

EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION
IN THREE SWEDISH SCHOOLS:
TOWARDS A MODEL OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

WEEMAES-LIDMAN, MARIA-CHRISTINA J.A.

Doctor of Education

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MARIA-CHRISTINA J.A.

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schools: Towards a Model of Holistic Education in Early Childhood**

by

WEEMAES-LIDMAN, Maria-Christina, J.A.

A Thesis Submitted to

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WEEMAES-LIDMAN, Maria-Christina J.A.

July 2014



THESIS EXAMINATION PANEL APPROVAL

Members of the Thesis Examination Panel approve the thesis of WEEMAES-LIDMAN, Maria-Christina J.A. defended on 6th October 2014

Principal Supervisor

Professor ADAMSON, Robert Damian
Department of International Education &
Lifelong Learning
Chair Professor of Curriculum Reform
Director, UNESCO-UNEVOC Centre
Hong Kong
Director, Centre for Lifelong Learning,
Research and Development
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

External Examiner

Dr. GIARDIELLO, Patricia
Unit Leader in Early Years
Faculty of Education
Manchester Metropolitan University

Associate Supervisor

Dr. WONG, Ping Ho
Associate Professor
Department of International Education &
Lifelong Learning
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Internal Examiner

Professor KENNEDY, Kerry John
Research Chair Professor
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Centre for Governance and Citizenship
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Approved on behalf of the Thesis Examination Panel:

Professor LAM, Lawrence Tak Ming
Programme Director of Doctor of Education (EdD)
Graduate School
The Hong Kong Institute of Education



ABSTRACT

Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Holistic Education in three Swedish Schools: Towards a Model of Holistic Education in Early Childhood

by WEEMAES-LIDMAN, Maria-Christina, J.A.

for the degree of Doctor of Education

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Myriad school reforms around the world emphasize the importance of ‘holistic education’ in early childhood. International policy reports show a clear consensus that quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) should encompass a broad, *holistic view* on learning, caring, upbringing, and social support for children (European Commission, 2011; Eurydice, 2009; UNESCO, 2010). In these reports, the words ‘care’ and ‘education’ are interpreted as ‘inseparable concepts’ in *holistic* education.

Britto (2014), Chief of Early Childhood Development at UNICEF, argued that “now is the time to invest in early childhood development,” and she recommends stakeholders to develop ‘investment portfolios’ through collaborations between the public sector, private organizations, and civil society. Desmond (2014) suggests taking a *holistic approach* toward the ‘cost of inaction’, as he believes in achieving greater response when illustrating the consequences of *not* investing in young children.

Educational scholars Chiu (2009), Kates and Harvey (2010), Forbes (2003), Allan and Evans (2006), Gallegos Nava (2000), Krishnamurti (1996), Miller (1983), and Brown (1988) offer comprehensive categorization of holistic education literature, and accentuate the holistic emphasis that addresses the multifaceted needs and potentials of teachers and students as they discover themselves and each other in the integral context of the

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classroom. Miller (2007) states that a general understanding of holistic education includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual development of a human being. He also accentuates that, in contrast to the first five, the spiritual dimension is frequently underexploited, disregarded, or remains unnoticed.

However, educational stakeholders' diverse range of perceptions on what holistic education entails could lead to either fidelity or slippage in the designing of policy and curriculum documents, and ultimately have an impact on the implementation of holistic education in classrooms.

This qualitative study unveils the perceptions of holistic education derived from interviewing policymakers, school principals and teachers in a Montessori, Waldorf and Nature school in Sweden. Findings reveal that, despite educational stakeholders' different perceptions of holistic education, interconnections exist that *supplement* each other, leading to fidelity rather than slippage in policy and curriculum documents. These cohesions disclose how *individual* contributions and *combined* forces from politicians, academics, and educators, who primarily *diverge significantly* in perceptions, practices, priorities, and philosophies of holistic education, ultimately *converge* towards holistic education practices in classrooms.

This research offers detailed insight into the perceptions of H. Ed. by educational stakeholders, a comprehensive model of holistic education for classroom implementation, a comprehensive overview of how *spirituality* takes place in classroom settings, describes an effective method of how Sweden managed a successful curriculum reform through a combination of research and practice, and shows how schools with progressive curricula can uphold and align their individual curricula with the national curriculum to ensure accountability towards government and parents.



Policymakers revealed that the political system in Sweden is based on common platforms that allow individual communities to converge on the child, through the choice of allocating resources in line with the needs of that community, thereby creating interventions to address all aspects of children's development. This, in combination with a democratic distribution of an equal amount of money for each child, shows the benefits of non-compartmentalizing funding as a cost-effective holistic approach.

The results of this research show how the political, academic, and educational world can cooperate in unison, through effective communication and collaboration between politicians, researchers, and educators who *complement* each other in their different roles, and how these stakeholders' combined perceptions enhance the understanding and practice of holistic education leading towards educating the *whole* child.

In addition, this study reveals how a pocket version of the national curriculum, in combination with an inspirational pocket version of scientifically based classroom research, became twin engines to trigger 'ripples of change' in holistic education, by converting teachers from passively following curriculum guidelines into active advocates of 'whole child teaching', through reflecting on existing practices and comparing these with scientific research.

The dual outcome of this study on the perceptions of holistic education can be useful to various educational stakeholders and caregivers, ranging from members of the education department, policy makers, to school supervisors, school principals, teachers, parents, caregivers, or meticulous stakeholders who engage in critical observation how holistic education unfolds in the environment they work in. This thesis is made for *readers*, and the practical holistic early years framework is made for *users*.

Ultimately, this study in combination with the conceptual map of holistic education has the potential to contribute towards a successful implementation of '*holistic education*'

without borders’ in any school system in the world. The benefits of holistic education have been made clear and visible through the framework, and concluding diagrams symbolize the outcome of this research as potential stepping-stone towards ‘holistic education without borders.’ As holistic education focuses on the “fullest possible development of the person, encouraging individuals to become the very best or finest that they can be and enabling them to experience all they can from life and to reach their goals” (Forbes, 2003, p. 17), it should become a universal right for all children to be taught in a way that addresses all aspects of their development.

With this final statement, I want to conclude that this timely ‘holistic education thesis journey’ responds to an “increased need in translating knowledge into *actions* that policymakers around the world can use to develop early childhood programs and investments” (IOM, 2014, p. 3). Although free education is a meaningful goal, but not achievable in the short-term for many countries, the provision of ‘holistic education’ for the world’s young learners *and our future leaders* might be an achievable goal in the near future – at least it is worth exploring.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
CHE	Cogwheels of Holistic Education
CMHE	Conceptual Map of Holistic Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ESL	English as a Second Language
H. Ed.	Holistic Education
HECF	Holistic Early Childhood Framework
HEST	Holistic Education Supporting Triangles
IB	International Baccalaureate
IPC	International Primary Curriculum
IQ	Interview Question
JPM	Junior Policy Maker
Lpfo	Laroplan for forskolan – Curriculum for the Preschool
MRQ	Main Research Question
MS	Montessori School
MSP	Montessori School Principal
MST	Montessori School Teacher
NS	Nature School
NSP	Nature School Principal
NST	Nature School Teacher
OBHP	Octagonal Based Holistic Pyramid
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PECERA	Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QEF	Quality Education Fund
SEN	Special Educational Needs

SH	Stakeholder
SP	Senior Policy Maker
SRQ	Specific Research Question
ST/SA	Storytelling/Story Acting
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WS	Waldorf School
WSP	Waldorf School Principal
WST	Waldorf School Teacher



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the thesis, and states the focus of this research. It starts with my personal motivation and background, followed by identifying the issue and background of this study, and a brief overview of educational stakeholders and educational reform. In the research focus section, I explain the research questions, their significance upon this research, their limitations, and the possibility of generalization.

This chapter positions the research with a focus on early childhood and holistic education, within the context of educational reform in Sweden and implementing a new Education Act (2010, p. 800), stating that *all* schools, government and private, have to follow the new national preschool curriculum (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010). The focus of this research is on: the *perceptions* of holistic education by Educational stakeholders (policymakers, school principals, and teachers) in three different school settings (Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools); and the *possible tensions* between national curriculum and individual school philosophies, principals' views of school philosophy, and teachers' views, and *differences* between the philosophies themselves. The researcher also aims to capture the holistic practices of case schools through documentary analysis, interviews, observations, and triangulation, in order to create a holistic early childhood framework that can be used to improve holistic education in preschools, and to offer 'holistic education without borders' to our current young learners who might become our future leaders.

1.1 Personal Motivation for This Study

This research attempts to shed light on the problem and complexity of holistic education, and its perceptions by educational stakeholders and decision makers in three school systems in Sweden.



I have been an educator for over twenty-five years in the East and West, teaching in bilingual school systems in Asia for seventeen years. Over time, I have developed a candid academic and scholarly desire to unveil the density of holistic education and its perceptions by educational stakeholders.

Myriad education systems in the East and West have been facing curriculum reforms, emphasizing the significance of a *holistic* view of education. In Hong Kong, the Curriculum Development Council produced a major reform document, *Learning to Learn* (2000), including the component of whole-person development. In South Korea, the new ‘Nuri’ curriculum (2013) promotes character education as a crucial part of their *holistic educational reform*. Sweden represents the West, and was assigned by the OECD as ‘best practice’ for curriculum reform (1998), embedding the successful implementation of holistic education.

A revision of the Swedish preschool curriculum Lpfo 98 in 2010, focused on the responsibilities of all the staff involved, and clarified the roles of teachers, work teams, and principals to ensure that *holistic education* was implemented. This review was a response to the growing need of ensuring quality in the Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care’s (ECEC) *whole child approach* services. This quality measure for the stakeholders’ accountability came into practice on July 1st 2011.

I started by analyzing curriculum documents of education systems in Hong Kong, Korea, and Sweden, at different levels of implementing ‘holistic education’. At the backdrop of examining holistic education-related guidelines in these three countries, a conceptual map was created revealing key areas and key words that reflected holistic practices. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews in Sweden in three different school systems (Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools) to map stakeholders’ perceptions of holistic education, after a pilot study revealed that Sweden was the only country that applies rules

and regulations, as well as accountability of schools, with progressive methods of teaching. An additional reason for choosing Sweden was that *all* preschools are subject to follow the national curriculum; contrastingly, in other countries the Montessori and Waldorf school systems are merely used to generate higher school fees, neither delivering the pedagogy that parents pay for nor providing trained teachers.

Having been an educator across multiple continents and cultures, the concept of holistic education has triggered my interest in clarifying and simplifying this complex paradigm, as a goal to unveil this important pillar of education that is unfortunately often overlooked. I have investigated the policy and curriculum documents of three countries under educational reform, analyzed how holistic education has been defined in these curriculum documents, made a conceptual framework to analyze interviews of stakeholders, and mapped the results of three case studies against the conceptual map of holistic education. It is my aim that this doctoral thesis will become a practical guide and tool for practitioners to offer ‘holistic education without borders’ in numerous early childhood settings.

1.1.1 Researcher’s Background

I have been involved in the education sector for over two decades, specifically in international school settings as a teacher, curriculum developer, head teacher, vice principal, and principal, in an array of countries including Belgium, Sweden, the US, Australia, the UK, Korea, and Hong Kong.

During my fourteen years of teaching in Hong Kong, I worked in international bilingual schools with the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). My Montessori training provided me with the powerful tool of observation that underpins and strengthens my personal philosophy – that careful, systematic observation is the key to understanding children’s needs. My IB training

opened the door to ‘inquiry-based learning’ as an extension to Montessori’s philosophy ‘help me to do it by myself’. On the other hand, IPC training opened my world to the power of acknowledging and incorporating multiple intelligences in enhancing children’s learning, and understanding how the students’ preferred learning styles and teachers’ preferred teaching styles induce balance and inclusion in the classroom. The IPC also promotes tolerance and understanding of cultural differences through discussing, respecting, and celebrating home and host countries’ cultural customs, traditions, and festivities. As an educational leader, I encourage all teachers to combine their studies and professional experience to continuously reflect on ways to promote intercultural understanding, which is crucial to educating 21st century learners. I believe in the importance of teachers taking the lead in reflecting on their own practice, in order to foster a genuine educational change through the day-to-day actions of empowered individuals.

Formulating a ‘personal mission statement’ is a stepping-stone for teachers to reflect, capture, and state personal strengths and values, and to envision how they will contribute to their students’ holistic development in early childhood settings.

1.1.2 Researcher’s Personal Statement

“The world has changed, so must the Education System!” (Proposal of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of The People’s Republic of China, Education Commission May 2000, p. 1).

Preparing students with the tools that are needed to cope with the demands of the 21st century is a target educational institutions worldwide aim for. To reach this target, classrooms need passionate, responsible, and knowledgeable educators, who are able to plant the seeds for ‘life-long learning’. Myriad education journals suggest educating the 21st century student in a ‘holistic’ way, not only taking into account the career path, but

placing equal importance on the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and social aspects of each student.

Pupils ideally should feel empowered, adequately prepared, and nurtured to actively embark on an exciting learning journey, guided by educators who have the ability to carefully and skillfully pave a fertile path where learning seeds can germinate. Students ought to be provided with ample opportunities to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in order to ‘learn through experience’.

As an educational leader, I aim to encourage all early childhood practitioners to become active participants of their own professional learning, by reflecting and questioning their own practices as well as the school’s practices. In an increasingly globalized world, where single prescribed ways of thinking and acting no longer exist, action research could become a powerful cross-cultural tool, as classroom researchers reflect on their personal educational values across cultures.

Teachers’ action-research could contribute to a climate of inquiry among staff, students, parents, and board members, facilitating collaborative decision-making and open-ended inquiry. As a result, school policies could be influenced by ‘cross-fertilization’ of ideas based on ongoing critical questioning and reflecting, ultimately enhancing learning and teaching.

In order to launch a ‘learning organization’ committed to team and trust building among staff members, a shift of mindset is needed to establish a learning culture that has the capacity to embrace innovation and problem solving. This could be compared with a statement of the great thinker, Albert Einstein, who said: “The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”



I truly believe that the effectiveness of successful leadership depends on the ability to share a vision with the staff, prepare them to meet the challenges of change by being a role model, and providing them with an ongoing mentoring/motivating program as well as targeted professional development. I also firmly believe that it is the duty of all educators worldwide to nurture and prepare students to meet the challenges of a changing world.

Combining the rigor of doctoral research with educational practice, I aim to contribute on a wider scale to the successful management of change in any educational establishment, and to prepare students to cope successfully with the demands of the 21st century. With a passion for teaching and learning, as well as the ability to motivate and inspire staff and students, I aim to lead, support, guide, and inspire educators and novice teachers, who have decided to embark on individual teaching journeys, thereby fulfilling both their educational dreams and helping students entrusted to them to reach their full potential.

1.2 Identifying the Issue

Despite the fact that Holistic Education (H. Ed.) claims to harvest multi-dimensional advantages, it is hypothesized that there are substantial gaps in stakeholders' theoretical knowledge (if any), and how H. Ed. is interpreted, perceived, defined, and operationalized in policy documents, curriculum documents, and classroom practice. Possible outcomes of this study could urge a necessity for policy change to ensure that more children could enjoy the benefits of H. Ed. during their early childhood years. This research may provide underlying evidence for the provision of targeted professional development for teachers, and address the uncertainties and confusion about the implementation of H. Ed. for young children in classrooms.

1.2.1 Preface



It could be argued that preparing students with the tools that are needed to cope with the demands of the 21st century is a target educational institutions worldwide aim for. H. Ed. has gained significant recognition globally, and educational reforms acknowledge identifying the ‘whole child’ as a priority for educational change. Myriad educational journals suggest 21st century students should be educated in a ‘holistic’ way, not only taking into account the career path, but also placing equal importance on the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and social side of each student.

In order to reach this target, classrooms need passionate, responsible, and knowledgeable educators who are able to plant the seeds for ‘life-long holistic learning’. Young children need support in health, nutrition, care, protection, early stimulation, and learning in order to develop holistically. As a result, developmental and learning goals for young children are multi-dimensional. According to the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), holistic goals are achieved when young children survive and become physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent, able to learn, culturally and spiritually aware, and aesthetically creative. These are the pillars that enable them to become responsible and productive adults. Research also shows that holistic early childhood development educates the younger generation and promotes nation building. We may conclude that holistic education ought to be both the ambition and guiding value of early childhood interventions.

Holistic education is a progressive model of education currently gaining significant recognition globally. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the world’s largest professional association of educators, has identified the ‘Whole Child’ as its single priority for educational change. It urges educators to,

Recast the definition of a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests, to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and

physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling.

The importance of holistic or whole child education is also endorsed at a professional academic level, with growing university courses and conferences on holistic education, and several published journals and books, including *The Holistic Curriculum* authored by John Miller (2007). He emphasized linking the three educational orientations of transmission, transaction, and transformation to acknowledge the wholeness of the child, and to make learning personally and socially meaningful to the student.

Ron Miller (1990) claims that H. Ed. aims to develop a passionate love for learning through identity, meaning, and purpose in life based on connections to community, the natural world, and spiritual values, such as compassion and peace. He warns that this is not done through an academic curriculum that condenses the world into instructional packages, but rather through direct engagement with the environment that nurtures a sense of wonder. Young children need support in health, nutrition, care, protection, early stimulation, and learning in order to develop holistically. As a result, developmental and learning goals for young children are multi-dimensional.

Nava (2000) describes holistic education as a multilevel vision of education integrating different pedagogies into a global map encompassing personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness. He urges all educators to be aware of young learners' multidimensional aspects, and describes a multilevel vision of education as integrating different pedagogies into a global map; this allows us to clearly see that education consists of at least five levels that need a deep level of cosmic or spiritual awareness and experience, which is fundamental to all genuine education. The spiritual level includes the individual, community, social, and environmental levels, and holistic educators always keep the spiritual level in mind when working at any other level. Nava introduced 'soul learning' as a multidimensional mode of learning in which



the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness.

In Hong Kong, the Quality Education Fund (QEF) launched “Promoting Whole Child Development in Kindergarten Education” as one of the priority themes for 2013/2014, facilitating whole person development and life-long learning to support the growing needs of Kindergarten education. In Korea, the new ‘Nuri’ preschool curriculum (2013) promotes character education as part of their holistic kindergarten reform in order to help children respect people, nature, and to obtain a good understanding of their culture. In Sweden, curriculum documents on holistic education have provided clear guidelines since 1998, including the UN Convention on the *Rights of the Child*. As a result, the Swedish preschool curriculum contains a section on the ‘influence of the child’, defining a child’s right to participate in the planning and decision-making process at his/her preschool. Research also shows that holistic early childhood development educates the young generation and promotes nation building. In conclusion, holistic education might become an important pillar and guide in early childhood interventions. However, the question remains: are our educational stakeholders (policy makers, school principals, and teachers) adequately prepared, aligned, informed, educated, and equipped with the holistic knowledge and holistic gear to ensure that holistic education is properly understood and actually takes place in their educational organization?

I hypothesize that early childhood practitioners who wish to implement this vital aim of H. Ed. in the next millennium are puzzled as to how to transform their theoretical knowledge on children’s holistic development, and how to offer truly holistic educational practices in the classroom. I assume that an urgent need exists to facilitate teachers into becoming reflective and critical practitioners who highlight the need to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of holistic education, as good ‘holistic’ intentions may lead to teachers’ despair when they face contradictory parent expectations, academic

pressure, and not enough guidance on how to cope with the countless demands of different stakeholders.

1.2.2 Overview of Chapters

In this study, chapter 1 gives an overview of the thesis and states the focus of this research. It starts with my personal motivation and background, followed by identifying the issue and background of this study, and a brief overview of educational stakeholders and educational reform. In the research focus section, I explain the research questions, their significance upon this research, their limitations, and the possibility of generalization. Chapter 2 offers insight into Swedish preschools' curriculum, history, goals, support, and tasks, while chapter 3 gives information about the case schools and their pedagogies. Chapter 4 is a literature review, starting with a summary of the general understanding of holistic education according to holistic educationalists. This is followed by a structured examination of literature, in line with my identification of the eight holistic stances that are also incorporated into the analytical framework for mapping the stakeholder's perceptions of holistic education: thinking skills, character education, concern for nature, caring relationships, democracy, creativity, spirituality, and play (fig. 2). Chapter 5 explains the methodology and flow of thinking for this study, and provides a detailed overview of the research method, epistemological stance, data collection, analytical framework, comparative approach, and methodological challenges.

In Chapter 6, I analyze curriculum documents against my holistic octagon (fig. 2), and present a detailed overview of the stakeholders' perceptions of holistic education in individual school systems. Chapter 7 deals with the comparative part of this study, showing the similarities and differences between the stakeholders' perceptions against the backdrop of the eight holistic stances, divided into four groups of two: thinking skills-character education; play-creativity; democracy-caring relationships and; concern for nature-spirituality, as an analysis of the interviews showed strong links between these

areas. This chapter also gives an overview of my observations of the three school systems as a triangulation, and identifies additional holistic practices. In section 7.3, I discuss my perceptions in addition to the analyzed eight holistic stances. Specifically, the holistic stance of spirituality was observed in detail across the three case schools, and similarities and differences revealed. At the end of chapter 7, the found similarities and differences are discussed and compared.

Chapter 8 is a discussion and summary of the findings, analyzed against my analytical framework and additional findings. This chapter ends with implications for future research and a summary of my recommendations. Chapter 9 answers the research questions. Chapter 10 offers concluding diagrams as a practical, informative visual way to represent the key findings of this research. Chapter 11 offers researcher's recommendations for policymakers, school principals and teachers, and Chapter 12 has final reflections on research methods, research findings, and a possible generalization of this study.

1.3 Background of Study

This study is conducted in the context of education reforms in ECEC, to increase the quality of provisions at local and international levels by encompassing a *holistic view* on learning, caring, upbringing, and social support for children. International policy reports (European Commission, 2011; UNESCO, 2010) and research (Oberhuemer, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) indicate that quality services in ECEC require both 'care' and 'education' based on a *holistic conceptualization*. A recent European research project entitled *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care* (CoRe) conducted by van Laere *et al.* (2012), revealed that a holistic view of education should be negotiated with all stakeholders, namely: practitioners, parents, local communities, schools, training institutions, local, regional, and national governments as well as policymakers.

National Early Childhood Curriculum documents worldwide are influenced by the underlying political guidelines of the country. In Sweden, democracy, gender equality, and solidarity are the pillars of Swedish society. In Korea, the key phrase of the new early childhood Nuri curriculum is character education, in line with new Korean educational policies emphasizing the importance of character building in schools, after studies showed that students, teachers, and parents were showing growing concerns about children's character. Hong Kong is privileged with a wealth of written documents about the whole child approach, but lacks practical examples to support the endeavors of teachers in implementing H. Ed. Although there is evidence that providing H. Ed. to students could lead to building the health and wealth of nations and advance social justice, the gap between theoretical information and practical guidelines for implementation remains wide. In conclusion, Swedish curriculum documents are in line with the values of Swedish society: democracy, gender equality and solidarity. As a result these important values are woven into Lpfo 98, rev. 2010, and by analyzing Swedish preschool documents I can conclude that these are clearly stated throughout the whole curriculum document.

