sue, please feel free to lie on the couch. Are you comfortable? I understand that you are going through a difficult time yourself. Would you like to explain?*



Yes, thank you. I feel like I have gone through a major transformation, and perhaps many little ones. I am so tired from it all. I just feel I need to rest and do something else for a while. I think I have spent so many years pushing my own learning - being on my learning edge - that I have forgotten that I need space to rest and integrate before the next big challenge.

Like my students, I think I learn in spurts of intensity. While I was working in industry I could manage this... between the creative times, there was the tedious 'just get the data and analyse it' times. Teaching however, well the sort I do, seems to constantly require creativity and attention; there are no dead periods. I seem to be addicted to this learning spiral. This action inquiry cycle which I have adopted for my research now seems to be a way of life. The very act of being in relation with someone else, requires my openness, my reflection, my learning. It challenges who I am, my sense of self and I feel constantly in a state of disintegration. I think the only way to stop learning is to stop teaching for a while.

*But surely Sue, learning can be gentle and integrative, rather than just transformational. What do you mean by transformational? What is it like in this space for you?*

This space can be quite invigorating as new ideas and understandings make connections in such a way that emergent potentials arise. You might feel like you are seeing things with insight. You are drawing together things in new ways... like me trying to bring a *spiritual* perspective into my teaching of *physics*. I am faced with a dialectic, which I am resolving perhaps naively by dancing and intertwining the possibilities. But there comes a point where something challenges all I am doing. I see the limitations. I see I have been playing in a very small box, and while I have been doing the best I can in this box, I need to move into a

bigger one. But to make this move requires me letting go some big assumptions, some baggage you might say. But this baggage is so firmly part of who I am, my ego, that this letting go process is not a nice easy shedding of an outer layer, but ripping to the very heart of me.



The problem is, once I put myself open to question, this self of mine almost disappears... this self is very fragile and the boundaries between myself and the world do not seem to be there... I feel that I am like a leaf being blown about by the wind. Anything anyone now says to me, or I read, I bring into myself with very close questioning. And everything unravels. It is out of control. I know it is out of control because I am even questioning that centre of myself, that spiritual being, that essence which if I stop thinking and questioning I can just breathe and be.

### *How did this unraveling begin for you?*

In June 1998 as part of my doctorate studies I was encouraged to write an autobiography of myself to reflect on where the contexts had come for my beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy. I spent three days writing over 30 pages, deeply reflecting on key incidents in my life and how they had shaped my assumptions about what life was about, and thus the purpose of education as I saw it. By the end of the three days I was so deeply involved in this storying that it got away from me and I spent another three days just lying in front of the fire with stories going around in my head. It was like a whole lot of things suddenly became significant. And I could see how much they shaped me. I questioned my earlier interpretations of them.

The idea which is so central to me is that I am a spiritual being with meaning and purpose. I had felt this strongly in myself from a very early age. I remember having conversations with God when I was seven about why we have to be good. It went something like this... "God, we shouldn't be good just to get a reward, to get into heaven, or because we might be punished and go to hell. Goodness should come from within yourself...because you want to be good, you feel goodness in your heart. Not just act good." Later when I was studying existentialism at university I went through a crisis of really questioning whether life was really just like Sisyphus pushing his rock up the hill and watching it drop, or whether it had

purpose and meaning. I spent two weeks sitting in my room, agonizing over this, incapable of attending to lectures or to life. I decided to vote for purpose and meaning and let the existentialists go and do their own thing.

In reflecting on this almost 20 years later, amongst many other aspects of my experience I started wondering whether my seeming uptil then unquestioned certainty that life was meaningful and had purpose was just a decision I had made, rather than a deep embedded knowing. What could I really know through my spiritual experience? In fact how much was this based on doctrine and what I had read and how much by direct 'I' experience? And how much was my 'I' experience interpreted through my understanding at the time (as informed by doctrine) and therefore open to question? Could I even trust my inner experiences? Aaaagh?

*Sue, it sounds like you have just got into a relativism spiral.*

Exactly, it is like before I was happily content with staying in the inner perspectives of **I** and **WE** and the inner/outer perspectives of **IT** and **ITS**, but as soon as I put that outer **WE** lens on myself, my whole world fell apart. I take things too personally, I know. But it seems I have to live these things to understand them. And I have certainly lived the disadvantages of rampant post-structuralism applied on myself. It certainly made me much more wary of stimulating transformation in my own students, without giving them the appropriate support.

I don't think my doctoral lecturers had any idea what was happening to me, and probably wouldn't have known what to do anyway. They were coming from a very detached view point – this writing is an academic exercise... not knowing that it could rip my very self apart. How can you honor someone going through this process? Certainly by not telling them that their writing needed more references... but through really reading what they had written and understanding that this was a birthing process and midwifery skills were needed. If we are in the business of assisting in the transformation of our students I really think we need to be aware of all the potentials... because if it is a true transformation it never is just about academic understanding; it is embodied and involves the deep self. As teachers we need to be able to read the clues that our students give us... in their conversations, in their products, in who they are and how they act.