1.3.1 Justification of Consulting Hong Kong and Korea's Curricula

I will consult two additional countries under educational reform to extract key words related to the implementation of holistic education for the formation of an analytical framework. Hong Kong, Korea, and Sweden are three countries at different levels of implementing holistic education. In Hong Kong, the curriculum development Council produced a major reform document, *Learning to Learn* (2000), which included the component of *whole-person development*. In Korea, the new 'Nuri' curriculum (2013) promotes character education as a crucial part of their *holistic educational reform*. Sweden represents the West and was assigned by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as 'best practice' for curriculum reform (1998),

embedding the successful implementation of H. Ed. Perceptions of stakeholders in Nature, Montessori, and Waldorf schools in Sweden will be mapped against my conceptual map of holistic education (CMHE).

1.3.1.1 Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Quality Education Fund (QEF) promoted ‘Whole Child Development in Kindergarten Education’ during their launch in 2013/2014 to facilitate *holistic education* and life-long learning, supporting the growing needs of kindergarten education in Hong Kong. However, in 2000 the Curriculum Development Council created a major reform document, *Learning to Learn*, introducing eight key learning areas within the curriculum framework, emphasizing communication skills, diversified learning, and *whole-person development* to promote life-long learning. Despite major government support for teacher development, workshops, courses for school principals, and hiring of overseas experts to ensure an effective implementation of this curriculum reform, many questions on the meaning, definition, and implementation of ‘holistic education’ or ‘whole child development’ in Hong Kong remain unanswered. As a potential detrimental consequence, teachers’ enthusiasm to implement ‘holistic’ or ‘whole child’ teaching might be watered down into confusion and frustration due to lack of practical guidelines, showing both the complexity of holistic education in Hong Kong, as well as the urgent need for clarifying this important yet complex paradigm.

1.3.1.2 South Korea

In South Korea, a new national preschool curriculum for children aged three to five, the Nuri curriculum, was executed in 2013/4 to unify the Kindergarten Curriculum and the standard Care Curriculum with a focus on character building, after a study conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2012 revealed that 54 to 84% of teachers,

students, and parents raised concerns that “there are problems with children’s characters” (Yang, 2013).

Nuri means ‘world’, and the ‘Nuri curriculum’ aims to become a helpful ingredient in establishing *holistic* early childhood education and care, by inaugurating the basic ground for children to grow to be responsible citizens through *holistic whole child education*. The purpose of the Nuri curriculum is to foster both physical and mental health, and ensure the harmonious growth required to form the foundation of a democratic citizen (Ministry of Education and Science, 2013; Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2013). The contents of character education for young children are based on six character virtues: consideration, respect, collaboration, sharing, order, and filial piety.

1.3.1.3 Sweden

Sweden’s preschool system takes a holistic approach towards children and their needs, and is designed so that *care*, *development*, and *learning* form a *coherent* whole. The assumption is that care and education go hand in hand, and that a good, caring environment is essential for development and learning. The Swedish curriculum also emphasizes the importance of *nature* and *play* in supporting the child’s learning and development. Preschool is meant to be fun, secure, and educational for all children. The Swedish Preschool Curriculum Document (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010) states:

The preschool should put great emphasis on issues concerning the *environment* and *nature* conservation. An *ecological* approach and a positive belief in the future should typify the preschool’s activities. The preschool should contribute to ensuring children acquire a *caring attitude* to nature and the environment, and understand that they are part of nature’s recycling process. The preschool should help children understand that daily reality and work can be organized in such a way that it contributes to a *better* environment, both now and in the future. (p. 7)

Play is important for the child's development and learning. Conscious use of *play* to promote the development and learning of each individual child should always be present in preschool activities. *Play* and enjoyment in learning in all its various forms stimulate the imagination, insight, communication and the ability to think symbolically, as well as the ability to co-operate and solve problems. Through creative and gestalt *play*, the child is given opportunities to express and work through his or her experiences and feelings. (p. 6)

The acquisition of *knowledge*, for Swedish preschool children, is considered to be “a complex concept which can be expressed in variety of forms - as facts, understanding, skills, familiarity and experience – all of which presuppose and interact with each other” (p. 6). Lpfo 98 highlights that the starting point for preschools is the experience that children have already gained their interests, motivation and their drive to acquire knowledge. Children's search for knowledge should be respected and developed through *play, social interaction, exploration and creativity*, as well as through *observation, discussion and reflection*. This is formulated in the preschool curriculum as:

A sense of exploration, curiosity and desire to learn should form the foundation for the preschool activities. These should be based on the child's experiences, interests, needs, and views. The flow of the child's thoughts and ideas should be used to create variety in learning. The purpose is to stimulate children's development and learning in a secure and caring environment, to promote social and emotional competence, and to prepare children for continued education. The learning environment should be open, enriched by content and attractive. The preschool should promote play, creativity and enjoyment of learning, as well as focus on and strengthen the child's interest in learning and capturing new experiences, knowledge and skills. (p. 9)

Since autumn of 1998, preschools have had their own curriculum, laid down in an ordinance endorsed by the Swedish ‘Riksdag’ and the Government. This emphasizes the importance of pre-school as the first step in lifelong learning. In 2010, the pre-school curriculum was revised, and now contains *clearer objectives* for children’s development in language, mathematics, natural science, and technology. Guidelines for staff responsibilities have been clarified, both at individual teacher level and at team level. New sections on monitoring, evaluation, development, and the responsibilities of pre-school heads have been added.

1.4 Education Stakeholders

As this research deals with the perceptions of holistic education by different stakeholders against the backdrop of curriculum reform, we have to define who these ‘education stakeholders’ are and what ‘curriculum’ and ‘reform’ entails, in addition to defining and conceptualizing the meaning of H. Ed.

Policy makers take a leading role in shaping directions for any kind of innovations. Education departments worldwide have a major influence on curriculum reforms. If holistic education is seen as being crucial in the development of the *whole* child, policymakers ought to urge governments to adopt a focused approach for setting goals, establishing priorities, and building frameworks for accountability, providing school principals and teachers with the holistic gear and guidelines needed to facilitate successful implementation. *School principals’* perceptions of H. Ed. will influence school plans for professional development and classroom practice. If school heads are uncertain about holistic education, they will unavoidably experience challenges in responding to teachers’ requests for clear guidelines. *Teachers’* personal beliefs, former experiences with recent educational changes, and perceived support from school heads may have a positive or resilient effect on the implementation of H. Ed. in their classrooms. Teachers should be able to seek advice, and voice their uncertainties, concerns, doubts, and

questions about the theory and practice of H. Ed., in order to reduce the gap between their current and preferred status of implementing H. Ed., as well as learning how to deal with parents' expectations. In an increasingly globalized world, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to inform and address the expectations of a diversified parent body. Especially parents of Asian descent may come from a society where academic excellence prevails. Consequently, teachers need opportunities to inform parents about the components of holistic education and the benefits of educating 'the whole child' in preschool.

According to Marsh (1997), up until the 1960s nearly all theorizing about curriculum development was focused on improving practices in schools, and frequently served to support existing educational, social, and political systems (p. 201). He claims that "appropriate curriculum theories could guide the work of teachers, policy-makers, administrators, and anyone else involved in curriculum planning and development," which would facilitate researchers' analysis of data and provide direction for curriculum research, with clear guidelines for teachers and benefits for students. However, he claims that the conceptualizing of curriculum theories still 'eludes' us (p. 199). Marsh's curriculum theory informs us that, "schools in which innovations are implemented can vary enormously in terms of staff interest and expertise, organizational structure and resources" (p. 86).

In this study, stakeholders of three schools with different pedagogies, Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori schools, will be interviewed. Marsh informs us that schooling occurs "as a result of decisions made by various individuals and groups, both professionals and laypersons" (p. 160), and urges us to understand the contributions of various players. Arends (2000) defines education stakeholders as individuals or groups of people who have a right to comment on, and have input into, school programs. Decision makers are those individuals or groups who, because of their professional status or position, are able to make specific decisions about what is to be taught, when, how, and to whom. Although



we may only identify education officers as being school principals and teachers, textbook writers, testing agencies, and accreditation and certification agencies are included as well.

1.5 Educational Reform

Bourke (1994) refers to ‘reform’ as changes instituted from above, and that “the implication in much of the rhetoric is that only *government* decision-making can reform education” (p. 1). Consequently, it is crucial to interview policy makers about their perceptions of holistic education and their underlying reasons for the curriculum reform, as politicians take a leading role in determining directions for curriculum reform. Kennedy (1995) emphasizes that, unless a reform is consistent with the values of the wider society, it is unlikely to be successful. Swedish society is based on ‘democratic values’, which is highlighted in the first sentence of the preschool curriculum stating that, “democracy forms the foundation of the preschool” (Lpfo 98, p. 3). This statement abides the Education Act (2010, p. 800) stipulating that, “education in the preschool aims at children acquiring and developing knowledge and *values*.”

Furthermore, Lpfo 98 (p. 3) states clearly that the foundation on which these values rests expresses the “ethical attitude that should characterize all preschool activity,” indicating that “care and consideration towards other people, justice and equality and the rights of each individual shall be emphasized and made explicit in all preschool activities.” The curriculum document also urges adults to serve as important role models as “the attitudes of adults influence the child’s understanding and respect for the rights and obligations that apply in a democratic society.”

The minister for preschools in Sweden, Maria Arnholm, is also the Minister of Education and Research, as well as the ‘gender equality’ minister. Preschool curriculum documents indicate that the way adults respond to girls and boys, as well as the demands and expectations imposed on children, contribute to their appreciation of gender differences.

The preschool should “counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles” by emphasizing the equal value of both genders, and stressing that girls and boys in the preschool should have the “*same* opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles” (Lpfo 98, p. 4). In order to help teachers to implement this curriculum guideline, sample questions related to gender reflection are inserted in the teachers’ guide, *Curriculum in the Pocket* (see appendix 4.3). Examples of reflection questions are: How are the curriculum guidelines anchored in yourself? What do you as a teacher do to show this in your classroom? What is your personal opinion about gender equity? How do you model it? What do you do to counteract traditional gender roles? Do you give boys and girls the same opportunities to try and develop their capabilities and interests?

The above questions show how teachers are gently prepared to question their own practices and reflect on their own opinions, and how these influence their attitude and the way they model these equality values.

Glatthorn and Jailall (2000) reflect that curriculum reform is mainly directed towards students and teachers to seek improvement in excellence and equity. Interviews with school heads and teachers will unveil their perceptions about H.Ed to improve existing practices.

As reforms also target the quality of the teaching force, teachers should be addressing the new social realities of teaching (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Sweden invested enormous sums of money to transform the uncertainty about quality and the availability of pre-school places, into an unquestioned right. Each parent is to have professionally trained staff readily available at a time when the parents need them. Hong Kong has also invested and supported the upgrading of teachers’ qualifications to improve the quality of their kindergarten programs.

Fullan (1996) states that schools in the 21st century are being engulfed by multiple innovations and policy changes, and argues that, “only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in study achievement” (p. 16). He defines the ‘cultural change principal’ as a principal attuned to the big picture, and suggests that this principal displays “palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope” (p. 17), which, in my opinion, is crucial for the successful implementation of true holistic education in classrooms.

1.6 Research Focus

This research attempts to shed light on the issues and complexity of H. Ed., and its perceptions by educational stakeholders and decision makers. In an era of numerous educational reforms, it is astute to investigate, compare, and reflect how other countries have dealt with the information and implementation of H. Ed. in their curriculum reforms.

Sweden was acknowledged by the OECD (1998) as having the ‘best practice’ for whole child development, embedding the successful implementation of holistic education in their *Curriculum for the Preschool* (Lpfo 98), emphasizing that all activities should be based on a *holistic* view of the child, and his or her needs and be designed so that care, socialization, and learning collectively form a coherent whole (p. 4). Clear policy documents on the ‘helhetssyn’ (whole child approach) and quality assurance documents (2005) contributed to the efficacious enactment of teaching the ‘whole child’ in the early years classroom.

In 2010, a new curriculum reform and a new Education Act required *all* schools to follow the revised National Curriculum for the preschool ‘**Laroplan for Forskolan**’ (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010). This revision was instigated by the conservative government to provide clearer objectives for children’s development in language, mathematics, natural sciences, and technology. In addition, the guidelines for staff responsibilities were clarified at an



individual teacher level and at team level. This document also states that the development of children into responsible persons and members of society should be promoted in partnership with the home:

The preschool should help families by supporting them in their role of bringing up and helping their children to grow and develop. The task of the preschool means working in co-operation with parents so that each child receives the opportunity of developing in accordance with their potential. (p. 4)

The revised curriculum also contains new sections on monitoring, evaluation, and development, and on the responsibilities of preschool heads (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). The renaming of the preschool document (Lpfo 98) to Lpfo 98, rev. 2010 indicates that the framework of the previous curriculum, Lpfo 98, was kept but revised in 2010 with clearer goals for students growth and clarified guidelines for staff's responsibilities and accountability.

This study focuses on three schools with embedded holistic education in their curricula: a Montessori school, a Waldorf school and a Nature school. Investigating these case school's perceptions, practices, and priorities of holistic education, while aligning their school philosophies with the national curriculum guidelines, forms an ideal platform to extract elements and practices to inform other early childhood settings and to improve the provision of whole child development leading to 'holistic education without borders' (my emphasis).

While my main goal in this study is to investigate the perceptions of H. Ed. in Sweden and to identify gaps in knowledge and possible tensions between stakeholders, I also aim to contribute at a practical level by creating a holistic early childhood framework derived from the results of this study, to facilitate the delivery of H. Ed. in any early childhood setting by generating practices from the case schools.

I argue that it is vital for *all* early years classroom practitioners to be given clear guidelines about the content, meaning, and purpose of H. Ed. Just as it is the right of all young children to be taught by inspired teachers who have the motivation, knowledge, and skills to implement H. Ed. in their classrooms.

In order to succeed with the above aims, the below research questions will be an aid in revealing the stakeholders insights, personal visions, and awareness of holistic education, leading towards answering the main research question of what holistic education means in three Swedish schools, and ultimately leading towards a framework of holistic education for other practitioners to consult and implement leading to holistic education without borders.

1.6.1 Research Questions

This research aims at answering one key question: *What does ‘Holistic Education’ mean in Sweden?* The main research question (MRQ) is supplemented by four specific research questions (SRQ) to elicit the *what*, *how*, and *why* of holistic education.

MRS: *What* does ‘Holistic Education’ in Early Childhood mean in Sweden?

SRQ 1: *How* is ‘Holistic Education’ interpreted in Early Childhood curriculum documents in Sweden?

SRQ 2: *How* is ‘Holistic Education’ interpreted by educational stakeholders (Policymakers, School Principals, and Teachers) in Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori schools?

SRQ 3: *What* are the similarities and differences in definition and interpretation of ‘Holistic Education’ in Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori school pedagogies?

SRQ 4: *Why* do differences exist in definition and interpretation of ‘holistic education’ by stakeholders and in the three school systems?

1.6.2 Sample Questions for Policymakers, School Principals, and Teachers

Full transcript in Appendix 4.1

IQ1: What is your understanding of ‘holistic education’?

IQ2: What is your understanding of ‘whole child approach’?

IQ3: How is holistic education defined in educational policy documents, school curriculum, school plans and daily lesson plans?

IQ4: How is holistic education operationalized in your school and classroom? Could you give me some examples of activities that promote holistic education?

IQ5: What kind of teaching and learning resources do you use for the implementation of holistic education activities in your classroom?

IQ6: Does your school provide professional development opportunities related to holistic education?

IQ7: What is the ‘work term’ used in your school for ‘educating the whole child’?

IQ8: How much emphasis or priority do you give on thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships and concern for nature?

IQ9: What are the factors that promote or hinder the implementation of holistic education in your school?

1.6.3 Sample Questions for Participants of International Nature Symposium

Full transcript in Appendix 4.2

IQ1: Could you describe what triggered your interest for Nature Education? Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.

IQ2: What words or phrases come onto your mind when you hear the word *nature*?

IQ3: How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

IQ4: How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? Is it part of the curriculum?

IQ5: Could you please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom?

IQ6: How do you see the relationship with nature and values education?

IQ7: How would you describe the journey of preschool children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

IQ8: What are the factors that facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

IQ 9: What are the factors that hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

IQ10: What are the views of parents and policymakers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

1.6.4 Significance of This Study

H. Ed. has become a policy priority in many countries, as part of evolving curriculum reforms to ensure quality provision in ECEC. A growing body of research reveals that H. Ed. leads to a better foundation for lifelong learning enhanced learning outcomes, improved child well-being, and positive social and economic benefits. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the world’s largest professional association of educators, has identified the ‘whole child’ as its single priority for educational change, urging to ‘recast the definition of a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling’.

While my main goal in this study is to investigate the perceptions of H. Ed. in Sweden, I also aim at contributing at a practical level by creating a holistic early childhood framework derived from the results of this study, to facilitate the delivery of H. Ed. in any early childhood setting by generating practices from the case schools.

I argue that it is vital for all early years’ classroom practitioners to be given clear guidelines about the content, meaning, and purpose of H. Ed., just as it is the right of all



young children to be taught by inspired teachers who have the motivation, knowledge and skills to implement H. Ed. in their classrooms. Providing H. Ed. in early childhood development gives children a platform for life-long learning. Hence, it is crucial that teachers are aware of the multiple benefits of H. Ed. Equally, teachers have to be aware of the potential alarming consequences of inadequate knowledge, skills, and understanding of H. Ed. leading to the inability to address young children's holistic needs.

Holistic advocates argue that children need holistic educational experiences that do not create artificial boundaries between the different aspects of their development. Children's learning ought to respond to their current and future personal needs—from the needs of the wide-ranging societies, to the society of which they will be part of. Learning needs to be active, engaging, and relevant to their future needs in a setting that is meaningful to their present lives. Holistic education provides a balanced approach that *connects* all aspects of learning with a sense of *identity* that offers *meaning* and *purpose*.

Holistic Education could be defined as a growing new educational approach, emphasizing, embracing, and honoring the *whole* child by respecting the multi-dimensional aspects of the learner, and engaging body, mind, emotion, and soul.

The 21st century welcomes holistic educational leaders who guide and nurture the 'whole child', and who awake the learner's *spiritual* tentacles to recognize and realize the whole of their potential. H. Ed. respects the *soul* as a guiding value in human action and relations. Based on the evidence of the multiple benefits that holistic education embraces, perceptions on holistic education by educational stakeholders need to be revealed and analyzed to identify the gaps in understanding and implementation that might facilitate or hinder the provision of holistic early childhood development. This study will unveil the perceptions related to holistic education that might lead to fidelity or slippage in design and implementation of policy and curriculum documents, inevitably creating an impact on the implementation of holistic education in schools.



This research will also contribute recommendations, to facilitate the provision of holistic ‘whole child’ education in classrooms, and to support the provision of experiences and benefits of holistic education for all children, by offering guidelines and practical examples to make ‘holistic education’ approachable and accessible for as many young learners as possible.

This study can serve as an underlying guide to inform and support Hong Kong policymakers and the Hong Kong Quality Education fund (QEF) in their 2014 launch to ‘Promote Whole Child Development’ in kindergarten education.

1.6.5 Clarification of the ‘Conceptual Map of Holistic Education’ (CMHE)

I had created a conceptual map of H. Ed. that was initially used for analytical purposes, with the potential to become solid, reliable, and mature by the end of the research. This analytical map holds the potential to develop into a model of H. Ed. in early childhood that could be generalized. This model can clarify and simplify a complex paradigm, and can become a practical tool for early childhood practitioners who are committed to elicit young learners’ full potential in a holistic way, but are in a desperate need of clear guidelines on how to support “a multidimensional mode of learning in which the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness which form the spectrum of spiritual intelligence and advanced holistic modes of thinking” (Kates & Harvey, 2010).

1.6.6 Significance of Outcomes

This study, through academic research, will shed light on the composition H. Ed, how it is defined in curriculum documents, and how education stakeholders perceive it. Furthermore, recommendations on how to ensure that both teachers and students are

geared with the tools that are needed to address the holistic needs of the 21st century young learners. In addition, this research has the potential to result in a comprehensive conceptual framework for H. Ed. in early childhood, which could become a welcomed practical tool for all dedicated early childhood educators; those who are committed to make a difference in the lives of all young learners entrusted to them, but who are in desperate need of practical guidelines on how to make this holistic development happen. The results of this study may inform policymakers and the Hong Kong QEF in their 2014 launch to “Promote Whole Child Development in Kindergarten Education,” and facilitate H. Ed. and lifelong learning in support of the growing needs of kindergarten education in Hong Kong, thereby offering Hong Kong preschoolers a vast platform for benefiting from a holistic ‘whole child approach’ within educational reform.

1.6.7 Limitations of This Study

I would like to summarize the limitations of this research with three quotes related to the interpretations of the findings: First “the investigator cannot fulfill objectives without using a broad range of her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable” (Richardson, 2003, p. 509). Second, “knowing the self and knowing the subject are intertwined” (Gibbs, 2002). Third, “I must remain sensitive to each classroom context and engage my own reflexivity to ensure self-awareness, cultural consciousness and ownership of my perspective as a researcher” (Ozga, 2000).

As an experienced educator (1.1.1/1.1.2) driven by curiosity and passion to conceptualize holistic education in the classroom (1.1), I have used a “broad range of my own experiences and intellect” as a past early childhood teacher, curriculum developer, deputy principal, and current school principal, in interpreting the research findings of this study (Richardson, 2003). Although triangulation has taken place between curriculum documents, interviews, and classroom observations, I sensed that the knowing of the self and the research were intertwined (Gibbs, 2002), and I was fully aware of Olga’s (2000)

recommendation to remain sensitive in each observed classroom and ‘to engage my own reflexivity to ensure self-awareness, cultural consciousness and ownership of my perspective as a researcher’.

1.6.7.1 Language of Conducted Research

This study was conducted in English for interviews with policymakers and school principals and in Swedish for schoolteachers. At times, Swedish vocabulary was difficult to translate, so I have *described* the terms used in the interview as close to the Swedish meaning as possible.

1.6.7.2 Sample Size

Total number of interviewees for this study: 20

Interviewees of the International Holistic Nature Symposium in Japan: 6

Interviews in Sweden: 14

Policymakers: 2 (1 senior and 1 junior)

School principals: 3

Curriculum coordinators: 3 (Nature school, Montessori school, Waldorf school)

Teachers: 6 (1 junior and 1 senior, in each school (Nature school, Montessori school, Waldorf school))



1.6.7.3 Cultural Influence on the Generalization of Study

As the findings of this study aim at informing the Hong Kong Education Department about the perceptions and implementations of holistic education in Sweden, Greenfield's (2000, p. 233) study is important to consider. He claims that there are aspects of culture "that are so deeply engrained in the minds of people that they take them for granted or they are repressed to the extent that only knowledgeable outsiders can notice them."

Brown (1991) stressed that purely emic studies lack validity, as they do not lead to universal laws of behavior, which is the ultimate aim of any scientific endeavor. However, the emic viewpoint is important as it results from studying behavior from inside the system. An emic approach is culture specific and is grounded in one culture. This approach focuses on the way a system is actually constituted, not as a series of miscellaneous parts but as a working whole that corresponds to a *holistic* and comprehensive view of culture. Furthermore, it helps to understand individuals in their contexts including their attitudes, motives, interests, and personality, and provides the basis upon which a predictive science of behavior can be expected to make some of its greatest progress (Pike, 1967, p. 41).

In respect to emic and etic approaches, both are important. Those who are committed to an etic approach believe in the universality of basic human nature. Enforced etics is the worldview that all societies, although located at different levels of economic development and modernization, are evolving to become alike. "As the societies get modernized by exposure to Western values, life styles, and industrialization, the people's values, attitudes, habits and lifestyle converge into a single pattern characterized by the industrialized cultures of the West" (Kerr, 1983; Meyer, 1970; Weinberg, 1969).

An etic approach arising from Western social sciences would have serious limitations in explaining, predicting, and understanding Chinese behavior, because the imported westernized (etic) concepts, theories, methods, and tools could not do justice to the complicated, unique aspects and patterns of Chinese people's psychological and behavioral characteristics (Yang, 1997, p. 65). The power of Chinese traditions may still permeate everyday life among the overseas Chinese, just as Swedish traditions also influence Swedish citizens living in Hong Kong. Many aspects of organizational theories produced in one culture may be inadequate in other cultures.

This research considers cultural dimensions. I refer to Hofstede's (1983) *Culture's Consequences*, especially the Asian 'above average' scores on collectivism and power distance, as well as Bond's (2004) Chinese Culture Connection that add Confucian Work Dynamics to the four dimensions of Hofstede. Conservatism and harmony should be explored equally, as well as the cultural dimensions that directly affect organizational behavior. These cultural influences are important to understand when referring to and recommending education reform practices from the West to be implemented in the East.

In conclusion, many options are available to researchers, and all routes involve the integration of etic and emic approaches to management. In an increasingly globalized world, educational leadership should adopt a strategy of integrating etic principles, for maintaining a global perspective, with emic sensitivity, to manage diversified workforce in culturally embedded organizations (Vijver, 1997, p. 43). This is crucial to keep in mind when elaborating this Western study into the East.

CHAPTER 2

SWEDEN

Introduction

This chapter offers an insight into Swedish preschools' curriculum, history, goals, values, shift in government, marketization and current view on Early Childhood in Sweden.

2.1 Swedish National Curriculum (Lpfo 98)

The Swedish National Curriculum for the Preschool (Lpfo 98) determines the curriculum for *all* early childhood settings in Sweden (Ministry of Education & Science, 2010). The ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the education system, from preschool to university.

Sweden is characterized by long preschool traditions, with roots in Froebel's Kindergarten and a pedagogy built upon Rousseau and Pestalozzi that was later elaborated on by Key and Dewey's work in the beginning of this century (Johansson, 1998). Preschool is the official name for day care, as well as kindergarten. By law, children start school at age seven, but almost all six year-old children are in 'preschool classes', which are guided by the same curriculum as compulsory school (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1998b). The preschool staff is well educated, with 60% of staff members holding university degrees. In August 1998, a new 'Curriculum for preschool' was implemented for children up to 6 years old (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1998a). At this time, an important change took place, where the authority from the department of Social welfare (Socialdepartementet) was switched to the Department of Education (Skolverket), reflecting a changing view of Swedish preschools. In combination with this authority change, every community in Sweden got allocated a sum



of money by the government to educate its preschool staff in accordance with the new goals of the curriculum.

A summary of Swedish preschool practices could be defined as laying the foundation for lifelong learning by stimulating children's development and learning while offering secure care. Activities should be based on a *holistic* view of the child and his or her needs, and care, socialization, and learning should form a coherent whole. The preschool experience should be “enjoyable, secure, and rich in learning for all children” (p. 4). Preschools are tasked with helping families by “supporting them in their role of bringing up and helping their children grow and develop” (p. 4), so that each child has the opportunity to develop into their potential by receiving support from both the school and their parents.

The OECD's mapping of pre-school and childcare in 30 countries concluded that pre-schooling should be accessible to all children, and that providing this care and pedagogy throughout the pre-school years ought to be a societal responsibility, coordinated at state, municipal, and local levels, with stable financing from public funds.

The development of childcare in Sweden has shown what politics can achieve. The consistency and ambition with which the Swedish childcare system has been built, and the clarity of its purpose and goals from an early stage, has made Sweden widely known and discussed by OECD. However, the Swedish pre-schooling system is often regarded as utopian system because of its high accessibility, in comparison to other European countries, as well as high financial burden that requires both parents and the industry to contribute through high levels of tax.

2.1.1 Social Framework for Swedish Preschools



In Sweden, a large part of the early childhood education system is financed by the state. All families with young children can enjoy strong financial support from the government. Parents are entitled to maternity leave for one year and receive an additional monthly allowance for each child, covering a significant part of the income lost during maternity/paternity leave. The law also guarantees a place in a preschool for each working or studying parents' child, readily available within a few months of the day that parents request the place (Socialstyrelsen, 1995, p.2)

2.1.2 Revised Preschool Curriculum (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010)

The curriculum for pre-schools was revised in 2010, as a result of an initiative undertaken by the conservative government to provide clearer objectives for children's development in language, mathematics, natural sciences, and technology. In addition, the guidelines for the staff's responsibilities were clarified at both the individual teacher level and the team level. The revised curriculum also contains new sections on monitoring, evaluation, development, and on the responsibilities of preschool heads (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

2.1.3 Marketization of Early Childhood and Care in Sweden

It could be argued that early childhood education in Sweden has been regarded as a systemic integrated approach that accommodates children's needs and takes into account the *holistic development* and well-being of young learners. O'Dowd (2013) evaluated the impact of the neo-liberal agenda along with the reforms implemented by the Social Democratic and the Conservative government on early childhood education in Sweden, and explained "the shifts made by political parties from a historical and conceptual perspective" (p. 86).

In Sweden, public debate has investigated whether social services are best provided by the state or the market. Naumann (2011) examined the changes in ECEC policy in Sweden, and reflected on the general trends of marketization and universalization of ECEC, suggesting it is a “complex picture of competing policy logics and goals in the restructuring of welfare states” (p. 37).

Naumann (2011), and O’Dowd (2013) have both investigated the ‘market curriculum’ and the marketization of ECEC. According to O’Dowd (2013), the neo-liberal agenda is clear. She states that:

The purpose of education in Sweden is market-oriented and such values as equality, democracy and solidarity are not a priority but rather dismissed as ‘soft core’ while value is attributed to ‘hard core’ school subjects such as mathematics, natural science and technology by the use of extensive evaluation and monitoring strategies. (p. 101)

Nauman (2011) argues that:

Marketization is *not* the only trend common but that the extension of children’s right to early childhood education is another important driver for reform, herewith concluding that service-sector reforms are more complex than what the controversy between *state* and *market* in policy debates may suggest. (p. 50)

According to Sandberg (2011), Sweden’s early childhood education is unique in its combination of learning, play, care, and “fostering fundamental values” of children’s rights, gender equity, and education for sustainable development (p. 44).

2.2 Sweden’s Education Act

According to the Education Act (2010, p. 800),

All who work in the preschool should uphold the fundamental values that are set out in the Education Act and clearly dissociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values. The preschool should counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the preschool should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles. (p. 4)

The Education Act also stipulates that education in the preschool should be “irrespective of where it is located, be equivalent” (p. 4). Cultural diversity is related to understanding the values of other people.

As Sweden welcomes migrants and refugees into Swedish society, the preschool is a “social and cultural meeting place,” where “awareness of children’s own culture and participating in the culture of others” should “contribute to children’s ability to understand and empathize with the circumstances and values of others” (p. 5).

2.3 The History of Swedish Preschools

One of the political pillars of the Swedish pre-school is that it must be possible to combine work and family life. As a result, parents need a choice of flexible options that enables them to find the most suitable choice for them, their children, and the needs of the family and workplace. Ninety percent of all one to five year olds spend some part of their day at pre-school. Swedish pre-schooling offers solid quality services, which parents can entrust their children safely to while they are at work.

In the 1960s, Sweden encountered a growing economy, which soon led to an acute need for a growing labor force, necessitating labor recruitment from Yugoslavia, Greece, and



Finland. Soon, Swedish women demanded liberation and gender equality in the workplace and in society, expressing their wish to contribute to supporting the family and having a professional life outside of the home. Since the booming Swedish economy needed women for labor, there was pressure on the organization and development of childcare. Separate taxation allowed women to be self-sufficient, and when the 1960s were over, Sweden had taken the lead in Europe in developing a new family policy, with expansion in the childcare system and parental insurance still to come in the coming decades.

In 1968, a commission on nursery provision was appointed with a focus on pedagogical content. They were managed in an authoritarian way with hierarchal staffing. Children were divided into various groups based on the dominant developmental psychology belief of the time, where a child's development was considered to proceed along definite stages (infants, toddlers, intermediate, and older children). Food, rest, hygiene, and outdoor activities were all considered to be important. In order to be granted a place in a daycare center, a needs assessment was conducted.

Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852) is regarded as the father of the Swedish pre-school. He stressed the importance of *play* in the child's development, and that children must be able to manipulate objects, build, and explore in order to learn from their own personal experiences. Liberal, radical women, who wanted to offer a rich and stimulating childhood environment based on Jean Henri Rousseau's philosophical idea that the child is a product of nature and contains the seeds for becoming a complete human being, staffed kindergartens.

Two well-known sisters, Ellen and Maria Moberg, who worked at the "Froebel" Training Center in Norrköping, established the first public kindergarten in Sweden in 1904. These public kindergartens were intended for *all* children, and charged either for a low fee or



were completely free. An important aim was to counteract the growing gaps in society and to create greater harmony between the different social classes.

Crèches and kindergartens were the precursors of the daycare centers and play schools that came later. The Swedish pre-school emerged from these two strands of poor relief and pedagogical philosophy.

In 1932, Alva Myrdal (1902 – 1986), a well-known social democratic politician, debater, and activist for women's rights, opened a venue where working mothers could drop off their children, even at night. This was Alva's attempt to remove the stigma of poverty from crèches. She believed that nursery staff should be well educated to deliver quality care for the children. Alva considered the current methods for raising small children too unfriendly and authoritarian. She also strongly believed that: childcare should be provided to everyone; children from all social classes should have the same opportunities for development; childcare should be free of charge; and that the state should be responsible for the training of the staff. Her persistence, dedication, proposals, and contributions to debates had an impact on housing development as well. She urged property developers to open their own nurseries on the ground floors of their buildings, so that mothers could have safe and good care available for their children while they were at work.

In 1938, the Population Commission undertook the first state commission into childcare, introducing new terms such as 'daycare center' for whole day care, and 'play school' for shorter periods during the day. In contrast to the existing play schools that tried to keep the romantic spirit of Froebel with elements of traditional handicrafts (sewing, cross-stitching, churning butter, spinning wool, and working with wood handicrafts), the daycare center was regarded by many as a necessary evil, due to the prevailing view that children had to become social beings by age four. According to O'Dowd (2013, p.99), an important influence in the reform of daycare was Prime Minister Olof Palme, portrayed



as “a radical and equality oriented new generation of politicians in the Government” (KORPI, 2006, p.23). A summary of the work of the commission was described in KORPI, 2007:24:

A gigantic commission based on around 1000 pages of documents was the foundation, ideologically, pedagogically, and organizationally, for the full-scale expansion of childcare in the municipalities. This scientific foundation was based on Jean Piaget’s (1896 – 1980) development combined with Erik Homburger Eriksson’s research in social psychology into the growing child. This new commission highlighted the importance of play, theme work, pedagogical dialogue, and children in mixed age groups, integration and normalization of children with functional disabilities, design of the premises, appropriate pedagogical material, and co-operation with parents. Their aim was to bring about a powerful *democratization* of activities for children, and introduce a *progressive* pedagogy for creating equivalent conditions for growing up.

The investigators recommended that the pedagogical dialogue between active pedagogues and children was a two-way relationship, based on respect for the child and treating the child as an individual, as well as having a belief in the child’s ability, curiosity, and desire to learn. This pedagogical dialogue was inspired by Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire’s (1970) work on illiteracy amongst the poor peasants of Latin America.

Pedagogical work was recommended to be organized around themes, not subjects, and based on the child’s *own revealed interests*, with the environment providing opportunities for individual activity, creativity, and play. It is important to understand that these recommendations radically broke away from the existing pedagogical traditions of schools as well as nurseries’ traditional attitudes towards children’s maturation process.



In 1998, Swedish Parliament passed the Curriculum for the Preschool, emphasizing *holistic development* and well-being of children through play, democratic values, and equity, and a child-centered preschool environment with cooperation between children's home and the preschool. The term 'child care' was redefined as 'early childhood education', in accordance with the shift in responsibilities for this sector from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science on July 1, 1996.

The pre-school curriculum was revised in 2010, in response to an initiative undertaken by the Conservative government. The explanation given on the government website was that the "curriculum documents now contain clearer objectives for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology." In addition, "the guidelines for staff responsibilities have been clarified, both at individual teacher level and at team level. New sections on monitoring, evaluation and development and on the responsibilities of preschool heads have been added" (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). The current Swedish Minister of Education, Jan Bjorklund, emphasizes the importance of the pedagogical work taking place in pre-schools, as what happens in the pre-school setting lays the foundation for the child's lifelong interest in learning. His goal is to further develop quality, to ensure that pre-school children build the strong foundations on which they will base their future learning on.

This review of the history of Swedish preschool shows that education has been influenced by a number of different political and social agendas, each of which have exerted pressure on the system in different directions. Vallberg (2006) comments that "different kinds of patterns inherited from the curricula of earlier periods are mixed with new elements at different levels can be discerned in the curricula of the present day". He summarizes the Swedish curriculum "to contain traces of historical change" (p. 29).

Neo-liberal politics, implemented both by the Social Democrats and the Conservative parties, has not only restructured the education system, its goals, content, and values, but has impacted the perceptions of the child and childhood.

O'Dowd (2013) concludes that today, the debate on education policy and practice is “dominated by economists, politicians, administrators and other self-proclaimed education experts” (p. 110). She refers to a quote by Reimer (1970, p. 13) to show another effect of neo-liberal politics:

Schools in all nations, of all kinds, at all levels, combine four distinct social functions: custodial care, social-role selection, indoctrination, and education as usually defined in terms of the development of skills and knowledge... It is the *conflict* among these functions, which makes schools inefficient. It is the *combination* of these functions which tend to make schools a *total* institution... and which makes it such an effective instrument of social control.

2.3.1 Reducing the School Starting Age

Reducing the age at which children start school from seven to six became a major recurring political issue. As the daycare center was highly regarded as a secure environment for the children of working parents, no widespread support could be found to send children to school one year earlier. Most parents argued that children started school soon enough, and that the daycare center offered significantly higher staff ratios and smaller groups than school.

From a political point of view, two arguments arose to verify the reducing of the school age. The Ministry of Finance estimated it would be cheaper to start school a year earlier, as the cost per school place for younger children was much lower than at a daycare center. Furthermore, with its late school start, Sweden would appear somewhat outmoded in



comparison to the rest of Europe. A more pedagogically justified second argument stated that the benefits of pedagogical approaches used in pre-schools contributed to the development of schooling in the early years. Politicians saw a way of bridging the existing mutual mistrust between pre-schools and schools by interacting with and blending the pre-school's and school's pedagogies.

The Swedish government had to deal with opposition in the two responsible ministries, as it was a real challenge to argue in favor of either the economic or the pedagogical cases, which led to uncertainty in the government. However, the six-year-old starting age question remained on the agenda, along with the existing question of whether the decision should be based on social or educational factors. A political struggle at the state and municipal levels between pre-schools and schools occurred, and the Swedish Teachers' Union argued that pre-schools as a whole, not only the six-year-olds, should be transferred to the education sector.

In 1990, the government proposed a flexible school start, thereby granting the *parents* the authority to decide whether they wanted to send their children to school at the age of six or seven. It was a miscalculated move, as not many parents were enthusiastic about choosing an early school start due to having many questions remaining unclear (i.e. would pre-school teachers or school teachers take care of the youngest children, would classes have mixed ages, would the pedagogical program of the pre-school or the school curriculum be applied etc.).

2.3.2 Shift in Government

In 1991, a shift in government proclaimed a systemic change, announcing deregulation, privatization, and freedom of choice. State grants for all forms of private pre-schooling were promised under the slogan of 'freedom of choice, diversity, and gender equality',



and the existing pre-school teacher training was extended by 20 credit points, to three years of study.

In 1992, Sweden implemented several national voucher plans that included private schooling as a publicly funded option. This voucher plan, in the form of public grants to schools based on enrollment, already existed in some European countries (e.g. Holland), and was considered a way to improve education under severe cost constraints, and to decrease central bureaucracy by shifting financial and educational decision-making to local governments and private households.

Swedish voucher plans, conceptualized by the economist Milton Friedman 50 years ago, are based on the claims that: school choice increases the total welfare of families who send their children to school; there are minimal social costs from increasing choice through privatizing public education; privately managed education is inherently more effective and cost-effective in producing learning; public schools competing for pupils with private and other public schools will become more effective; and that a privatized and competitive education system is more likely to improve social mobility for the children of low-income families.

The original voucher plans have been modified as political conditions have changed. Unregulated vouchers for private schools were exchanged for subsidies regulated by municipalities. Choice was maintained, but the agenda for privatizing education was reversed even though it had little real effect on the education system.

2.3.3 Revised Curriculum 2010 (Operational from July 1st, 2011)

Sweden invested enormous sums of money into transforming the uncertainty about quality and the availability of pre-school places, into an unquestioned right for each parent to have a good and safe place, with professionally trained staff readily available, at

the time when the parents need it (the same model will be implemented for the care of the elderly).

What primarily differentiates Sweden from other EU countries is that Sweden, from an early stage, invested in developing and expanding its childcare system, making it possible for parents to combine their family and work lives, and offering children adequate pedagogical stimulation that encourages their development. This also made it possible for more women to work in the labor market, while combining parenthood with work.

On July 1st, 2011, the revised National Curriculum for Preschool (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010) was implemented with the purpose of increasing the quality of Swedish preschools by emphasizing its scientific basis. The revised curriculum built upon the original Lpfo 98, with the main changes focusing on the role and responsibilities of preschool teachers, work teams, and school heads, as well as on planning, documentation, follow-up, and evaluation in order to increase *quality* and accountability towards parents. This corresponds with Lofdahl's (2004) statement that, children are today regarded as social, competent actors in a globalized world, and they have the right to high *quality* childcare. Preschools have the responsibility "to care, educate, and foster children according to the national culture and value system" (Alvestad & Berge, 2009). Policymakers and the Education Department have stressed the importance of preschool teachers having science-based knowledge in their practices, and while acknowledging that preschool teachers' knowledge is regarded as valuable in society, teachers would also reflect more on their existing practices.

Swedish curriculum is influenced by New Zealand's curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996), which contains four strands of well-being, belonging, contribution, and communication, and is based on *holistic development* through empowerment, family and community, and a relationship with the environment. The opening statement of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *TeWhariki*, articulates the hope that children will be



“healthy in mind, body, and spirit” (Ministry of Education 1996, p. 9). This curriculum is conceptualized as a woven mat, taking a *holistic approach* to the child and family, in the education and wider communities. An important aspect of this curriculum is the *spiritual* dimension for the well-being (*manaatua*) of young children, described by Reedy (2003) as the “divine ‘specialness’” of every child, that is to be acknowledged in early childhood settings. As an influential Maori woman, she had a profound influence on the construction of the early childhood curriculum, which aims to ensure that children are “empowered in every way possible, nurtured in the knowledge that they are loved and respected and that their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional strength will build *mana*, influence and control” (p. 74).

However, Blaiklock (2010) warned that with this ‘holistic and integrated approach’, there is a risk that subject content can easily be overlooked. As a result, communication, mathematics, technology, and natural sciences are highly stressed in the revised curriculum. Early research on the perceptions of the revised curriculum indicates that educators felt that the ‘status of their profession’ had been raised (Brodin & Renblad, 2014).

2.3.4 Conclusion about Swedish Preschools

The OECD’s (2012) mapping of pre-school and childcare in 30 countries concluded that pre-schooling should be accessible for all children, and that it ought to be a societal responsibility for providing this care and pedagogy throughout the pre-schooling years, coordinated by the state, municipal, and at local levels with stable financing from public funds.

The development of childcare in Sweden has shown what politics can achieve. The consistency and ambition with which Swedish childcare has been built up, and how its

purpose and goals were very clear at an early stage, has made Sweden widely known and discussed.

2.4 The Internationalization of Swedish Society

The internationalization of Swedish society imposes high demands on the ability of its people to live with and understand values inherent to *cultural diversity*. The preschool is a social and cultural meeting place, which can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalized community. Awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the cultures of others should contribute to the children's ability to understand and empathize with the circumstances and values of others. The preschool can help to ensure that children from national minorities or with foreign backgrounds receive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity.

2.5 Goals of the Swedish Preschool Curriculum

According to the Lpfo 98 rev. 2010, preschools should provide children with a secure environment, while challenging them and encouraging play and activity. Preschools should inspire children to explore the surrounding world. Children in preschool should meet adults who see the potential in each child, and who involve themselves in interactions with the individual child and the group of children as a whole. The ability to communicate, learn, and be able to co-operate are necessary in a society that is characterized by a huge flow of information and rapid rate of change. The preschool should provide a foundation, so that children in the future can acquire the knowledge and skills that make up the common framework that everybody in society needs. Children should have the opportunity of developing their ability to observe and reflect. Preschool should be a living social and cultural environment that stimulates children into taking initiative and developing their social and communicative competence. Preschool should



also promote learning, which presupposes active discussion in the work team on the contents of what constitutes learning and knowledge.

Knowledge is a complex concept, which can be expressed in a variety of forms, such as facts, understanding, skills, familiarity, and experience, all of which presupposes and interact with each other. The starting point for preschool is the experience children have already gained their interests, motivation, and their drive to acquire knowledge. Children search for knowledge, and develop it through play, social interaction, exploration, and creativity, as well as through observation, discussion, and reflection. A theme-oriented approach can broaden and enrich the child's learning.

Learning should be based not only on the interaction between adults and children, but also on what children learn from each other. The grouping of children should be regarded as an important and active part of development and learning. Preschools should give children support to develop a positive picture of themselves as learning and creative individuals. They should be supported in developing confidence in their ability to think for themselves, to act, to move, and to learn, to develop from different perspectives such as the intellectual, linguistic, ethical, practical, sensory, and aesthetic.