At the same time that I was going through my self-questioning I was taking the rug from under my students feet in physics, encouraging them to go on their own journeys of

questioning what they really knew. “How do you know an electron really exists? Has anyone really seen one? What are you basing your knowledge on?” And while I was floundering, trying to find myself again, my students spent a small amount of time being anguished over discovering that their knowledge of the physical world was uncertain and then they actually enjoyed the uncertainty. I had a professional interviewer interview them at the end of the year and she was astonished by their comfortability with uncertainty and their flexibility. They seemed to cope with relativism very well thank you.

How could they gain that, when I was not coping with my own uncertainty? Did I help them, or was it just luck? Did they really challenge who they were, and if not would this exercise help them in future transformations?

*But Sue, have you found yourself again?*

On good days. On bad days parts of me are somewhere in Ursula Minor, the tree over there, or in a box at the bottom of a well.

*Sue have you forgotten to breathe? Breathe with me now...*

Hmmm, but first let me get the vacuum cleaner...

*Stand tall.*

*Breathe out, step out, push.*

*Breathe in, step in, pull back.*

*Breathe out...*

*Breathe in...*

The lounge room is clean. I have lost myself in breath and flow, rhythm and service.

I am breathing long and slow breaths. There is an energized flow, through me.

I am permeable and open, but yet centered in my own expression of being.

Who am I? Where am I?

Here and now.

In the moment.

Clean, refreshed.

A vacuum?

Waiting to be filled.

## Interlude 2: Mindfulness in teaching with two exhibits

### Exhibit A - Maths 2004

It is the second week of class and I have just handed out a maths worksheet which I hope will help students construct an understanding of percentage, rather than just practicing problems. I hope it will build their confidence. This is a class of students who really struggle with maths and I am trying to address some of their fundamental issues with it. I hope the worksheet will help.

I am walking around the room helping my students, responding to their questions and some are quite demanding, calling me back again and again. Eventually I move around to Erin, who has been sitting quietly, unlike most of the others, and ask her how she has been going. She bursts out “This is a complete waste of time! I can’t do it! Why are you giving me something I can’t do! I hate maths!”

What am I feeling? On one hand taken aback, and wondering why she hasn’t asked for help. At another level I am remembering other outbursts from her and how aggressive she sometimes gets with the other students. I am wondering what is happening. Where is this coming from and why. What can I do?

I step back in my mind and breathe. I begin to sense her energy and it is all spiky. I put my hand on her shoulder and say to her “Erin, feel how tense you are.”

She shrugs her shoulders, almost trying to throw off my hand. I keep it there and say “No seriously, feel your neck muscles, they are as hard as a rock. You know when that happens your brain freezes and you just can’t think.”

She begins to relax a slight bit and she massages her neck. I sit down next to her and ask her to tell me what is going on.

“I was going alright and then I got to this bit and I just couldn’t do it, which always happens. I just am not good at learning maths.

“What did you do when you got to the place that you got stuck?”

“I just sat here and got madder and madder.”

“And I bet your shoulders got tighter and tighter, which made it even harder to think.”

She is now rotating her head and easing her shoulders.

“Yeah, I guess I got myself all tense.”

“Does this always happen?”

“Yes, I guess so.”

“What about making up some strategies that you could use when you get stuck with something.”

She looks at me sceptically as if I might be offering her a false hope, yet behind that seemed to be someone who *was* hoping... “like what?”

“Well, first of all is noticing when you start to get tense. Realising you are getting tense and then stopping what you are doing that is causing that. The tension is a signal. So you know then to ask for help and not try to do it by yourself. Another strategy is missing the bit you can’t do and going on with something else... that way if everyone is busy you don’t have to wait.”

“Ok, she says “I’ll try it.”

“Do you want me to help you, so when I see you are getting tense I put my hand on your shoulder to remind you?”

So that is what we agreed upon and for several weeks I kept a close eye on how she was going and put my hand on her shoulder when I thought she was tensing up. I introduced some Brain gym exercises to the class which helps to strengthen brain-body connections. Erin soon began to recognise for herself when she was getting tense and became used to putting the hard bits aside until I could help her, or asking the person next to her. She started doing work at home, listing questions she had for me on the bits she couldn’t do. Soon she didn’t have many questions, or they were at another level. Within three months she had moved up two levels in maths ability – a major achievement. Her teachers noticed that she was much more confident, autonomous and had lost the aggression.

When Erin first exploded I could have taken any number of routes in ‘handling the situation’ and who knows what the outcome might have been. For other students, I know I have taken other routes and I wonder how our relationships might have been had I been more mindful.

## **Exhibit B - Journalism 2006**

The class are supposed to be working in teams to produce a photo-story for a deadline as a quick exercise in team work. Ashley is on chat yet again rather than doing her work. I ask her mildly “Are you off task?”

She bursts into tears. “My friend has just died!” she says, “I am chatting to a friend to find out when the funeral is.” She looks at me accusingly. “I told you before I had to leave earlier to go to a counsellor to talk about this.”

Holy shit, she had said something about seeing a counsellor. Was I having a mindless day today?