Children should be stimulated and guided by adults, in order to increase their competence and acquire new knowledge and insights through their own activity. This approach presupposes that both different forms of language and knowledge, as well as different ways of learning, are brought into balance, and together form a *whole*.

2.6 Fundamental Values of Swedish Preschools

The Swedish Education Act (2010, p. 800) stipulates clearly that “democracy forms the foundation of the preschool” and that preschool activities aim at “children acquiring and developing knowledge and values as well as a lifelong desire to learn”. Democratic

values entail respect for human rights, respect for the intrinsic value of each person, respect for the shared environment, equal value of all people, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable. These values are endorsed in the Swedish curriculum documents stating that “All who work in the preschool should uphold the fundamental values that are set out in the Education Act and should clearly dissociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values” (Lpfo 98, p. 4). The way in which adults respond to girls and boys, as well as the demands and expectations that are imposed on children, contribute to their appreciation of gender differences. Preschools should counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the preschool should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed on them by stereotyped gender roles.

Children’s rights, gender equity, and education for sustainable development are three fundamental values that Swedish preschools aim to integrate during daily play opportunities in early childhood settings (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011). According to Pramling-Samuelsson and Asplund-Carlsson (2008), teachers have important roles when it comes to children’s learning. They can aid children’s learning and development without dominating or disrupting it (Bodrova & Leong, 2003)

The Education Act stipulates that education in the preschool should be equivalent, irrespective of where it is located. National goals specify the norms for equivalence, and preschools should strive to achieve these goals. Concern for the individual child’s well-being, security, development, and learning should characterize the work of preschools. The varying conditions and needs of children should be taken into account . This means that preschools cannot be organized in the same way everywhere, and that the resources of preschools need not be distributed equally (p.4).

2.7 Support in Preschools

Pedagogical activities should be related to the needs of all children in the preschool. Children who occasionally, or on a more permanent basis, need more support and stimulation than others should receive such support in relation to their needs and circumstances, so that they are able to develop as well as possible. (Lpfo 98, p. 5)

The skills of the staff in understanding and interacting with the child is important, as is gaining the confidence of the parents, so that the time spent in the preschool provides positive support for children in difficulties. All children should be able to experience the satisfaction that comes from making progress, overcoming difficulties, and being a valued member of the group. (Lpfo 98, p. 5)

2.8 Tasks of the Preschool

The preschool should build the foundations for lifelong learning and be enjoyable, secure, and rich in learning for all children. It should also stimulate children's development and learning, and offer secure care. Activities should be based on a *holistic* view of the child and his or her needs, and be designed so that care, socialization, and learning, form a coherent whole. "Children's development into responsible persons and members of society should be promoted in partnership with the home". (Lpfo 98, p. 4)

The preschool should help families by supporting them in raise and help their children to grow and develop. It is the task of the preschool to work in co-operation with parents, so that each child receives the opportunity of developing into their potential. (Lpfo 98, p. 4)

The preschool should take into account that children have different living environments, and that they try to create context and meaning out of their own experiences. Adults should give children support in developing their trust and self-confidence. The child's curiosity, initiative, and interests should be encouraged, and their will and desire to learn

should be stimulated. The preschool is tasked with not only developing the child's ability and cultural creativity, but also passing on a cultural heritage and its values, traditions and history, language, and knowledge, from one generation to the next. (Lpfo 98, p. 5)

2.8.1 Listening to Children's Views

Hundreds of pre-school children between the ages of three and five were asked to give their views before a bill was passed by the Swedish government (Riksdag). This unique way of allowing children to voice their views and opinions was initiated by the Swedish education minister, and resulted in a large number of drawings and written statements from pre-school children about what was good, what was bad, and what could be improved.

Children unsurprisingly stated that the very best thing about pre-school was that they could play there. For pre-school children, their whole life revolves around opportunities to play. When playing, children are inventors, artists, and researchers, whether they play inside or outside. Some of the statements in this report revealed children's responses. One girl said, "The best thing about day care is you're free to be a child. You can play hide-and-seek, climb in the climbing frame, and do all sorts of other fun things". A boy expressed his feelings by saying: "When I play on my own I have a funny feeling in my tummy. It's no fun. But when I can be with someone else it's sunny in my tummy".

When questioned what they did in pre-school, children listed: reading books, writing, counting, drawing, painting, playing games, carpentry, building blocks, playing rock music, eating fruit, singing, digging in the sandpit, playing outside, baking, running a café, showing their parents what they have done, playing computer games, football, bandy, cycling, going on the swings, dressing up, playing theatre, doing jigsaw puzzles, having assemblies, weekly nature walks, cleaning and tidying up, and a lot of other

different things. When questioned if they learned anything at pre-school, they answered, “Of course, we learn to be clever and kind!” This echoes the combination of learning and care in preschool. When asked, “Why are you in pre-school?” they replied, “Because we’re children”. These declarations resulted in paragraph 2.3 of the Swedish preschool documents Lpfo 98 (p. 12) ‘influence of the child’ stating clearly that “the needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning activities”. In addition, preschool teachers have to ensure that “the opinions and views of each child are respected” and that “boys and girls have an equal measure of influence over and scope for participating in activities” (p. 12).

2.9 Current Views on Early Childhood in Sweden

Early childhood in Sweden is undergoing change, which according to O’Dowd (2013), can be attributed to three main reasons: the neo-liberal agenda, widespread privatization, and abandoned goals and values (p. 87). Findings of the historical and conceptual perspectives of contemporary early childhood education question the neo-liberal ‘market-oriented’ agenda, indicating that the original values of equality, democracy, and solidarity are dismissed as being ‘soft core’ and giving way to the ‘hard core’ values of mathematics, natural science, and technology. She also refers to Kelly’s (2005) notion of ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’, referring to ethics of care necessitating the recognition that ‘care’ should be at the center of how we understand children, giving appropriate recognition to those who provide care and indicating the value of caring relationships. O’Dowd (2013) indicates, that against the backdrop of education policy and practice, there “appears to be reason for concern as regards the integration of early childhood care into the education system,” as she refers to the domination of economists, politicians and education stakeholders.

CHAPTER 3

CASE SCHOOLS WITH DIFFERENT PEDAGOGIES

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides the reader with a brief overview of what curricula entail, followed by an analysis of the importance of curriculum differentiation, tracing back the roots to Dewey (1922) as an advocate for developing a discriminating mind and a disciplined intelligence. This is followed by background information on the case schools and their pedagogies. For this research, a Montessori school, a Waldorf school and a Nature school were selected for analysis, as they all promote embedded holistic education in their curricula. These schools were chosen to: investigate the holistic features of their practices; summarize all finding into a holistic early childhood framework; and to make extracted findings accessible for mainstream schools to facilitate holistic education in mainstream schools with an aim of providing holistic education without borders for all young learners.

3.1 European Humanism

Montessori, Waldorf, and Forest schools all have a common ancestry in European humanism. Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) started her first school in the slums of Rome in 1907. Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) was asked to establish a school in 1919, after the First World War. Montessori's approach reflected her belief in children's natural intelligence from the start, while Steiner's vision was based on 'anthroposophy', the true nature of the human being, to educate children who would be able to create a just and peaceful society. Nature schools were influenced by the growing number of Forest schools in Europe, and by Gosta Frohm, an active promoter of the Swedish outdoor Association who created the 1957 imaginary character 'Mulle' to teach children about the importance of nature.

3.2 Curricula in Perspective

It could be argued that the student development is the main concern when composing a curriculum. This entails the planning, discussing, and implementation of education practices, defined by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) as ‘primary engines’ of development and learning according.

Curriculum has been defined by UNESCO (2004) as “a way of planning, assessing and teaching a heterogeneous group of students in once classroom, where all students are learning at the optimal level” (p. 9).

The origins of curriculum differentiation can be drawn from Dewey (1922), whose child-centered philosophy emphasized the need to develop a ‘discriminating mind’ and a ‘disciplined intelligence’ to cultivate a habit of: suspended judgment; skepticism; desire for evidence; appeal to observation rather than sentiment; discussion rather than bias; and inquiry rather than conventional idealizations (p. 141).

Alternative approaches to learning that shift the focus from school-centered to student-centered have become increasingly popular, in response to parents’ desire to find a school where their children are respected, accepted, approached, and taught as individuals. This encompasses differentiation ranging from students who require additional learning support, to gifted students who need academic challenges in order to stay intellectually motivated and to cater for sustainability in their learning.

3.3 Curriculum Differentiation

In the last decade, politicians worldwide have become advocates for curriculum differentiation in an attempt to improve existing school systems. Juang, Liu, and Chan



(2005) researched Asian countries, Miliband (2004) represented the UK and the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2002) in USA, and UNESCO (2004) addresses the importance of differentiated classrooms to address students' individual needs to reach their full potential.

UNESCO (2004) defines curriculum differentiation as “the process of modifying or adapting the curriculum according to the different ability levels of the students in one class” (p. 14). According to Tomlinson (2001), teachers in differentiated classrooms “provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's” (p. 2).

The selected case schools in this study are, according to their philosophies, all committed to a child-focused approach, and are engaged in differentiation to enable every child to achieve their individual potential. Differentiation is achieved by catering for different learning styles, observing and acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, and nurturing the whole child through a balanced approach encompassing personal, social, emotional artistic, environmental, and spiritual practices, leading towards a total child approach in the classroom.

3.4 Nature Schools

In Sweden, Nature schools have become increasingly more popular, as research has shown benefits such as physical and emotional wellbeing, better concentration, as well as fewer sick days for students. Nature schools ‘I Ur och Skur’ (in rain and shine) offer experience-based learning outdoors. Many Swedish preschool children attend ‘Skogsmulle’ schools. Skogsmulle is a fictional character who lives in the forest and who helps children to love nature through fairy-tales, songs, and games, while out in the woods studying animals and plants. This character was first introduced in 1957, by Gosta Frohm, who was an active promoter of the Swedish Outdoor Association

(Friluftsliv). His philosophy was that if you can help children to love nature, they would take care of nature. This ‘Skogsmulle’ method of teaching children in nature has spread to countries in East and West.

Joyce (2012) claims that this ‘outdoor learning approach’ is echoed in the growing number of Forest Schools in Europe, whose *holistic* focus emphasizes the personal growth of the individual in terms of self-esteem and self-worth (p.8). She informs that the initiative of people from all walks of life promoting ‘learning outside the classroom’ resulted in a *Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto* (DfES 2006a) in the UK, a document which supports outdoor learning as a vehicle for improving education outcomes by engaging children in meaningful first-hand experiences. According to the Lpfo 98, the preschool should strive to ensure that each child “develops their interest and understanding of the different cycles in nature, and how people, nature, and society influence each other” (p. 10), as well as to “to give children the opportunity of understanding how their actions can have an effect on the environment” (p. 11).

3.4.1 Swedish Nature School – The ‘Skogsmulle’ Philosophy

The *Skogsmulle* philosophy is based on a very simple principle, that “if you can help children to love nature, they will take care of nature because you cherish things you love” (p. 1). This approach is supported by the fictional figure named Skogsmulle, who visits children in the forest when they are engaged in nature walks with their preschools. Through a combination of fairy tales, songs, and games, Skogsmulle educates children, while out in the forest, to study plants and animals. Due to the popularity and effectiveness of his teaching young children about the importance of taking care of nature, Skogsmulle got three friends. The first book of *Skogsmulle* was published in 1970, followed by *Fjallfina* (1971), who teaches children how to look after plants and animals that live on high grounds, such as hills and mountains, *Laxe* (1978), who teaches children how to keep the water in our rivers and seas clean, and *Nova* (1997), who lives on a



totally *unpolluted* planet. From a researchers' perspective, I perceive Skogsmulle and friends as a 'living environmental curriculum' for preschool children.

3.4.2 Skogsmulle in a 'Vygotskian' Way

The underlying philosophy in *Skogsmulle* is an instinctive practice, where children and adults reflect on their experiences and learn from them together. This can be compared with a 'Vygotskian way' of adults 'scaffolding' children's experiences, and helping them to move to their next stage of learning.

3.4.3 Ur och Skur's Philosophy

Ur och Skur means 'Rain or Shine', and can be seen as the umbrella organization for outdoor learning. Its philosophy, as outlined in their mission statement, is in line with education for sustainability and cognitive understanding of children's learning. Their vision starts with the individual, moves towards learning collaboratively in groups, leading towards a responsible citizen, and finally enabling its followers to playing "an active, informed part in considering global environmental issues" (Joyce, 2012).

Ur och Skur's contribution to the pedagogy of outdoor learning was rewarded with the 2009 Nordic Council Nature and Environmental Prize, and was described by Norden (2009, p. 1) as a "model to emulate", illustrating perfectly how time spent in the great outdoors provides children with a better understanding of nature, enhances a child's wellbeing, and promotes the development of the child through linking outdoor activities to learning.

Linde (2010a) explains how the idea of spending time in nature for young children originated from mothers in the 1950s, when little or no childcare was available, and many

mothers took their children to the forest to enjoy, have fun, and develop love and respect for nature's beauty. Many of these mothers became nature leaders themselves.

3.5 Waldorf Schools

The Waldorf Education system was founded by Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925), an Austrian scientist and philosophical thinker. He aimed at integrating spirituality and science through understanding and experience, and established 'anthroposophy', defined by Kotzsch (1990) as "knowledge of the true nature of the human being."

In 1919, after the First World War, Steiner was asked to establish a school for the employees of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. Steiner's vision was to educate human beings who would be able to create a just and peaceful society. His school was open to children of any background, comprehensive, and had a self-governing administrative unit, independent of external control.

Steiner (1995) believed in the unification of body, soul, and spirit. He claimed that good education restores the balance between thinking, willing, and feeling. His theory of child development elaborated three cycles of seven-year stages, each with its own distinctive needs for learning. He claimed that before the age of seven, children learn through imitation and doing (Schwartz, 1996). He also considered imaginary play as the most important 'work' of a young child, and stated that it is through this activity that the child grows physically, intellectually, and emotionally. The educational focus of Steiner's curriculum is on bodily exploration, constructive, and creative play, and oral (never written) language, and story and song.

3.6 Montessori Schools



Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) was Italy's first female physician, who devised a methodology for working with children with disabilities. In 1907, she started her 'Casa dei Bambini' (Children's House) for children aged four through seven, in the slums of Rome. Her approach reflects her belief in children's natural intelligence, involving from the start the rational, empirical, and spiritual aspects, and associated theories of other European progressive educational philosophers, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Seguin, and Itard. She conjectured that an active child, eager for knowledge and prepared to learn, seeks perfection through reality, play, and work. She defined the period from birth to age three as the 'unconscious absorbent mind', and age three to six as the 'conscious absorbent mind'. She also claimed that a child seeks sensory input, regulation of movement, order, and freedom to choose activities and explore them deeply without interruption, in a carefully prepared (tranquil and attractive) environment that facilitates the child's choice of activities. Teachers observe and present demonstration lessons when an individual or small group is ready to advance in the sequence of self-correcting materials in the areas of practical life, sensorial materials, mathematics, language, science, geography, art, and music (Humphryes, 1998).

Montessori designed famous materials that are still used by Montessori schools worldwide. The Montessori curriculum offers a clear scope and sequence in well-defined domains. As it is highly individualized, some young children master reading and writing before the age of 6, following Montessori's 'writing to read' method. Preschool children in full-day programs usually address the Montessori curriculum in the morning during a 3-hour 'work cycle', and childcare play, including imaginative play, in the afternoon. Between ages 6 and 12, children explore the wider world of developing rational problem solving, cooperative social relations, imagination and aesthetics, and complex cultural knowledge. From 12 to 18, children reconstruct themselves as social beings, and are humanistic explorers, real-world problem solvers, and rational seekers of justice, which is echoed in the below powerful quote of Maria Montessori:

Since it has been seen to be necessary to give so much to the child, let us give him a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, an answer to all questions... The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole in relation with each other, and so close is this relation that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun... and he [the child] begins to ask: What am I? What is the task of man in this wonderful universe?... What is good and evil? Where will it all end? (Montessori, 1994, p. 5 – 6)

Maria Montessori's theory of the 'Cosmic Plan' aimed at offering the child an insight on the relationship between different people and cultures on earth. Through these studies, the child will see that his life is intermingled with the lives and conditions of other people's lives, and the child is connected to the 'brotherhood of man'.

Children can easily be brought to thrill to the knowledge that there are millions of people like themselves, striving mentally and physically to solve the problems of life, and that all contribute to a solution though one may find it. (Montessori, 1994, p. 55)

Maria Montessori saw man's role as the protector of the natural world in which he lives, as well as an integral part of it. She was an early proponent of a one-world viewpoint, and used Froebel's term, 'the Cosmic Plan', to explain how this approach influenced her method.

Montessori continually emphasized the importance of presenting a whole view of the world to the child. She repeatedly stressed the interrelatedness of everything in the natural world. 'Cultural subjects', the Montessori term encompassing the areas of knowledge that enrich the child's understanding of all aspects of the world he lives in, embeds any subject which may enrich the mind of the child (science, history, geography, music, and arts and crafts). Montessori expected that a well prepared classroom

environment would provide the child with the stimuli and the opportunities to explore any aspect of these areas of knowledge that appealed to them, and that it is the responsibility of the teacher to facilitate the child's absorption of knowledge in such a way that they acquire a truly global perspective of the interrelatedness of people and living/non-living forms as part of our planet's ecological system.

3.7 Comparison Between Waldorf and Montessori Schools

From a historical perspective, Rudolf Steiner grew up in an intellectual and rigid Germanic culture, and his educational ideal balanced that background with storytelling, art, imagination, knitting, and flowing eurythmy movements. In contrast, Montessori developed her pedagogy from observing poor Italian families, and her methods are characterized by a disciplined, sequential, and intellectual approach. Every piece of equipment has a *correct* way of demonstrating to the children and results in a single, strict intellectual outcome when used correctly.

Waldorf is characterized by artistic and imaginative group work led by an inspirational teacher, in contrast to a Montessori environment characterized by beautifully designed Montessori materials that help students independently explore their learning environment, where teachers' role is a guide and observer after meticulously demonstrating the proper use of the didactic materials. Although these two approaches have distinctive differences, they could easily complement each other and benefit from each other's strengths.

While the teacher's role is central in Waldorf, Montessori recommended that the teacher should take a back row seat. "Education should no longer be mostly the imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities" (Montessori, 1988). She indicated that these human potentials were to be released by the children working at their own *pace* on individual projects, and with materials of their own *choice*.



CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 4 is a literature review, starting with a summary of the general understanding of holistic education according to holistic educationalists. This is followed by a structured examination of the literature, in line with my identification of the eight holistic stances that are also incorporated into the analytical framework for mapping the stakeholders' perceptions of holistic education: thinking skills, character education, concern for nature, caring relationships, democracy, creativity, spirituality, and play. In this chapter, I try to identify and unveil the theories and understandings of holistic educators, investigate the practices of holistic education, look at the values involved, and the leadership roles needed to support holistic teachers. I also review literature about action research and professionalism as a practicing holistic educator, and I explore the extent of parent involvement in the holistic curriculum and specific features of holistic practices.

4.1 Holistic Education – An Overview of the Literature

Miller (2004) informs that holistic education began to take form as a recognizable field of study and practice in the mid-1980s in North America, and emerged as a response to a dominant worldview of mainstream education, often referred to as 'Cartesian-Newtonian' worldview. Holistic education seeks to challenge the fragmented, reductionist assumptions of mainstream culture and education, and is concerned with 'underlying worldviews or paradigms in an attempt to transform the foundations of education (Nakagava, 2001; Schreiner, 2005).

A comprehensive literature search on holistic education includes: the historical roots of H. Ed.; Nakagava's (2001) worldviews that underlay H. Ed.; Nava's (2001) four pillars of



learning in H. Ed.; Miller's (2000) Levels of Wholeness in H. Ed.; Forbes's (2003) ultimate goals of H. Ed; and in conclusion, *Education 2000*'s basic principles of H. Ed., which summarize the basic knowledge about H. Ed., that it should be a cultivating and nurturing part that underlays all subjects that are stated in national curriculum documents, ensuring that all early childhood educators are informed about this crucial element of teaching the whole child.

It could be argued that holistic education encompasses a wide range of philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices. Holistic education focuses on wholeness, and attempts to avoid excluding any significant aspects of the human experience. Holistic education aims for balanced: development; relationship among the different aspects of the individual, be it intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and aesthetic; as well as the relationships between the individual and other people, natural environment, the inner- self of students, and the external world. Holistic educators urge for renewed measures of respect and reverence for the inner life of the growing person (Miller, 2006).

Forbes (2003) claims that H. Ed.: educates the whole child (all parts of the child); educates the student as a whole (not as an assemblage of parts); sees the child as part of a whole (society, humanity, the environment, and spiritual), from which it is not meaningful to extract the student. Miller (2004) challenges the present approach to education and its obsessive focus on standards and testing, which reflects a materialistic and consumerist culture that has reduced schooling to the training of individuals to compete and consume in the global marketplace, thereby abandoning any attempt to educate the whole human being, and reducing schooling to training for the workplace that can be easily assessed through standardized tests.

Singh (1996) informs that holistic education addresses the broadest development of the whole person at the cognitive and affective levels, which is in line with Forbes (2013) writings that H. Ed. aims for the fullest possible human development, enabling a person



to become the very best or finest that they can be and develop fully those capacities that together make up a human being.

Miller (2004) states that a holistic vision includes a sense of the whole person, who is connected to his or her surroundings, context, and environment.

H. Ed. focuses on the relationship between the whole and the part, and suggests that teaching and learning approaches need to be rooted in a larger vision. Miller (2006) warns that if techniques are isolated and unrelated, they can become traditional, static, and fragmented, ultimately promoting alienation and suffering.

Nakagava (2001) states that holistic education is concerned with “underlying worldviews or paradigms in an attempt to transform the foundations of education.” Miller (1992) argues that “holistic education is not to be defined as a particular method or technique; it must be seen as a paradigm, a set of assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways.”

Clark (1991) claims that introducing students to a holistic view of the planet, life on Earth, and the emerging world community, in a context of ‘meaning’, these holistic strategies will enable students to perceive and understand the various contexts which shape and give meaning to life. Hare (2006) informs that the process of holistic education must be flexible and dynamic enough to accommodate personal differences and influences, especially in personal progression. Nava (2001) concludes that H. Ed. is an education for the 21st century, directed towards developing human beings with a global conscience, a vision of peace, love, and intelligence.

4.1.1 Historical Roots of Holistic Education



According to Miller (2004), the holistic ideal can be traced back to indigenous cultures, as the aboriginal or indigenous people generally perceive the earth and the universe as infused with meaning. Holistic educators and schools that embed holistic education in their curricula try to recuperate this meaning and purpose in education through their focus on earth connections.

The word ‘holistic’ is derived from the Greek concept of *holon*, or seeing the universe as being made up of integrated wholes that cannot be reduced into parts. Socrates encouraged each person to examine his or her own life, to “know thyself,” and could be regarded as an early holistic educator (Miller, 2007).

According to Miller (1991a), Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Frobel, Montessori, and Steiner, all emphasized the spiritual nature of the human being. He states that Rousseau viewed the child as essentially good, and believed that the soul of the child should be allowed to unfold according to its own natural pattern. Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator who believed that the classroom should be a place for meaningful activity, encouraged teachers to use their intuition and believed that education is connected to a divine plan (Miller, 2006).

Grimes (2002) described Rudolf Steiner, and Maria Montessori, as two of the most important holistic educators of the past century. Maria Montessori was the founder of the Montessori school movement, and was an advocate of nurturing the spiritual development of children. According to her beliefs, within each child there is a ‘spiritual embryo’ that is developing according to a divine plan, and she saw the most urgent duty of a teacher to “eliminate as many obstacles to his development as possible” (Montessori, 1965). She also believed in providing a nurturing environment in which ‘horme’ can naturally unfold to become an independent adult. She defined ‘horme’ as a natural unfolding of a child’s personality and powers, on the condition that a prepared environment conducive to learning has been provided.



Rudolf Steiner was the founder of the Waldorf school movement, which began shortly after World War I. Steiner, just as Montessori, believed in a nurturing school setting, and introduced the term ‘soul life’. In line with Montessori’s ‘home’, ‘soul life’ was explained as the natural development of children’s spirituality, once carefully prepared classroom environments are offered to the children.

4.1.2 Worldviews Underlying Holistic Education

According to Nakagawa (2001), the six major theories or worldviews underpinning contemporary holistic education are: perennial philosophy, indigenous worldviews, life philosophy, ecological worldview, systems theory, and feminist thought.

4.1.3 Pillars of Learning in Holistic Education

Nava’s (2001) four ‘Pillars of Learning’ are in line with UNESCO’s (1996) 21st century learning. He modified Learning to Learn, Learning to Do, Learning to Live together and Learning to Be.

4.1.4 Levels of Wholeness in Holistic Education

Ron Miller (2000) identified five levels of wholeness, to explain that everything in the universe is interconnected to everything else, symbolizing interconnectedness and meaning, as well as the understanding that any change or event affects everything else. He emphasized that a phenomenon cannot be understood in isolation, and that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Miller’s five levels of wholeness encompass the whole person: wholeness in community, wholeness in society, a whole planet, and a holistic cosmos. Rudge (2008) claims that by understanding and applying these levels of wholeness, students are educated for world citizenship and participatory democracy.

4.1.5 Basic Principles of Holistic Education

Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective, is defined by Flake (2000), Nava (2001), and Schreiner (2005) as a welcoming overview of the central principles of Holistic Education. It stresses the importance of: educating for human development; honouring students as individuals; the central role of experience; the concept of wholeness; the new role of educators; the freedom of choice; educating for participatory democracy; educating for global citizenship; educating for earth literacy; and honoring spirituality in education.

4.2 General Understanding of Holistic Education

Miller (2007) states that a general understanding of holistic education includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual development of a human being. He also accentuates that, in contrast to the first five, the spiritual dimension is frequently underexploited, disregarded, or remains unnoticed. Miller (2007) claims that holistic education is founded on the three overarching principles of balance, inclusion, and connection, while linking the three educational orientations of transmission, transaction, and transformation. He emphasizes that holistic education is underpinned by engaging the head, heart, and spirit of the child, and that a holistic curriculum makes connections with community, earth, soul, subject, and mind-and-body, as well as develops intuition and inquiry.

According to Miller (1990), holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life, through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values, such as compassion and peace. His emphasis is on nurturing a sense of wonder, and he aims to instill a fundamental respect and admiration for life and a passionate love of learning. Miller (1990) warns that this respect and admiration for life, and passion for learning, will not be accomplished through an



‘academic’ curriculum that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment. He emphasizes that holistic education respects and facilitates diverse learning styles, in response to the needs of evolving human beings.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) claims that, “Holistic goals are achieved when young children survive and become physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent, able to learn, culturally and spiritually aware, and aesthetically creative.”

Chiu (2009) sees holistic education as a concept that has the ability to “transform traditional academic goals by emphasizing the values of whole human development” (p. 262). According to Kates and Harvey (2010), holistic education is a multidimensional mode of learning, in which the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness, that form the spectrum of spiritual intelligence and advances holistic modes of thinking. Ron Miller (1992) recommends considering holistic education as a paradigm, a set of basic assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways, rather than a particular method or a technique.

Children need a holistic educational experience that does not create artificial boundaries between the different aspects of their development. Learning must respond to children’s current and future personal needs, their future career needs, and the needs of the wide-ranging societies and cultural groups in which they are likely to play a part in. Learning needs to be active, in the sense that children must engage with their own learning. For young children, this means that learning, which is relevant to the future, must be placed in a context that is meaningful to their present lives.

We may conclude that offering young children a ‘holistic’ curriculum is the most relevant way to interconnect and intrinsically relate all areas of knowledge. Combining cultural

subjects with the arts could be a vehicle for creating and maintaining a peaceful classroom for young learners. Parental involvement is crucial for the support of holistic education, and parents need sufficient information about the importance of the whole child approach, and their role as parents as the first educators of their child.

In summary, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) states that we have to recast the definition of a successful learner, from one whose achievement is “measured solely by academic tests” to one who is “knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling”.

This statement is in line with Miller’s (1990) comparison of an academic curriculum that is “condensing the world into instructional packages,” and urges students to have direct contact with the environment. Chiu (2009) validates the above writings, and claims that emphasizing the values of holistic education could “transform traditional academic goals.”

4.1.1 Values of Holistic Education

According to John Miller (2007), to educate ‘the whole child’ is to create a teaching and learning framework that inspires, educates, and delivers a complete holistic environment for children and teachers to thrive and grow. To truly educate a child, the mind, heart, and will need to be engaged. Holistic education encompasses care, thinking, health, relationships, communication skills, and fosters spiritual well-being through connections. Miller’s framework is infused by characteristics of ‘care’, and could be summarized as care for children’s academic work, the unity of knowledge, how academic subjects relate to each other and to the students themselves, and how the arts stimulate an artistic sense and facilitates connections between subjects. Care is also important for the physical development of students, required to foster healthy bodies. Care also implies how students relate to others, and to the community. A holistic curriculum can be defined as

transformational learning, as it acknowledges the wholeness of the child, in connecting the child with the curriculum. Teachers engaged in transformative teaching promote creative problem solving and cooperative learning, while the arts underpin activities to reinforce learning and encourage students to make connections that are personally and socially meaningful.

4.1.1.1 Balance – Inclusion – Connection

John Miller (2007) emphasizes the three overarching principles of balance, inclusion, and connection, as fundamental pillars of holistic education. He explains the philosophical roots of ‘*balance*’, from the Tao, and the concepts of Yin as the group and process, and Yang as individual and content. Yin also stands for imagination, qualitative assessment, instruction/learning, program, and vision, while Yang stands for quantitative assessment/evaluation technology, and techniques/strategies. Miller encourages continuously reflecting, and revisiting the balance between these yin and yang elements. He defines ‘inclusion’ as learning by incorporating transmission, transaction, and transformational ways of teaching. He explains that transmission learning occurs when we accumulate new knowledge, transaction learning when problem solving is encouraged through dialogue, and transformation learning occurs when student and learning merge, and one is able to apply the newly acquired skills. The latter is seen as the most holistic form of learning.

Connections form an important element of holistic education, and students need to be informed and encouraged to develop an awareness of the connections between: linear thinking and intuition; mind and body; various domains of knowledge; the earth and to the soul; and between the individual and the community. Teaching students to be mindful of all their actions, being fully aware of what one is doing, as well as drawing attention to the breadth of their actions, encourages students to slow down and be present with one task at a time. Fostering community connections incorporates the establishment of trust



and cooperation. Positive interaction and conflict resolution are taught, modeling the acts of providing positive feedback, decision-making, and problem solving.

4.1.1.2 Personhood

Splitter (2003) defines the term ‘personhood’ as a function of the reciprocal relationships we have with each other; relationships in which ethical strategies such as empathy, decentering, moral imagination, and making judgments, are crucial. These strategies, in turn, allow us to balance the feelings we have for ourselves and for others. The ‘community of inquiry’ constitutes an ideal environment for personal development, precisely because it provides countless opportunities for practice in these and other strategies (p. 222). In a kindergarten setting, both the teachers and students are ‘nourished’ by a classroom environment of respect, care, and devotion.

4.1.1.3 Soul Education

Soul education includes a spiritual level of awareness that helps learners develop ways to learn, to be, and to do, based on personal meaning and connection. ‘Soul’ is defined as a vital mysterious energy that gives meaning and purpose to life. The holistic curriculum strives to connect students with their inner lives or souls. In preschool, this can be operationalized through storytelling, as it calls on the children’s imagination. In Waldorf schools, this storytelling is an integral part of most lessons. Meditation, relaxing exercises, and breathing exercises can gradually be introduced. The holistic curriculum exposes students to environmental problems, explaining how we are naturally embedded in the natural processes of Earth.

4.1.1.4 Peace Building

UNICEF's global chief and senior advisor for early childhood, Pia Britto, is engaged in an ongoing investigation about the relationship between early childhood and peace building (IOM & NRC, 2015).

Giardiello (2014), who researched pioneers in early childhood education, informs that Montessori was an advocate for peace building, and was nominated for the 1949 Nobel Prize for Peace by Professor Helena Stellway of Utrecht University for furthering international understanding through her educational work (p. 91). Montessori was not awarded the prize, but after her death in 1952, her life work has been continued through Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), an organization that she founded in Amsterdam in 1929.

Montessori believed that social change and world peace would only come about through an educational approach that paid attention to social justice, which required a *mind shift* in adults and policymakers' views on children. She participated in the founding meetings of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1950, and she advocated the promotion of international peace through education (Barres, 2007 in Giardiello, 2014). Montessori believed that intrinsic to 'peace' is the positive notion of constructive social reform (Montessori 1948/1972 in Giardiello, 2014, p. 91).

This was endorsed by Splitter (2003), who claimed that bringing philosophy into the school curriculum was the essential ingredient in equipping the next generation of adults with the wherewithal to construct a better world. He informs that, "at the very least, philosophy commits us to the kind of persistent and disciplined thinking that such construction will surely require" (p. 4).

Splitter (2003) suggests that education should be concerned with the 'improvement of thinking' (p. 5), indicating the poor state of 'thinking competence' in numerous students

and graduates, and he recommends that resolving this thinking dilemma would require a “radical change in focus” in the way we conceive education.

Rinaldi (2006) claims that there is a close link between Montessori’s philosophies about peace building and the Reggio Emilia Approach. She suggests that educating children from a young age about peace and social justice, through participatory democracy and an awareness of civic responsibilities, for the benefit of the community, are fundamental for an educational vision of peace. She also mentioned that it would need policymakers across all boundaries to change their views on children. Peace underpins the cosmic education of the Montessori approach; the awareness that everything in the universe is connected, interdependent, and forms a harmonious whole, and that all people are part of, belong to, and contribute to that whole.

Borba (2001) claims that empathy is what moves children to be “tolerant and compassionate, to understand other people’s needs, and to care about those who are hurt or troubled.” She claims that by learning to show empathy to others, our children can help create a more tolerant, peaceful world (p. 19).

According to the IB’s mission statement, its aim is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people, who help create a better and more *peaceful* world through intercultural understanding and respect. (See 4.1.8).

4.1.2 Differentiation in Holistic Education

The Stanford University School of Education Conceptual Framework (2002) accentuates that “it is not enough for teachers or principals to believe that all children can learn if they do not know how to enable diverse students to engage challenging material successfully” (p. 3), and urges educators to take on the roles of “diagnosticians, planners and leaders” (p. 5), who are able to make informed, needs-based curricula decisions to

meet the needs of diverse learners. However, findings of Tomlinson et al., (2003), warn that despite teachers acknowledging the presence of diverse learners, the reality shows that most teachers do not engage in “differentiated or academically responsive instruction” (p. 119), which could be the result of teachers lacking deep knowledge of their learners, and/or requiring support and pedagogical skills to help children of diverse abilities.

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) recommend that the essence of differentiation, in response to student academic readiness, is the need for academic challenges at their appropriate level of difficulty, in order for students to be intellectually motivated and to sustain efforts to learn, as opposed to being bored by under-challenging tasks or frustrated by too difficult tasks.

4.1.3 The Holistic Educator

Education theorists exploring a holistic worldview all describe the *interconnected* nature of the world and human experience, and see their *wholeness* rather than the fragmentation and detachment.

According to Miller (2002), a holistic educator “attempts to balance freedom and structure, individuality and social responsibility, spiritual wisdom and spontaneity, in order to respond to each learning situation in its immediate presence” (p. 25). He argues that “any particular learner, in a particular setting, in a particular culture, at a particular point in historical time” (p. 25) should be addressed in that moment, and not according to a fixed model applied to all individuals in all learning situations. He indicates that some educators practice this way without labeling themselves as ‘holistic educators’.

In line with recommendations of being a holistic teacher in an early childhood setting, teachers need a proper attitude, skills, and a holistic approach to educating young children. Today’s early childhood educators need the ability to be a counselor, friend,



mediator, confidant, advisor, etc. According to McGuey (2007), the training and development of these important skills are often neglected during induction processes at schools, as the school management often assumes that these skills are already present in new teachers. This mismatch may contribute to a high teacher turnover within the teaching profession. He instructs effective teachers to: express themselves positively; communicate with interest and enthusiasm; phrase questions, directions, and statements clearly; recognize when empathy is required; not to embarrass students in front of others; and set clear expectations. He also claims that the variables that dictate success or failure are the four characteristics of an inspirational teacher: modeling, respecting, listening, and relationship building (p. 7), which corresponds with Buber's (1965) relational theory, where the building of direct relationships, and the continuous effort to recover these, should be the goal of teaching. He argues that students can perceive if their teachers are not concerned about their real problems, and would rather deal with them only superficially (p. 107). This also reflects Dewey's beliefs that, when a teacher does not love to be involved with children, students will easily detect this. He urges teachers to develop a "crucial set of positive relationships, including an enjoyment of interacting with students" (LW 13, p. 343).

Teachers should be able to tackle the moral aspects and complexities of teaching, and show teacher professionalism by incorporating teachers' ethical knowledge. Carr (2000) argues that ethical knowledge can provide the basis of renewed professionalism in teaching. Campbell (2003) explored ethical knowledge from formalized codes and standards, which illustrated this knowledge through teachers' actions as both moral practitioners and moral educators. Beckner (2004) defines 'moral' and 'ethical' as more or less interchangeable, and that they both relate to human virtues, according to an Aristotelian tradition of moral or ethical relativism.

However, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) argue that there is simply not enough opportunity and encouragement for teachers to work together, learn from each other, and

improve their expertise as a community. This leads us to question if current early childhood educators are adequately equipped for the ‘reality’ of the job. Just as school leadership of the 21st century requires leaders who are capable of wearing a multitude of organizational hats, and are able to handle a myriad of demands. Preschool and kindergarten teachers face similar challenges in satisfy the needs of a changing preschool community.

4.1.4 Flow

The concept of ‘flow’ as defined by Csikszentmihalyi et al., (1993), addresses the importance of motivation, stating the benefits of the psychological state of flow when a student is completely engaged with a task to the extent that one forgets the time and the fatigue that usually comes with prolonged work on the task.

Whalen (1998) endorses this state of flow, and informs that teachers are most effective in helping students find flow when they are passionate about their work, communicate high expectations, support student efforts, and plan for appropriate challenges that leverage on students’ interests and talents.

4.1.5 Timeless Learning

Timeless learning, characterized by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) as ‘flow’, occurs when a person becomes fully immersed in an experience. He makes the direct link to timeless learning, by stating that one’s “self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual, experiencing happiness, enjoyment and fulfillment in the moment, whatever you are doing. The sense of time is distorted and hours seem to pass by in minutes” (p. 31) when flow arises. Csikszentmihalyi also identified eight characteristics in his study that he refers to as ‘optimal experiences’ of flow: clear goals, immediate feedback, ability to

concentrate on the task at hand, the possibility of successful completion, total involvement, loss of self-consciousness, a sense of control, and time distortion.

Griffiths (1999) claims that it is in ‘timeless moments’ when powerful learning occurs, and encourages programs that explicitly nurture timeless learning, as children usually live outside conventional time. This was endorsed by John Miller (2006), who defined ‘timeless learning’ as holistic, as it connects and transforms.

Another advocate of ‘timeless learning’ was Maria Montessori, who developed the concept of ‘cosmic education’ to facilitate students’ understanding to see themselves in relation to the unfolding of the universe, and to develop a sense of reverence for life and care for the earth. Wolf (2004) acknowledges Montessori’s cosmic education, and the interconnectedness of all creation that helps children place themselves within the total framework of the universe through order and purpose, while offering a common reference point “beyond the boundaries created by nations and religions” (p. 6). She also emphasized that cosmic education contributes to an awareness of the long-term cosmic pattern, of which we are only a tiny part and “awakens a deep humility and reverence for all the labors of nature and the work of human beings that preceded us” (p. 16).

Krishnamurti’s (1996) ideas on timeless learning as part of H. Ed. was it would “bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole” (p. 24), indicating that education consists of intelligence “as the capacity to perceive the essential, the what is; and to awaken this capacity in oneself and in others” (p. 14). As perceiving the essential relates to timeless learning, being present or mindful indicates that the individual is no longer restricted by cultural conditioning.

Waldorf education also embeds a timeless quality, as Steiner’s approach to movement, eurythmy, is central to Waldorf education. Time is viewed rhythmically in the flow of the

seasons and the breath, and eurythmy facilitates the opportunity for students to bring the cosmos down into their being through eternal, timeless quality of movement.

John Miller (2006) explains how teachers can embody qualities favorable to timeless learning, such as caring, mindful presence, and conveying a sense of respect to the student in their daily classroom practices. He exemplifies Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as inspiring people who embodied their own teachings, and as a result, modeled to millions of people how to follow the path of non-violence. This was in line with earlier findings of Rogers (1969), who identified empathy, respect, and genuineness as key factors in the success of teachers, when their desire to teach is consistent with their expressed beliefs.

Miller and Nozawa (2002) concluded that timeless learning can significantly contribute to teaching a holistic curriculum, suggesting that this is not limited to alternative education, but can flow from the heart and being of teachers, wherever they are. By being mindful and present, teachers can connect more deeply with their students and their learning processes.

Nel Noddings (1992) suggests that timeless learning can be cultivated through compassion and care. Her most significant contribution to holistic education has been her ideas on caring relations. Noddings (1992) proposed a caring-centered education that calls for the cultivation of relations of care in school, which encompassed caring for: the self, the inner circle, distant others, animals, plants and the Earth, the human-made world, and the world of ideas. Eisler (2000) designed a model of education called ‘partnership model education’, which embraces a democratic and egalitarian structure; equal rights to females and males; respect; peaceful conflict resolution; empathy; caring; non-violence; mutual responsibility; and connections to the earth. The combination of Noddings’ thoughts on ‘caring relations’, and Eisler’s ideas on ‘partnership education’, are directly

or indirectly present in the works of nearly every holistic educator committed to providing holistic education in the classroom.

4.1.6 Holistic Leadership and Management

Holistic leadership is critical in a collaborative organization, because it “fills the vacuum left when the command-and-control structure of the hierarchy is gone and the regulations and procedures of the bureaucracy no longer govern function” (Savory, 1999, p. 367).

Daresh (2007) informs that today’s effective school leaders look at their responsibilities *holistically*, not as a series of tasks and responses to emergencies. The development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes are essential for inspired, proactive leadership, increasing the quality of its educational programs. Holistic administrators and supervisors need holistic insights on exercising power and authority, dealing with conflict, working with groups, motivating staff, communicating effectively, and managing change. Holistic leaders have a responsibility to be role models, to increase opportunities for followers, to influence organizational goals and outcomes, and to engage in distributive leadership.

Holistic management is a proactive process, in which you attempt to make happen what you want to happen, through empowered people who feel trust and confidence and are engaged in meaningful work and experience freedom of expression. When a collaborative organization feels valued, they can contribute with creativity to achieve your goal. The way an organization is structured, and the way it functions, can enhance or diminish creativity.

Savory (1999) claims that a *holistic* perspective is essential in management (p. 17). He explains that “no whole, be it a family, a business, a community, or a nation, can be managed without looking inward to the lesser wholes that combine to form it, and outward to the greater wholes of which it is a member” (p. 17). His holistic approach to



management shows a strong link to our environment, as he stresses the need for a new approach to the challenge of making a living without destroying our environment. This was line with Splitter's (2003) statement that we are now educating the next generation of adults, suggesting that Philosophy for Children (P4C) could be "the essential ingredient for equipping the next generation of adults with the wherewithal to construct a better world" (p. 4). He argues that philosophy commits us to the kind of "persistent and disciplined thinking" (p. 4) that is required to understand this link with our environment.

Savory (1999) uses the power of stark 'nature related paradigms' to get his four key insights of holistic management across. His first insight can be interpreted as a warning against non-holistic perspectives in management, as he cautions that these decisions are doomed to fail as only the whole is reality. His second insight explains that environments respond differently to the same influences, comparing how humidity restores in non-brittle environments but damages in very brittle environments. His third insight talks about how large numbers of herding animals are vital to maintaining the health of the lands we thought they destroyed, and the fourth insight deals with the amount of time that plants and soils are exposed to the animals.

He claims that, although no piece of land is needed to practice holistic management or to engage in holistic decision-making, holistic managers need to have an understanding of some basic ecological principles because many management decisions will affect the land at some point. His holistic management model (p. 51) encompasses 'the whole' under management: the holistic goal, the ecosystem processes, the tools for managing ecosystem processes, the testing guidelines, the management guidelines, the planning procedures, and the feedback loop.

Savory wrote (1999) a remarkable example to illustrate how his holistic management process works, and I choose to include this in my thesis as I regard this example beneficial to holistic decision-making. He compares Holistic Management to building a

custom-designed house for your family. The goal is to build it on a solid foundation, encompassing the four ecosystem processes. To build your house, you may choose any of the tools at your disposal, and you will enlist all your ingenuity and brainpower to make efficient use of labor and capital. Not being entirely familiar with all your tools, or how best to organize your labor force or manage your capital, you turn to a set of instruction books—the management guidelines and planning procedures—to learn more. A second set of instruction books—the testing guidelines—help you to assess which tools will be best for the job. You work according to a plan, using the tools selected, and you monitor your progress to stay on track. When unexpected events turn up, you re-plan, change the way you are using your tools, or substitute different ones; whatever it takes to finish the building and achieve your goal. While this example exemplifies the ‘common sense principle’, it also questions why so many management decisions in ecosystems and economies turn out wrong!

Savory (1999) concludes that in testing our decisions towards a *holistic goal*, we are generally assured of being approximately right, but we still have to complete those essential feedback loops of planning, monitoring, controlling and re-planning to be sure (p. 55).

Increased interest of holistic education inevitably leads to holistic leadership. Toffler (1991) described in *Future Shock* a collision of the present with the future, and that, especially for teachers, the ‘future’ had come to meet them too fast. Toffler wrote in a time when people in education were cautious in their use of the word ‘change’. The term ‘development’ was preferred because it was seen as ‘less threatening’ to teachers. ‘Development’ implied something continuous and evolutionary, whereas ‘change’ implied discontinuity and revolution. This millennium’s holistic leaders have the task of helping teachers, pupils, and parents to come to terms with the impact of the three major changes of globalization, transformation of education, and the new meaning of leadership.

‘Holistic education’, or the whole child approach, could be the power to conquer national borders and cultural identities.

Just as Mintzberg (1994) drew a powerful conclusion, that the work of the manager is as much, or more, about managing people and their emotions as it is about planning and analysis, principals need to inform teachers to be observant of children’s emotional needs and find a way to accommodate them, before learning can take place in a school setting prone to respect the aspects of H. Ed.

Bayliss (1999) developed five competences for the 21st century: *learning, citizenship, relating to people, managing situations, and managing information*. For *relating to people*, Bayliss emphasized understanding how to relate to people in varying contexts, how to operate in teams, and how to develop other people. *Citizenship* was defined as understanding ethics and values, society, government, and business. Similarly, Hallinger and Bridges (2007) identified five imperatives for 21st century management education: learn to “manage for action”; to “think globally and apply knowledge locally”; to “lead and to manage”; how “values, emotions and ethics underlie leadership”; and to “integrate technology into management practice” (p. 11).

Holistic education is in need of knowledgeable and skillful holistic leaders, who manage to inspire and lead their staff by modeling, mentoring, and motivating what holistic education entails. Relating to people (Bayliss, 1999), and leading and managing by honoring values, emotions, and ethics (Hallinger & Bridges, 2007), seem to become prime attributes of holistic leadership.

4.1.6.1 Shift From Focusing on Teaching to Focusing on Learning

The literature on teachers changing towards more holistic approaches in classrooms suggests a pivotal shift from focusing on teaching, towards a focus on students’ learning

(Intrator, 2002; Palmer, 1998). Learning can no longer be seen as the passive taking in of information, but rather as the application of thinking skills in a way to activate sense making. This requires teachers who engage in synergistic and interdependent goals of “creating opportunities for thinking” and making their “students’ thinking visible” (Ritchart et al., 2011, p. 26).

4.1.6.2 Principled Professionalism in Holistic Education

Goodson (2003) discussed the importance of *principled professionalism*, which “will develop from clearly agreed moral and ethical principles” (p. 132). Campbell (2003) adds that the extensive knowledge of some teachers, who are quite aware of and attentive to the moral and ethical elements of their practice, is “usable, sharable, and learnable.” This body of knowledge could form the foundation of a renewed professionalism in teaching, which Campbell (2004) defined as unique among the professions.

4.1.7 Holistic Research in the Classroom

Lomax (2002) encourages all early childhood practitioners to constantly improve their existing practices, by becoming an active participant in their own professional growing. She defines ‘holistic research’ in Coleman and Briggs (2002, p. 136):

...as a teacher-educator investigating my own practice, I do not separate my intent to motivate my students, from my intent to help them develop their technical competence, from my intent to help them refine their professional judgment. I value respect for the *whole person*, which I think means treating professional knowledge holistically.

I support Lomax (2002)’s belief that as educators, and in order to make a significant difference in students’ lives, it is important for educators’ voices to be heard, and that



they are given the opportunity to share their values and persuade others about the significance of their work. In an increasingly globalized world, where single, prescribed ways of thinking and acting no longer exist, *action research* could become a powerful cross-cultural tool, as researchers clarify their personal educational values across cultures.

Dall and Cherrington (2009) suggest that by valuing respect for the *whole* person, you treat professional knowledge holistically. They encourage teacher-educators to investigate if their own practices and intentions to motivate their students help themselves to develop their own technical competence, and they urge educators to refine their own professional judgment, continuously.

Furthermore, they claim that conceptualizing professional learning in relation to the changing world of early childhood, we must position *care*, *relationships*, and *wisdom* as central elements in professional learning aimed at promoting ethical professional practice.

4.1.8 A Holistic Approach to Education: The IB Learner Profile (IBO, 2000)

Inquiry-based programs have gained importance in the last few decades. In line with a quote from the great thinker, Albert Einstein, “The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking,” educators around the world have acknowledged the importance of inquiry-based learning to promote critical thinking.

Allan and Evans (2006) suggest that 21st century education would benefit from an educational process that at least emphasizes systems of connection, creative skills, and acknowledging differences to achieve the common good. They suggest that schools should teach: a more complex way of reasoning that is *holistic*, and that accentuates systems of connection; a more complex concern for how we relate to others, and be open to novelty and embracing diversity; and a more complex grasp or the rhythmic character

of how we reason and relate, one that encompasses change while appreciating the creative skills needed in a dynamic world (p. 3). These suggestions echo Miller's (2007) overarching principles of balance, inclusion, and connection, as the fundamental pillars of holistic education.

Inquiry-based programs as part of holistic education, have resulted in a considerable increase of schools adopting the IB inquiry-based curricula in Southeast Asia and worldwide. The ten attributes contributing to the IB 'learner profile' offer a backbone for both students and teachers to promote holistic education in schools. According to the IB's mission statement, its aim is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

Worldwide, IB schools encourage students to be active IB learners, and to be able to demonstrate the attributes of the IB 'learner profile': to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. Schools adopting the IB program encourage their students to develop their natural curiosity, and acquire the necessary skills to conduct inquiry, research, and independent learning. The students actively enjoy learning, and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives. As this educational goal is in line with holistic education, I will clarify IB's 'learner profile'.

The learner profile is in line Shim's (2008) philosophical investigation of the role of teachers according to Plato, Confucius, Buber, and Freire. While Plato emphasizes guidance, and Confucius self-cultivation, Buber focuses on relationship building with students, and Freire on critical consciousness towards oppressed situations.

Inquirers have had their natural curiosity nurtured, and they have acquired the skills necessary to conduct purposeful, constructive research. They actively enjoy learning, and

this love will be persistent throughout their lives. Thinkers exercise initiative in applying their thinking skills critically and creatively, to make sound decisions and to solve complex problems. Communicators receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of mathematical symbols. Risk-Takers approach unfamiliar situations without anxiety, and have the confidence and independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas, and strategies. They are courageous and articulate in defending those things in which they believe. Knowledgeables have spent time in our schools exploring themes, which have global relevance and importance. In so doing, they have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge. The Principled have a sound grasp of the principles of moral reasoning. They have integrity, honesty, and a sense of fairness and justice. The Caring show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a sense of personal commitment to action and service. The Open-minded respect the views, values, and traditions of other individuals and cultures, and are accustomed to seeking and considering a range of points of view. The Well-balanced understand the importance of physical and mental balance, and personal well-being. The Reflective give thoughtful consideration into their own learning, and analyze their personal strengths and weaknesses in a constructive manner.

The abovementioned IB learner profile is also in line with Ayers' (1995) findings that learners need help when they face difficulty in understanding properly, thinking logically, and acting morally. He points out that teachers try to lead people to think, question, speak, write, read critically, work cooperatively, consider the common good, and link consciousness to conduct (p. 126). This profile is also supported by Dewey's recommendations (LW 13, p. 345), that students need capable teachers who are passionate about their fields of expertise, and who demonstrate the ability to think critically and imaginatively in those fields. Ultimately, Dewey opted for students who are passionate about knowledge and thinking for themselves. He described successful teachers through the contagious love of learning, and that "having an engaged, thinking, artistic teacher is one of the greatest gifts that a student can receive" (MW 9, p. 177). He

identified this “love of inquiry into the puzzling and unknown,” with the “development of curiosity, suggestion and habits of exploring and testing, which increases sensitiveness to questions” (LW 8, p. 156).

4.1.9 Parental Involvement in the Holistic Curriculum

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed standards to accredit high-quality programs for young children. They have included ‘parent-staff interaction’ as a necessary component, and they recommend that parents should to be well informed and welcome as observers and contributors to the program.

The NAEYC’s (1998) rationale states that,

Young children are integrally connected to their families. Programs cannot adequately meet the needs of children unless they also recognize the importance of the child’s family and develop strategies to work effectively with families. All communication between centers and families should be two-way, based on the concept that parents are and should be the principal influence in children’s lives.

According to Epstein (2001), the goal of partnerships is to develop and conduct better communication lines with families, to assist students to succeed in school. I recommend any school to critically evaluate current home-school programs, by consulting Hornby’s (2000) pattern of parent-school activities, and Epstein’s (2002) Home-School Partnership Model of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. This outline could then be a platform for improving existing practices, as well as be an informed way of establishing a sustainable parent-school partnership. Results of this investigation would clearly reveal the present inventory of practices, annual evaluation, types of involvement, and desired goals to achieve, as well as the measures to be taken to reach these aims. Results of critical

reflection, combined with the outcomes of this survey, could pave the way to improved information, participation, and more effective parent involvement, to support sustainable quality teaching and learning. Making use of a school event (back-to-school-night, open house, anniversary, graduation ceremony, etc.) could be a perfect occasion for presenting this new partnership plan, prior to the start of a new academic year, with a strategic overview of implementation and evaluation.

As a general rule, most kindergartens operate on three main principles: that learning occurs through social interaction and play; that a school should reflect the environment and serve the community in which it operates; and that the family is an integral part of a child's total development. From my position as a researcher and school leader, home-school programs regularly need to be evaluated and critically reflected upon, as parents and students change every year. Consequently, parental involvement ought to be reviewed against the backdrop of these three main principles, to prevent unwanted surprises.

Consulting Hornby's (2000) pattern of parent-school activities, teachers sometimes prefer a protected mode, in which teaching and parental function is separated, as teachers might at times want to avoid parent involvement, perceiving it as a risk to their teaching efficiency and professionalism. However, when schools promote parental involvement, the institution can operate on an enhanced course mode, where parents mainly participate in the curriculum, and the school allows them to be involved in their children's learning.

Holistic educators need to welcome parents' involvement, acknowledging that "the family is an integral part of a child's total development," hence the motivation to establish a well-functioning school-family-community partnership.

4.2 Thinking Skills

Introduction

It may be that bringing philosophy into the school curriculum is the essential ingredient for equipping the next generation of adults with the wherewithal to construct a better world. At the very least, philosophy commits us to the kind of persistent and disciplined thinking that such construction will surely require. (Splitter, 2003, p. 4)

Thinking is crucial. Creative thinking is encouraged, as well as problem solving using both analytical and intuitive thinking processes.

4.2.1 Philosophy for Children (P4C)

Splitter (2003) suggests that education should be concerned with the *improvement of thinking* (p. 5), indicating the poor state of ‘thinking competence’ of many students and graduates, and he recommends resolving this thinking dilemma would require a “radical change in focus” in the way we conceive education. He recommends reflecting on the phrase ‘thinking for oneself’, entailing autonomous and independent thought, as opposed to controlled or dependent thought. Splitter proposes that by “redefining teaching and learning as *inquiry-based activities*” (p. 24), children and teachers can participate in this process that ultimately could be the key to improved thinking in all students.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is defined by Sharp (1995) as,

An attempt to take the discipline of philosophy and reconstruct it for children in such a way that they can appropriate the concepts and methods and come to think



for themselves about matters of importance, while at the same time, care about doing so. (p. 45)

She argues that,

If children of the world could learn to do philosophy well in their formative years, they could acquire the skills that they need not only to shape their lives in a harmonious fashion, but to think, judge and act well with regard to the good of all. (Sharp, 1995, p. 52)

P4C views ethics as an ongoing communal inquiry, rather than a rule-guided or principle-guided endeavor, and aims to give rise to a better universe. It is based on caring for other persons and species in nature, as well as continuous inquiry itself (p. 53).

Research on P4C in 35 nations has shown, according to Sharp (1995, p. 54), that “we don’t have to wait until children have become adults for them to do philosophy well.” Humanity can no longer afford this postponement. She argues that P4C *can* take place in the early years, similar to language and mathematics. As children are naturally curious, they think, and in their thinking lies the potential to become more caring, benevolent, honest, and just people, in relation to others. In summary, P4C entails liberating movements of civilization, and these liberating movements are moral in nature because they promise a qualitatively different life (p. 55).

Traditions and common ways of thinking distinguish different cultures from each other. As educators, teaching a wide diversity of nationalities and cultures lead to the importance of being aware of one’s culturally determined ways of thinking. Often teachers will justify their dominant way of thinking by saying, “this is the way we have always done it.” Splitter (2003) defines the term ‘personhood’ as a function of the reciprocal relationships we have with each other; relationships in which ethical strategies

such as empathy, decentering, moral imagination, and the making of judgments are crucial. In turn, these strategies allow us to balance the feelings we have for ourselves and for others. The ‘community of inquiry’ constitutes an ideal environment for personal development, precisely because it provides countless opportunities for practice in these and other strategies (p. 222). Splitter wonders if instigating philosophy in the existing curriculum could promote persistent and disciplined thinking, operating as “the essential ingredient for equipping the next generation of adults with the wherewithal to construct a better world,” and he considers thinking skills as the “missing glue” between subjects to understand its interrelatedness (p. 4).

4.2.2 Balance Between Linear Thinking and Intuition

Miller (2007) opts for a balance between linear thinking and intuition, as linear thinking involves a sequential observable process, and intuition as direct knowing. He warns that if our emphasis is on linear, analytical thinking, we can lose our spontaneity in dealing with problems, and it can be detrimental to only rely on our intuition. Unfortunately, intuition, as integral in creativity, is generally understated in traditional schooling.

4.2.3 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking can be seen as a crucial part of problem solving. According to Smith (2005) “creative and critical thinking enable us to see new relationships.” We blend knowledge and see new similarities and differences, a new sequence of events or a new solution to an old problem, and that can be defined as creating new knowledge by “using old learning differently” (p. 470).

4.2.4 Caring Thinking in Early Childhood

Lipman (2012) counter-invented the notion of ‘caring’, thinking to redirect a tendency towards over-emphasis on critical thinking. He defined a caring thinker as one who is sensitive to other people, perspectives, purposes, has the ability to reason, and who is as good at listening (or even better) as they are at speaking. As ‘caring thinking’ encourages sensitivity towards other people, perspectives, and purposes, it can be regarded as most suitable for early childhood. Ann Sharp (2003) introduced Appreciative Thinking, Collaborative Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Critical Thinking.

4.2.5 Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)

Several researchers, including Rogoff (1990), Rinaldi (2006), and Jordan (2009), emphasize the importance of sharing the thinking, engaging with the understanding of others and studying meaning with children, thus identifying links between co-construction and sustained shared thinking (SST). Siraj-Blatchford (2002b: 85), states that, “child development progresses as children experience more challenging *sustained shared thinking* in their play initially with adults, then in reciprocal peer play and later in sophisticated collaborative play.” Whereas in scaffolding, the teacher is in control, often with an outcome in mind, in co-construction. The interests and dispositions of the learner are important, and the skill of the practitioner lies in establishing intersubjectivity, allowing the child to accept responsibility for their learning (Jordan, 2009; Olusoga, 2009).

In terms of the most effective intellectual environment for SST, Siraj-Blatchford (2005) has identified a number of strategies to support children’s SST. Dowling’s (2006) teaching materials to support SST in the early years were based on these strategies. Nutbrown (2011, p. 149) maintains that, “educators must be tuned into young children’s thinking, open to their ideas, and responsive to ever active minds.” In Siraj-Blatchford and Smith’s study (2010), the ability of adults to show an interest in a conversation led by

the child, and to develop the conversation without resorting to personal agendas, was a significant success factor for SST.

Walsh, Murphy, and Dunbar (2007) stated that staff in excellent settings was “more likely to encourage children to engage in new experiences; more enthusiastic about the child’s efforts; and more proactive in seeking out opportunities to scaffold children’s thinking” (p. 15). Research by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) concluded that, “positive cognitive outcomes are closely associated with adult-child interactions of the kind that involve some element of ‘sustained shared thinking’” (p. 720). When thinking takes place as a result of a dialogue and social activity, participants move into the ‘intermental development zone’ where ‘interthinking’ takes place (Mercer, 2000).

Lipman (2003) argues that higher order thinking skills, critical, creative and caring thinking, can be developed in a social situation where a community of learners has joined together to share perspectives and to reach a deeper personal understanding. He informs that characteristics of this type of group collaboration, which occurs within a ‘community of inquiry’, includes ‘shared cognition; feelings of social solidarity’ and the ‘quest for meaning’ (p. 95 – 96).

4.2.6 Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), suggests that an individual learns in his personal ZPD and that new learning can take place through scaffolding, or supported by a teacher or a more academically advanced peer in the classroom.

Alexander (2005) advises that one of the most effective tools in mediation and ‘pedagogical intervention’ is ‘talk’. He claims that ‘talk’ is pervasive in its use, and powerful in its possibilities (p. 2). These statements were endorsed by Cambridge Review

(2009), as they define ‘talk’ as a necessary relationship between how teachers think about their practice, and how pupils learn. Hargreaves (in the Cambridge Review, 2009) suggests that for ‘deep learning’ to occur, teachers as well as students, need to engage in ‘learning conversations’ that lead to ‘professional development and innovation’ (p. 308).

4.2.7 Making Thinking Visible

‘Visible thinking’ is an approach that originated from Harvard’s *Project Zero*, aimed at developing a set of thinking routines for scaffold thinking, designed to be woven into a teacher’s ongoing classroom practice. Ritchart et al. (2011), emphasizes the importance of ‘opportunities’ and ‘time’ (p. 241) in establishing ‘cultures of thinking’ (p. 219), where a group’s, as well as individual’s, collective thinking is valued, made visible, and actively promoted. They introduce “see, think, justify, wonder” (p. 258) as a four-step approach in eliciting what students *see* in the picture, what they *think* it means, have them *justify* their thought process, as well as prompting their thinking of what they *wonder* about when they see this picture. Older children would be engaged in the ‘4 C’s’ of: eliciting what *connections* they draw between the text and their own life or learning; what ideas, positions, or assumptions students want to *challenge* or argue with in the text; what key *concepts* or ideas students think are important and worth holding on to from the text; and what *changes* in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the text, either for themselves or others (p. 140).

If schools and classrooms aim to provide room for intellectual stimulation, and value the development of individuals who can think, plan, question, and engage independently in a school culture where learning is *not* viewed in test scores only, they should try to make the students’ thinking visible to education stakeholders, as a way of accountability and as a platform for ongoing discussion. Ritchart et al. (2011) recommends that teachers should to use their students’ work as a ‘natural springboard’ for their next teaching move, to ensure that they build ‘arcs of learning’ as opposed to individual episodes of activity to



promote deeper learning and understanding. They encourage all teachers who are dedicated to teaching their students in a holistic way, to ‘making thinking visible’ and a “valued, visible and actively promoted part of their daily classroom practice” (p. 273).

4.2.8 Deep and Surface Learning

Educational theorists (Bruner, 1973; Gardner 1983, 1991) have been examining the complexities of teaching and learning for *understanding*, opposed to only knowledge *retention*.

Biggs (1987), and Marton and Saljo (1976), define surface learning as a learning method that focuses on the memorization of knowledge and facts, often practiced through rote practice. This is in contrast to deep learning, which focuses on developing understanding through more active and constructive processes.

4.2.9 Cultural Influence

Governments, legal systems, family structures, educational systems, and religious organizations have the ability to influence people. Understanding how the culture we grow up in affects our thought processes differently from other people’s, might lead to a better ability to manage intercultural negotiations.

4.3 Character Education

Introduction

I consulted the work of, Bandura (1986, 2001), Good and Brophy (1991), Kilpatrick (1992), Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (1998), Bencivenga and Elias (2003), and Matula (2004) to research character education. Bandura (1986) affirmed that individuals have



personal convictions and moral regulators that help shape behavior. He stressed the importance of providing learning environments in schools that model good character, which would in turn foster good character traits in the students. This is in line with Kilpatrick's (1992) findings that "the primary way to bring ethics and character back into school is to create a positive moral environment" (p. 226). Matula (2004) states that character education does not only involve the students, but equally all schools' staff, parents, caregivers, and community members. He also warns that if inconsistency exists between what teachers say and what they do, students will copy teachers' behavior rather than following their oral instructions (Good & Brophy, 1991). The importance of developing a partnership with parents and community members, in order to enhance and strengthen the school's character initiatives, is described by Bencivenga and Elias (2003). Lickona (1989) stressed the importance of teaching and practicing character education in developing the whole child. He emphasized that it is crucial to provide opportunities for children to practice virtues and utilize the values learned at school, thereby indicating that character education reaches the hearts and souls of children. Modeling and discussing character issues is also part of teaching character education. According to Jeong (2010), character education is related to the common denominator of value education, moral education, human nature education, and civic education. As a result, character education can be regarded as an important supporting pillar of holistic education.

Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis's (1998) 11 principles of effective character education encapsulate most of the above research findings. These principles consist of: developing and modeling core ethical values and expected behaviors; comprehensively defining ethical values through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors; embracing all aspects of the environment through a moral lens; creating a caring environment in which students feel respected; providing opportunities for moral action, in addition to providing a caring environment; providing children with the opportunities to practice what they have learned, as children learn by doing; having a curriculum that provides a variety of activities to enhance cooperative learning, problem solving, and experience-based



approaches; developing intrinsic motivation to act in accordance with the defined values in the children; offering opportunities to students to work collaboratively with others, modeling providing assistance by helping others, or discussing how to make a positive impact in the community; modeling the behavior you expect of your students; encompassing a leadership vision that develops short and long term planning and support; involving and recruiting community and parental support; engaging in ongoing reflection and assessment of your implemented character education program.

The aim of character education in a holistic curriculum is to foster the all-round development of the child. Academic excellence is not enough on its own, and should be accompanied by good character so that the knowledge acquired can be put to proper use for the benefit of the individual and society. Offering young children a ‘holistic’ curriculum is the most relevant way to interconnect and intrinsically relate all areas of knowledge.

Both in the East and the West, the importance of virtue in moral development is considered fundamental. Occhinogrosso (2002) describes the Confucian text, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, that encourages the development of five fundamental virtues: jen, humaneness and benevolence; li, reverence, respect, and loyalty to others (the main way of expressing jen); yi, acting on righteousness from selfless motives; chih, wisdom and knowledge; and hsin, trust or faithfulness. This illustrates that morality and virtues are intertwined.

4.3.1 Values in Character Education

It could be argued that academic excellence on its own is not enough, and that it should be accompanied by good character so that the knowledge acquired can be put to proper use for the benefit of the individual and society. Moral intelligence originates from empathy, the ability to identify with and feel another person’s concerns. Empathy



enhances being human, civil, and moral, through the awareness of others' ideas and opinions. It alerts a child to another person's difficulty, and stimulates his conscience. A child who learns empathy will be much more understanding and caring, and will usually be more skillful at handling anger.

My work term for 'values' in this study could be compared with an 'inner compass' that directs our external life. Values make up our personal code of conduct that guides us when we have to make decisions. As human beings, we have the capability to think and reflect on our actions. Values provide frameworks for thinking more deeply about our lives, especially in relation to the lives of others (Splitter, 2012). According to Le Metais (1997), values are an inherent part of the education process at all levels; from the systemic, institutional, macro levels, through to the meso level of curriculum development and management, and to the microlevel of classroom interactions, where they play a major role in establishing a sense of personal and social identity for the student. Seah and Bishop (2001) describe the values held by teachers as representing the 'cognization' of affective variables, such as beliefs and attitudes, and the subsequent internalization of these values into their respective affective-cognitive personal system. It could be argued that teachers' values in the classroom are shaped, to some extent, by the values embedded in each subject as perceived by them. Could changing teachers' perceptions, and their understanding of the subject being taught, change the values they can emphasize in class?

In Montessori schools, values are integrated through the theory of the 'Cosmic Plan', aimed at offering the child an insight into the relationship between different people and cultures on earth. Through these studies, the child would see that his life is intermingled with the lives and conditions of other people, and so he would feel connected to the 'brotherhood of man'.



This approach to education emphasizes that everything is interrelated, which forms a platform for the study of ecology, the investigation of the interactions of living things and relationships between living and non-living forms. From a Montessori perspective, understanding ecology develops a concern for human impact on Earth, and encourages a value system involving a caring and responsible attitude towards our environment.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out what every child needs. Participating countries that have endorsed the Convention aim for much more than the basics of food, water, and a place to live. They want to provide each child, boys and girls equally, with education and health care, and to protect them from wars, abuse, and exploitation. The Convention also gives children the right to have their opinions heard, the right to play, and the right to know their rights. This ‘cosmic awareness’ can be reinforced by selected literature. For example, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) produced a book, *A Life Like Mine*, which showcases how children all over the world are living in completely different and fascinating ways. Although faced with many challenges, they all have one thing in common: a passion for life, singing, dancing, playing, and learning. This book provides pictures of children all over the world; how they live, what they eat, how they go to school, and what their passions and goals in life are. History in Early Childhood Curriculum reflects a global, planetary approach, which constantly interrelates with the other cultural subjects. The Montessori principle is first to give the broadest outline of knowledge, then to fill in the detailed picture, always following the interests of the children.

4.3.2 The Art of Storytelling in Character Education

Stories have always been a means of passing on information from generation to generation. In ancient days, before books and written material was readily available, storytelling was the main method of teaching and nurturing character development. *Values*, such as courage, honesty, and loyalty, would be woven into the plot of the story,



thus setting a high standard or example for the children to follow. In the family circle, storytelling was one of the chief forms of entertainment, and it helped to create an atmosphere of *love* and *unity* between the adults, who narrated the stories, and the children, who listened. Unfortunately, the ‘modern-day storyteller’ is the television, and it is quite debatable as to whether the values and morals that it portrays are really what we want our children to absorb.

Often, parents wonder when they should start to introduce stories to their children. As soon as an infant is capable of understanding the language, he/she can respond to stories. The question is not *when* we should start, but rather *what kind* of stories we should tell. When holding a baby, we may show it a bird and explain: “This is a bird, it has two wings, two legs, and a beak; it makes a chirping sound.” This is an example of a simple story. Each child has an inborn curiosity to find out and know things. Consequently, it is never too early to start. Children of different age groups are attracted to different kind of stories, in line with their intellectual development and understanding.

4.3.3 Storytelling to Enhance Character Education in the Holistic Curriculum

In Waldorf education, the teacher has an important role to be a fascinating storyteller (recited by heart), to teach and inspire students to listen, ‘embody’ the story through drama and play, and afterwards create their own booklets. Montessori education consists of great stories to introduce timelines, the history of man, dinosaurs, math, language, photosynthesis, etc. In Nature education, children are introduced to *Mulle and friends* as nature characters who teach children about taking care of the natural world. All local schools in Sweden have access to the services of the Swedish Church, where they offer quality interactive storytelling at regular intervals at local churches. I had the opportunity to witness such storytelling twice, and observed all the students totally absorbed in well-planned storytelling, professionally guided by a skillful priest. I reached the conclusion that Swedish preschools are lucky to be able to bring their students to a peaceful church



environment to experience ‘spirituality’, and enjoy meaningful ‘story time’ outside of school.

4.3.4 Careful Selection of Children’s Literature for Character Education

According to Coody (1992), children’s literature is a subject area with an acknowledged tradition of fostering moral and aesthetic engagement, as a natural part of the student’s overall involvement with learning. He states that poetry can be seen as the finest expression of emotion, which is one of the *values* of good literature, and claims that young children respond to a deep and spontaneous level of poetry, as it articulates for the child an emotion that they have felt but have been unable to express. Coody’s (1992) statement is endorsed by May Hill Arbuthnot, who wrote in *Children and Books* that the following basic human needs are met by exposure to the right stories and poems: emotional (the giving and receiving of love), physical (shelter and comfort), aesthetic (beauty), informational (basic knowledge), relaxation (play, laughter, and escape), achievement (to become competent), and acceptance (to be part of the group). The last two are very strong in a young child, and often cause conflicts as they are egocentric, but they desperately wants to be part of a family, their peer group, and the school.

4.3.4.1 Role of Poetry

Roberts (2005) argued that many students and teachers need artistic forms, such as poetry, to make sense of the world around them; to reflect, to think, to be aware of the people and issues around them, and to resolve conflict in their lives. According to Eisner (1994), “each form of representation has a special contribution to make to human experience. We see this daily in our culture: we use different forms to say different things” (p. 19). Writing poetry can offer students a different way of seeing and knowing their world; it allows students to view the world through a variety of lenses. Compton (2002) strongly supports any attempt at creating and maintaining a peaceful classroom and learning



community, through a multiplicity of lenses. Kovacs (1994) revealed a myriad of poetry forms that could provide edifying vehicles for a peaceful classroom.

4.3.5 Role of the Arts in Character Education

In the early childhood classroom, artwork is an integral part that underpins most cultural subjects ranging from geography, history, biology, and science, to music, math, and language.

Eisner (1985) defines ‘the arts’ as literature, visual arts, music, drama, and dance that helps children learn to *illustrate* “what cannot be said.” In this way, “the arts elevate consciousness” (p. 69).

In line with Eisner’s findings, Intrator (2005) states that, “we can live a fuller, more robust life if we can harness the powers of writing, speaking, painting, poetry, and dance to express to others what we know” (p. 181).

According to Waldorf philosophy, combining cultural subjects with the arts could be a vehicle for creating and maintaining a serene classroom for young learners.

We may conclude that the arts are our culture’s most powerful means for making sense of life, by illustrating the *feelings* of life’s experiences. When young children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their artistic capacities to draw the pictures or find the images to represent words.

4.3.6 Role of Music in Character Education

Wang (2004) states that exposing young children to a variety of well-chosen, proper music pieces could cultivate *virtuous qualities*, such as peacefulness, compassion, and

honesty. Music can move children to awe-inspiring experiences, just as exposing them to beautiful artwork can. Both music and art cultivate ‘aesthetic taste’, so children can take delight in seeing and hearing beautiful things. Such aesthetic taste could enter ‘into the soul’ and help establish a noble personality, making one ‘beautiful and good’. This occurs without conscious awareness, since the influence of music does not come through reasoning or intellectual understanding, but enters directly into the soul. It is *music* which provides pleasure to the sages, and improves the minds of the people. Even ancient rulers used music in education, as it influenced the people profoundly and changed their customs and manners, resulting in better virtues. The *Analects of Confucius* indicate that a young man “grows through odes, establishes through rites, and accomplishes through music.” The *Book of Rites* states that rites and music were adopted by the three great former kings, when educating their sons. “Music was for the cultivation of the inside; rites for the outside. With rites and music combined in the young man’s inside and expressed in the outside, he becomes joyous, pious, and gentle” (SSJ, 5,397). We may conclude that music affects the inner disposition, while rites affect the outer demeanor. Accordingly, the education of young people ought to be conceived both inside and outside.

Plato (1969) used the quotation “One who is properly educated in music would receive beautiful things into his soul to foster its growth and become himself beautiful and good.” He implied that the soul of the universe is united by musical concords, and could be compared with the pleasant feeling we experience when we are in *balance* with ourselves. Boethius (1965) indicated a resemblance between sound organization, and the internal nature of humans. In his understanding of Plato, individuals are ‘united’ in their ‘likeness’ between the sound organization (“what in sound is well and fitly combined”), and what is inside them.

Music’s ethical power can be regarded as part of *holistic education*, because of its value in education and its connection with the universe, leading to cross-cultural significance



and importance. Music should not be narrowed to ancient traditions, but rather be respected with deserved consideration by educating students.

4.3.7 Morality in Character Education

Borba (2001) defines developing good character as “building moral intelligence in terms of seven core virtues: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness.” She claims that empathy is what moves children to be “tolerant and compassionate, to understand other people’s needs, and to care about those who are hurt or troubled.” She implies that learning to show empathy to others, would help our children create a more tolerant, peaceful world (p. 19).

Haidt (2003) talks about ‘elevation’, a moral emotion that is elicited by moral beauty. His work is associated with recent theory and research in the Positive Psychology movement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), where experiences of beauty can elicit moral emotions that can lead to moral action tendencies (Haidt & Keltner, 2004).

Rhett Diessner (2004) researched if “encouraging sensitivity to and recognition of beauty in the natural world and in art could be a developmental stepping-stone to recognizing moral beauty in the human social world.” It is crucial to understand that to be educated in the beauty of the literary and visual arts only is not enough, but that it is also necessary to experience the motivation of moral emotions elicited by moral beauty, to bridge the gap between the knowledge of beauty and moral action.

The initial research findings of Algo and Haidt (2004), regarding the moral emotions, indicate that experiencing the moral emotion of ‘elevation’ leads to moral (prosocial) action tendencies. Diesner (2004, p. 4) states that human morality involves: voluntarily willing the good and the right; producing moral emotions (Haidt, 2002); thinking about and intellectually determining what is good and right (with either quick, unconscious, and

intuitive cognition, or with slow, conscious, logical, and deliberative cognition about what is good and right); and doing what is good and right. Consequently, the goal of moral education is to unify the will, the emotions, and the intellect, in the service of the good. This is in line with Socrates statement, that when these three parts are unified and in harmony, the human soul exemplifies justice. In the *Confucian Book of Rites*, (p. 235) we can read,

If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there be beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

4.3.8 Conclusion

Moral education often depends on the interest and the character of the teacher. When a teacher is able to trigger students' attention towards admiring the beauty in nature, he/she is able to integrate his/her passion into the curriculum. For this to happen, the teacher must love beauty, especially moral beauty, which could be compared to the proverb that in order to inspire other people you first have to go through the transformation yourself.

The aim of education in human values is the all-round development of the child. It could be argued that academic excellence is not enough on its own but should be accompanied by good character, so that the knowledge acquired can be put to proper use for the benefit of the individual and society. As Aristotle's teaching state that people do not naturally become morally excellent or practically wise. They become so, if at all, only as the result of life-long personal and community effort.

Character education should become an underpinning value of presenting young learners a holistic view of the world, emphasizing the interrelatedness of everything in the natural



world. Exposing children to the beauty of nature, through all seasons, could elicit ‘elevation’, a moral emotion triggered by natural beauty that could lead to good moral decisions, and ultimately serve as a bridge between learning about life and values, and experiencing how to put the theory into practice.

4.4 Play

Introduction

According to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child’s right to play needs local and global recognition. In order to achieve this crucial goal, the play process has to be acknowledged, supported, and facilitated, and the right of children to decide and control the content and intent of their play has to be respected. Ultimately, all educators and parents need to understand that the play process is vital for the child’s healthy social and emotional development.

Else (2014) defines play as a valued part of childhood and offers a comprehensive summary of play:

Play is the way humans *develop efficient brains* – when children play, the nerve signals that the body generates, creates neural pathways that help with brain development and brain plasticity. Playing contributes to *developing effective systems for learning* rather than particular learning outcomes. Playing is a child’s free, open, boundless, and self-controlled activity. Through play children discover the differences between themselves, others and the world in which they live – These discoveries help them become individuals, independent, self-sufficient and autonomous.



Else (2014) concludes that humans describe play as a right to be endorsed and protected, yet it is fundamentally more important than that, and can not be reduced to a set menu or curriculum; play will emerge everywhere, given the right conditions. She argues that when we play, we become most alive and most human. Hence supporting many opportunities to play makes perfect sense. In childhood and throughout life we should be playing, as play is pleasurable, and it leads to enjoyment, satisfaction, and fun (p. 154).

4.4.1 The Value of Play

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1995), play enables children to understand the world, interact with others socially, control and express emotions, and establish their symbolic representation capabilities.

‘Learning through play’ is the key guideline for early childhood practitioners, who wish to implement this vital aim in the next millennium. However, research from Cheng (2001) reveals alarming signs that some early childhood practitioners are puzzled as to how to transform their theoretical knowledge on play, into offering meaningful play experiences for the children. These findings disclose an urgent need to transform teachers into reflective and critical practitioners, and highlight the need for bridging the gap between theory and practice. A lack of adult involvement seems to be a necessary ingredient of play experiences, in which the child, rather than the adult, takes the initiative. Dewey (1999) claims that playfulness is more important than play, as the former is an attitude of mind, and the latter a passing outward manifestation of this attitude. Children should feel that they are the ones taking the initiative, and that they have choices in self-managed activities. They also should have the flexibility to pretend and to determine the pace, while being engaged in enjoyable activities.

Another study conducted by Cheng and Stimpson (2004) recognized kindergarten teachers’ invaluable implicit knowledge to identify contextual practices, but also revealed

that these early childhood practitioners failed to make sense of learning through play in the classroom. The research disclosed that participants were obsessed with their intentions to include play, but unaware of the unintentional consequences of their rigid and mechanical thinking, which left children without real play experiences. Findings indicated that teachers seemed able to adopt learning through play by adapting old theories. Calderhead (1991) recommends a holistic picture of the practitioners' sense-making process in order to articulate their thoughts, and how these thoughts are put in action.

In conclusion, teacher education programs should acknowledge early childhood practitioners' potential difficulties and perceived challenges related to play, and explore multiple resources to support teachers in their endeavors towards implementing quality play in their teaching.

4.4.2 Zone of Play

The importance of play is highlighted by Konner (2010), who claims that children thrive on activities that are 'just right'. He introduces the term 'zone of play' as,

Intermediate stimulus patterns as a source of pleasure, which is enhanced by a certain degree of control which sensitive parents can lead their child into. However, because adaptation level changes with long-term stimulation, the amount and type of stimulation that will produce optimal arousal also change – a key process in development. (p. 505)

Konner's conclusions were in line with Csikszentmihalyi (1990) findings of 'flow'. He described that:

The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen. For a child, it could be placing with trembling fingers the last block on a tower she/he has built; for a swimmer it could be trying to beat his own record; for a violinist, mastering an intricate musical passage. (p. 3)

Or for a doctorate student writing the final rebuttal, my emphasis.

4.4.3 Play Flow

Play flow is defined by Else (2014) as a state of playing when a child becomes 'lost' in their play (p. 70), with no concern for the past or the future. Once entered into, this play flow can absorb children for minutes or days at a time. During this play, roles can be changed, a variety of themes can be covered, ideas are developed, and concepts are shifted. Ultimately, the play becomes self-regulated, and the play flow is reliant on the playing child getting satisfactorily feedback from play responses.

4.4.4 Play and Learning

Pramling-Samuelsson and Johansson (2006) argue that play and learning are inseparable dimensions in early childhood contexts, and that young children make no distinction between play and learning. Conversely, school children tend to differentiate between learning that happens in the classroom, and play that occurs during lunch breaks and occasionally in physical education classes.

Play enables children to communicate and experiment with the real world. Studies from Elkind (2007) revealed that, through play, children construct, deconstruct, and co-construct their world. Children's play is the way they enter into and engage in real and

imaginary enactments of what is seen around them. Gordon (2008) clarifies that through their interaction with the world, children can discover ways to transform understanding. Through play, children become active contributors to their learning, as in play, they are allowed to manipulate and sculpt their experiences.

Play has been advocated to develop positive mindsets, active engagement, intense concentration, and goal-directed motivation, which are essential attitudes for quality learning. Vygotsky (1966) argued that any imaginary situation in play results in rules, which change during the course of the game. However, Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg (1983) contradict, and define play as being free from rules that have been imposed from outside. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) identified six indicators for a state of playfulness: clear goals set by the player himself; concerned attention; loss of self-consciousness; altered sense of time; intrinsic motivation; and the belief that an experience is worthwhile for its own sake.

However, results of a study conducted by High Scope (2006) warned that in most kindergartens, open-ended, child-initiated play has been replaced with adult-initiated group instruction, in order to meet the curriculum demands. This report claims that children up to age seven would gain greater cognitive ability and increased language development, if preschools would encourage child-initiated learning rather than instruction by a teacher.

4.4.5 Rethinking Play

According to Sylva et al. (2004), Ryan (2005), and Wood (2007a), the educational emphasis on play in recent policy and curriculum documents, has seen other words attached to play such as ‘play-based learning/curriculum’ or ‘playful’ approaches to teaching and learning. This shift occurs concurrently with results in challenging traditional notions of play in relation to ‘free play’ or ‘discovery play’. Ryan’s (2005)

research shows how play in child-centered approaches is political, and how power relationships operate under the guise of freedom to choose, while Wood's (2009) findings on 'educational' play leads to questions about whose purpose and intentions are dominant, and what the 'modes, intentions, and outcomes' are of adult intervention (pp. 166 – 167).

4.4.6 The Trouble With Play

Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) unveil a 'darker' side of play, one that is not innocent, fair or natural, and requires teachers to implement more thoughtful approaches to play in the early years. Their findings question the discourse of 'natural' that comes into play, shaping how we think and speak about the children, and that the trouble with the idea that what is natural in children is selective as an accumulation of science, tradition, history, culture across time and place. These findings conclude that when teachers are focused only on the educational value of play and choose not to intervene in children's free play, it makes noticing or attending to unjust actions problematic. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) advise educators to 'play' with these thought-provoking questions about the sophisticated and multifaceted nature of children's relationships, and how they can very capably switch roles and identities to suit the situation (p. 11).

4.5 Creativity

Introduction

I maintain that there is a desperate social need for the creative behavior of creative individuals. – Carl Rogers (1982, p. 137)

Creativity can be seen as the 'gem' of true education. Once it is well developed, children are able to express whatever they are feeling and experiencing, as well as be able to tap into the 'higher knowledge' that lies within them.



The benefits of engaging young children in creative work are plentiful. Creative work develops skills, stimulates the child's imagination, and can be used as a way of expressing his/her thoughts, worries, needs, and feelings. Creative work builds self-confidence, strengthens concentration, and encourages discipline, patience, and perseverance.

Kates (2010) explores creativity as 'soul work', and its role in educational settings. She states that personal creativity has the capacity to awaken the transformational connection between the self-in-time, and the higher self or 'soul'. Steiner (1976) refers to the spiritual question, "what do I want to do in this life?" and claims that thinking about this question connects us to our personal purpose of being on earth, and links us to use our creative energy to affect change and transformation. Steiner (1976) states that learning should include the development of personal creativity, to help students re-discover their innate connection to their soul source, and advocates for an education that concerns the body, mind, and spirit, and that these principles should be 'known and recognized' (pp. 15 – 17). Steiner's statement was endorsed by Jack Miller (2000), who believes that as we re-align the unifying energies of our multi-dimensional self, which includes the creative, we are able to develop a more coherent relationship to soulful practices and soul-infused values.

"If we view personal creativity as an essential energy that re-aligns the personal will to the transpersonal will – the soul space within our psyche – then we more willingly open to the unbounded opportunities for self-nurturing and self-development" (Kates, 2010, p. 128). According to Arieti (1972), creativity invites us to open to our innate transformational resources, and empowers us to infuse soul awareness into our personal and educational relationships and life work. She concludes that "creativity is a gift of spirit; it is the 'magic synthesis' that unlocks the doors of unbounded perception" (in Kates, 2010, p. 128)



4.5.1 Storytelling to Enhance Creativity in Holistic Education

Duckworth's (2006) observations that,

The more we help children have their wonderful ideas and to feel good about themselves for having them, the more likely it is that they will some day happen upon wonderful ideas that no one else has happened upon before. (p. 14)

Giving children the opportunity to act out their ideas stimulates their self-confidence, which is acknowledged in a report by Cremin et al. (2013), stating that storytelling and acting out characters of a story showed a general increase in children's innovative and original ideas.

4.5.1.1 Storytelling and Story Acting

Paley (2011) has been researching for decades the optimal way to promote children's development (Miller & Almon, 2009). She argued that, although there is a growing consensus about the importance of early childhood education (Guernsey, 2013), there seems to be less agreement on the kinds of experiences children should have in a preschool environment. Her research revealed that storytelling/story acting (ST/SA) was the best way to promote children's creativity, social and emotional development, and language and literacy skills. Paley (2011) states that 'listening' is the heart of ST/SA: teachers listening to children, children listening to their classmates, and children listening to adults. This three-fold aim promotes a better understanding of each other's ideas, and enjoyment of each other's stories, with the impetus aligned with standard kindergarten requirements related to storytelling and drama play, such as: retelling a familiar story; identifying characters, settings and major events in a story; comparing and contrasting the adventures and experiences of characters in a familiar story, etc.



4.5.1.2 Benefits of Storytelling

Dennett (1991) states that storytelling is a fundamental human endeavor, and he uses the metaphor that, just like beavers build dams and spiders spin webs, people tell stories. This is in line with Carlson-Paige (2008) findings that people tell stories to share information, impart lessons, entertain, process events, and keep loved ones informed about their days. In early childhood settings, children are accustomed to stories, and eagerly and patiently wait for ‘story time’ to appear in their daily classroom routine.

4.5.1.2.1 Language and Literacy Skills

Findings from McCabe (2010) reveal that children who actively participate in storytelling and dramatizing stories, score higher than peers from comparable social-economic and linguistic backgrounds, as these activities provide a rich context for vocabulary development, especially since children listen to and use words in authentic ways.

4.5.1.2.2 Social and Emotional Development

According to Cremin et al. (2013), storytelling fosters a sense of belonging and social connections, even for children who seem to stand apart from other classmates. Carefully selected stories have the ability to forge bonds within a classroom community as illustrated in Paley’s (1991) *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter*.

4.5.1.2.3 Self-Regulation Through Storytelling and Drama Activities

According to McClelland et al. (2012), self-regulation is important to later school success. Hence, learning to self-regulate, to wait, take turns, and defer, is a major task of early childhood, and could be facilitated through storytelling and drama activities that promote

turn taking and following rules to dramatize stories, as researched by Nicolopoulou et al. (2006).

4.5.1.2.4 Scaffolding and Cultural Sensitivity During Storytime

Storytelling paves a smooth way for creating a ‘zone of proximal development’. Wertch (1991) introduces the term ‘gentle scaffolding’, as narrative development is enhanced through dialogue and questions during children’s story time sessions. However, McCabe (1997) warns that teachers, unfamiliar with a particular cultural style of storytelling, may evaluate children’s stories as underdeveloped or disorganized.

4.5.1.2.5 Supporting English Second Language (ESL) Children and Special Education Needs (SEN) Students Through Storytelling

Haneda and Wells (2012) inform that the non-verbal elements of storytelling, such as facial expression, pointing at pictures, and tone of teacher’s voice, provide children learning English, and children with special educational needs, unique opportunities to participate in an inclusive classroom setting. Storytelling and drama offer frequent opportunities to talk and connect to other children in the classroom.

4.5.2 Creativity to Enhance Values Education in a Holistic Curriculum

Rhett Diessner (2004) researched if “encouraging sensitivity to and recognition of beauty in the natural world and in *art* could be a developmental stepping-stone to recognizing moral beauty in the human social world.” It is crucial to understand that, only being educated in the beauty of literary and visual art is not enough, but it is necessary to experience the motivation of moral emotions, elicited by moral beauty, to bridge the gap between the knowledge of beauty and moral action. Children who are encouraged from a

young age to develop their creative abilities will grow up with a more balanced and harmonious nature.

Creativity and value education are intertwined to enhance the teaching and understanding of values in the holistic curriculum. There are numerous opportunities to incorporate values through the creative thinking and resourcefulness of the teacher. Asking the children to draw a scene from the story told in the lesson, gives the children the opportunity to use their artistic skills, and to imprint the contents of the story in their minds. Younger children can be given black and white sketches to color in. Children can be asked to draw the value in a color of their choice, triggering the expression of creative ideas on paper. Older children can be introduced to poems and encouraged to write their own; to express their feelings as an illustration and documentation, to reveal how values are perceived. Group drawing and writing can be modeled as a way of building on a previous student's drawing or writing. This exercise is excellent for developing cooperation between group members.

4.6 Caring Relationships

Introduction

Buber (1965) claims that relationship building is crucial in an early childhood environment, based on his findings that the authentic existence of man is realized in a relationship, and that trust is the most inward achievement of relations in education (pp. xiv – xv).

According to Noddings (1992), *caring relations* ought to be at the heart of holistic education, as the relationship that teachers establish with their students underpins their learning, social life, and social justice. Miller (2007) extends this notion of 'care', and informs that care is not only important for the physical development of students



(fostering healthy bodies), but equally important is that care should be given to ensure that crucial thinking opportunities are offered (creative thinking and problem solving is encouraged) using both analytical and intuitive thinking processes. In addition, Miller (2007) indicates that educators should care about how students relate to others and to the community, with a focus on communication skills.

This is in line with holistic educators “theories that students’ capabilities can only prosper and thrive in *caring learning communities*, showing mutual affection, respect, empathy, acceptance, and trust” (Forbes, 2003).

Palmer (1998) warns that in the absence of a teacher’s ability to connect with his/her *deeper self*, he/she will not be able to establish an authentic relationship with his/her students. Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools all emphasize that *caring* teachers work together *with* the child, as opposed to authoritarian figures who work *upon* them. In Montessori schools, teachers are encouraged to be a *guide* rather than a lecturer; in Waldorf schools, teachers are artistic *role models*, who render all subject matters into artistic experiences before presenting them to the child; and in Nature schools, teachers work as *co-explorers* alongside the children.

In conclusion, loving, caring, and genuine relationships between teachers and students are crucial in holistic education. Caring relationships promoting ‘prosocial’ behavior, such as sharing or providing comfort, and being aware of children’s capacity for empathy and sympathy will lead to ‘deep links’ between values and the real world.

4.6.1 Ethics of Care

Researchers warn of the risk of children’s natural learning strategies (such as play, exploration, freedom of movement, relations, and discussions with other children) being

less encouraged, if schools see preschool as a preparation for compulsory schooling, as it tends to limit attention given to the *caring* dimension of education.

Noddings (1992) has written a number of articles on the ethics of care, and has contributed significantly to our appreciation of education. She suggests that neither utilitarianism (making decisions on the basis of anticipated consequences) nor deontology (principled reasoning) can provide a proper understanding of the way ethical questions and concerns are approached. She also argues that the ethics of care revealed the old distinction between what ‘is’ and ‘ought’ as a pseudo problem.

4.7 Democracy

Introduction

Democracy is part of the holistic development and well-being of children. Swedish preschool education emphasizes the importance of learning and play, *democratic values*, equity, and a child-centered preschool environment, with cooperation between the children’s home and the preschool. The characterization of Swedish early childhood education was studied by Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan (2009, p. 50), and they reported that:

During the last few years, several evaluations of Swedish preschool have been carried out. Sweden was one of the 12 countries that the OECD (2001) evaluated in the project ‘Starting Strong’. One of their conclusions was that ‘*democracy*’ could be seen even in the group for young children, something which we have also found in our study. Today democracy and participation are seen as prerequisites for all kinds of learning at all ages. This can be related not only to the curriculum of preschool but also to the social policy that characterizes it, ‘low

fees, accessibility and efforts to maintain good quality’. (Regeringens proposition, 2004; Skolverket, 2005)

This was confirmed by Eger (2010) when he wrote:

Sweden stands out as arguably *the* most egalitarian, humanitarian, and *democratic* country in the world. Indeed, all key indicators point to just that. With consistently high economic growth and a strong welfare state that ensures low inequality. Swedes enjoy a high standard of living, universal health care, education, and generous unemployment benefits. Further, the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (2007) index of democracy ranks Sweden as *the most* democratic country with a near perfect score. (p. 204)

4.8 Concern for Nature

Introduction

Splitter (2003) questions if there is room in this,

Web of reciprocal relationships, to develop a genuine environmental ethic – that is, a concern for nature and the world which goes beyond a concern for persons to embrace a sense of care and respect for animals, trees, rivers, mountains etc., and ultimately for the world itself? (p. 222)

In case the answer is ‘yes’, he recommends the establishment of a “classroom community of environmental inquiry as a safe environment build on trust where students can link knowledge and thoughts, weave threads, sort arguments, and reach a balanced understanding and resolution of issues” (p. 225).

4.9 Spirituality

Introduction

Ratcliffe and Nye (2006) recommend a personal working definition, when researching spirituality. This can broadly correspond with a means of connecting people to each other, to all living things, to nature, and the universe. It is a way of appreciating the wonder and mystery of everyday life, and it gives a scope for love. Peace, happiness, and compassion are all aspects of life that cannot be bought by money, yet are crucial for a person's well-being.

According to Zhang and Tan (2010), spirituality is the human quest for meaning, purpose, self-transcending knowledge, and meaningful relationships. Wright (2000) defines spirituality as the relationship of the individual, within community and tradition, to that which is, or is perceived to be, of ultimate concern, value, and truth, as appropriated through an informed, sensitive, and reflective striving for spiritual wisdom (p. 14). Young children's spirituality is reflected in many ways. Many have observed that there is a natural spirituality in children, which is characterized by a sense of wonder and fascination, an ability to play and to engage in activities using the imagination, an acute awareness of present experiences and emotions, and the instinct to know when things are not as they should be or when the truth has not been told (Daly, 2004).

Holistic education emphasizes the importance of meditation as a way to create an inner harmony, which can be shared throughout educators' personal and professional lives. Hunt (1987) claims that starting with ourselves is vital. Through meditation, we could experience being interconnected with the whole, and may experience humbleness, awe, appreciation, and an indescribable connection with others.

4.9.1 Knowing – Emoting – Willing

Danesh (1997) suggests that all education that helps students develop virtues, directly or indirectly, is spiritual education. Crucial to spiritual education is integrating the three fundamental abilities of the human psyche, the powers of knowing, emoting (loving), and willing, in the service of the good. He illustrates that when we apply our ‘power to know’ to influential people (e.g. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa), their lives inspire us, and we feel an ‘elevation’ or a moral emotion which triggers a prosocial tendency to act to better ourselves and to serve others. Our ‘will’ commands our body to act, and changes the prosocial action ‘tendency’ into true action of service to others. Nava (2001) claims that fundamental to all genuine education is the spiritual level, which is inclusive of the individual, community, social, and environmental levels, and that holistic educators should always keep the spiritual level in mind when working at any other level. He introduced ‘soul learning’ as a multi-dimensional mode of learning, in which the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness. Spiritual growth is fostered through connectedness within themselves, and with other beings on this planet. Palmer (1998) defines spirituality as “not something that needs to be ‘brought into’ or ‘added onto’ the curriculum,” but claims that “it is at the heart of every subject we teach” (p. 8). Miller (2006) articulates the necessity for mindfulness practices in education and the importance of being fully present.

Unfortunately, in many countries in the world, many schools and policy makers have focused on education reforms that emphasize the academic performance and cognitive development of the child, neglecting to view the child as a whole person (Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003).

4.9.1.2 Confusion of Spirituality

Lantieri (2001) emphasized the importance of nurturing children's spirituality, without necessarily adhering to a particular religion. Far too often, confusion between religion and spirituality creates misunderstandings in curriculum implementation. Most schools take a pluralistic approach to belief, as an increasingly globalized world entails a diverse student population with myriad faiths being represented in the classroom. Consequently, it is of utmost importance to 'clarify' spiritual education in a school context as an important part of educating the 'whole child' in a secular, as opposed to religious, way. Palmer (1999) questioned how to induce a spiritual dimension of public education, as he claims that spirituality is intrinsic to the entire curriculum and not something separate.

Confusion, tension, misunderstanding, and frustration often occur when 'spirituality' is investigated, discussed, and explored. Early years teachers' knowledge of spirituality ought to be bridged with their classroom practice. Given the evidence that nurturing the spiritual development of each student is crucial, clarification is needed about the meaning, as the majority of education stakeholders tend to link spirituality with religious aspects.

Since spirituality is part of holistic and humanistic education, kindergarten educators should be made aware of this important aspect of whole child development, and address concerns about the caring needs of spiritual growth in young children. It could be argued that spiritual education is closely related with both humanistic education and holistic education. Spirituality education shares similar elements with liberal studies, in which the concerned areas and aspects of knowledge are widespread. Hence, it is not limited in promoting its meaning. Some literature regards spirituality education as religious education, while others show a close relationship between spirituality education and humanistic education, which could be unrelated to religious education.

As spirituality is an important aspect of educating the whole child, it is suggested that education authority and educators should be given more time, resources, and professional development, to promote the care for spiritual education in schools, enabling kindergarten teachers to address spirituality in their classrooms.

4.9.2 Spiritual Literacy

Lin (2006) gives a strong message about the importance of spiritual literacy, advocating for the elimination of ‘spiritual illiteracy’, as it enables students to open up to self-understanding. She claims that *transformation* occurs through relational understanding of inner wisdom to the outside world and others. Other important components to ensuring a spiritual curriculum are the provision of ‘*stillness*’ by the teacher, to promote openness and trust, and opportunities to ask questions and practice virtues. Binder (1998, p. 41) summarizes the transformative quality of ‘spiritual literacy’ as the ability to draw from a well of wisdom and meaning, conceptualizing these internal forces, and allowing them to become visible in meaningful ways. “Spiritual literacy enables us to define our place at a local, global, and universal level” (Binder, 2005, p. 138).

According to Palmer (1998), *spiritual literacy* is about making meaning at a profound level, through personal narrative, and the teacher being able to listen and to read the texts of the children’s experiences. It is about providing space for children to ask ‘bigger’ questions, and enabling them to respond and reflect upon their learning. Binder (2011) introduces the term ‘pedagogy of thought’ (p. 22).

Hay and Nye (2006) claim that nurturing spiritual literacy allows for “an awareness that there is something other, something greater than the course of everyday events” (p. 60).

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

“Research is a systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom” (Bassey, 1999, p.38)

Systematic implies a sense of order and structure. Since this research on the perceptions of holistic education relies on an innovative design, “the implication is that there is a connectedness about research which involves the planning and integration of design, process, and outcomes” (Morrison, 2002).

Chapter 5 explains the methodology and flow of thinking for this qualitative study, and provides a detailed overview of the research method, epistemological stance, data collection, analytical framework, comparative approach, and methodological challenges. In this chapter, I will guide the reader through the different stages and methods of systematic, creative, and critical inquiry used to investigate, conceptualize and communicate education stakeholders’ perceptions of ‘holistic education’.

This qualitative study encompasses Bassey’s (1999) definition of an educational case study, encapsulating my research *approach*, while Denzin and Lincoln’s (1998) description of ‘bricolage’ could be used to symbolize the *analysis* of this qualitative research.

Creswell’s (1998, p. 57) description of ‘constant comparative methods’ as a process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories *summarizes* my exciting, yet time consuming, research journey. The literature search, interviewing, documentary analysis, observations, and triangulation between methods



ultimately led to me providing a conceptual map of holistic education as an ‘audit trail’ by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments (Bassey, 1999, p. 58).

5.1 Research Methods

“Educational research must seek to articulate and examine the relationship between the educational realities it purports to explain and the educational values it unavoidably defends and promotes.” (Carr, 1995, p. 99)

5.1.1 Justification of Research Methods

Realizing the complexity of this research and deciding on the use of appropriate research methods, four key words emerged that I will explain in sequence: ‘alchemy’, ‘bricolage’, ‘bricoleur’, and ‘cauldron’.

Researchers are constantly faced with a series of choices and options in selecting research methods. Ultimately, as a researcher you have to make the ‘optimum’ choice to justify the particular context of the research you are undertaking (Watling, 2002, p. 264). Watling’s metaphor of equating analysis as researchers’ ‘alchemy’, where the hope of turning raw data into nuggets of pure gold through equal measures of science and art, can be applied to the outcome of this study. It is my hope and aim that the results of this study can be turned into a holistic framework for early childhood, by extracting useful information and practical guidelines from this research for the use of other practitioners who wish to implement holistic education in their classroom settings.

In this qualitative research I try to make critical choices about the meanings and values of the acquired data, and to ensure that my decisions can be justified in terms of the research, the context in which it was carried out, and the people who were involved in it.

I put myself into the position of a '*bricoleur*', derived from the French word '*bricoler*', symbolizing the collection of processes as '*bricolage*', described by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) as 'a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation' (p. 3) while the bricoleur embodies the key skills of a flexible, creative, intuitive qualitative researcher who seeks to produce an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena (p. 265).

I came across the word '*caldron*' while doing consulting work on problem-based learning (PBL). Murphy (in Bridges & Hallinger, 1995, p. xiii) used the metaphor of '*caldron*' to describe how practice and research in PBL are "thoroughly mixed and blended in processes and products," claiming that Bridges and Hallinger redirected our thinking and provided a "remarkable useful vehicle" to actualize this directed energy. Murphy (1995) also stated that this might have been Bridges and Hallinger's most significant contribution. In line with this '*caldron*' metaphor, I hope the research methods used, in combination with the concluding diagrams, will offer some kind of '*roadmap*' which educators and caregivers can use to navigate through to find a road, street, highway, boulevard, lane or just a simple path or a signpost which they can use however they wish in the classroom or in the area in which they would like to improve existing practices by consulting elements of the HECF or implementing keywords from the HEST.

I will now explain my '*bricolage*', "a complex, dense, reflexive collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4).

Swedish curriculum documents (Lpfo, 98) will be analyzed to find the broad key areas that lead to holistic education. Stakeholders will be interviewed to understand their perceptions of holistic education and their prioritization of the holistic stances. Observation of classroom practices in the three case schools will take place to capture the methods and approaches of holistic education by the practitioners.

Triangulation is a crucial means of cross-checking data to establish its validity by comparing many sources of evidence, in order to determine the accuracy of information or “explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 233).

In this study, documentary analysis of preschool curriculum documents (Lpfo 98) will be checked against interviews with stakeholders for interpretations of these documents and complemented with classroom observations to examine if what interviewees communicate actually takes place in classroom settings. Triangulation will also take place between case schools to check similarities and differences of observed phenomena, in line with Nisbet and Watt’s (1984) concept of triangulation in case study research:

In order to guard against being misled, either in interview or by documents, you must check one informant against another, and test what they say against any documents which exist. Similarly, observations in once context must be checked against others in comparable situations. The basic principle in data collection for case study is to check your data across a variety of methods and a variety of sources. (p.85)

5.1.1.1 Qualitative Study

Any researcher has to evaluate and reflect on suitable methods that match the purpose of answering the research questions. According to Henwood and Pidgeon (1994), the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is a ‘technical matter’, whereby the choice depends on the ‘suitability’ in answering particular research questions (p. 17). “Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals’ perceptions of the world.” (Bell, 1993, p. 5)

5.1.1.2 Interpretive Paradigm

Since the purpose of this study was to capture education stakeholders' in-depth perceptions of holistic education, I evaluated an array of research options and decided that a *qualitative* approach with an *interpretive paradigm* best matched the aims of my research. Coleman and Lumby (1999, p. 11) explain 'essential features' that are in line with the focus of this study, such as viewing the world as being socially constructed and subjective, where the observer is part of what is observed, and believing that science is driven by human interest. As eliciting stakeholders' perceptions focused on meanings, interpretations, and trying to understand what is happening, and using small samples to look at the totality of the situation by using multiple methods to establish different *in-depth* views of the phenomena, all the above validate the choice of a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm.

Another reason for choosing the interpretive paradigm was that understanding stakeholders' meanings of holistic education could emerge from this research, and this new understanding could be used to make a practical framework of holistic education for other early childhood practitioners.

5.1.2 Case Study Research

According to Bassey (2002), an educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is: conducted with a localized boundary of space and time; investigates interesting aspects of an educational activity, program, institution, or system, mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons; done in order to inform the judgments and decisions of practitioners, policymakers, or theoreticians who are working to these ends, and such that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able to explore significant features of the case; to create plausible interpretations of what is found; to test for trustworthiness of these interpretations; to construct a worthwhile argument or story

to any relevant research in the literature; to convincingly convey to an audience this argument or story; and to provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments (p. 109). In this study, I aim to: explore significant features of holistic education; create plausible interpretations of my findings; construct a worthwhile framework to relate to the provision of holistic education ‘without borders’; convincingly convey to an audience of policymakers, school principals, and teachers; and provide an audit trail for the perusal of other researchers or practitioners to validate or challenge the findings or construct alternate opinions.

5.1.3 Documentary Research

According to Cortazzi (2002),

Documents can be read for embedded meanings as unwitting evidence for such aspects of educational institutions as the exercise of power and control, the presentation of real or contrived images, the leaking of attitudes, values and social expectations which the authors might have thought hidden. (p. 202)

In this study, documentary analysis will be used both as a major method, and as a way to provide triangulation.

5.1.4 Interviews

According to Wragg (2002), “interviews are a fruitful source of information when handled skillfully, either as the sole means of enquiry, or in conjunction with observations” (p. 144). He warns against ‘interviewer bias’ and recommends not to lead the respondent towards expressing certain beliefs endorsed by the investigator (p. 143). In this study, the questions were meticulously composed to elicit important information, while avoiding potential hazards of sample bias (see appendix 4 for sample questions).

5.1.5 Observations

According to Moyles (2002), “observation as a research tool, seeks explicit evidence through the eyes of the observer, either directly or through a camera lens” (p. 172). Robson (1993) states that observation is a holistic approach concerned with the observations of everyday events and the descriptions and construction of meaning, rather than reproduction of events.

As the aim of this study is to unveil the perceptions of holistic education to construct meaning and to create a holistic early years framework, observation is a powerful tool, especially in extracting classroom practices related to the delivery of holistic practices.

5.1.6 Triangulation

Triangulation is a crucial means of cross-checking data to establish its validity by comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or “explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 233).

In this study, documentary analysis of preschool curriculum documents (Lpfo 98) will be checked against interviews with stakeholders for interpretations of these documents and complemented with classroom observations to examine if what interviewees communicate actually takes place in classroom settings. Triangulation will also take place between case schools to check similarities and differences of observed phenomena in line with Nisbet and Watt’s (1984) concept of triangulation to case study research:

In order to guard against being misled, either in interview or by documents, you must check one informant against another, and test what they say against any

documents which exist. Similarly, observations in once context must be checked against others in comparable situations. The basic principle in data collection for case study is to check your data across a variety of methods and a variety of

5.2 Data Collection

I visited each case school three times during a two-week period in the month of February in 2014. The first visit offered a tour of the school and an interview with the school principal. The second visit gave me the opportunity to observe the classrooms and interview teachers, while the third visit was to verify my transcriptions, and to discuss or clarify statements or observations.

Privacy and guarantee of anonymity measures were taken to prevent disclosing identifiable information about interviewees. Each record interview was assigned a code, and I separately kept the list of names and matching codes in a secure place. Research records were maintained for the purpose of collecting information about interviewees' perceptions of holistic education, and *not* to make judgments about individuals or to support decisions that could directly and personally affect an individual. Individual information was only recorded to keep track of respondents' data, and transcripts were sent to interviewees for their perusal. As a precautionary measure against unintended disclosure, before releasing the data I had removed all identifiers, such as interviewees' names and positions, and the addresses and telephone numbers of the case schools.

5.3 Tools for Analysis

I analyzed the Swedish national curriculum documents (Lpfo 98 rev. 2010) to derive elements of holistic education. I conducted semi-structured interviews in *Sweden* in three different school systems (Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools), to map stakeholders' perceptions of holistic education. In Sweden, all preschools are subject to follow the

national curriculum. I observed the classroom practice in all three case schools for triangulation between the different research methods and to increase reliability and validity.

As I wanted to elicit the *perceptions* of participants, semi-structured interviews allowed for greater depth, especially when trying to identify similarities and differences between the different pedagogies. While questionnaires reach a bigger sample size, face-to-face interviews offer the possibility of “modifying one’s line of enquiry, following up interesting responses, and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot” (Robson, 1993, p. 229).

Results of this research show how politics and educators can *complement* each other in their different roles to successfully implement holistic education, only if meaning and application is *cross-fertilized* across all levels and stakeholders, enhancing an improved holistic view of early childhood education.

5.4 Generalization of Findings

As one of the aims is to collect data to support the Hong Kong Education Department’s improvement of ‘whole child education’, *caution* is needed to account for cultural differences and as is the concept of ‘fittingness’ as defined by Schofield (1994). He suggests analyzing the ‘degree’ to which the studied situation matches other situations, and recommends a “workable way of thinking about the generalization of research results” (p. 206).

As this is a Western study to be conducted in the East, it is crucial to keep Vijver’s (1997) ‘emic sensitivity’ in mind when providing underlying information for the Hong Kong Education Department about the ‘whole child approach’, and in order to help improve the current views on holistic education in Hong Kong preschools. I agree with Vijver (1997,



p. 43), who states that, “In an increasingly globalized world, educational leadership should adopt a strategy of integrating etic principles for maintaining a global perspective with emic sensitivity to manage diversified workforce in culturally embedded organizations.”

As described in detail in section 1.6.7.3, Berry’s (1990) and Brown’s (1991) findings while purely emic studies lack validity and they do not lead to universal laws of behavior, they should not be overlooked as universality is the ultimate aim of any scientific endeavor.

I keep Greenfield’s (2000) study in mind, in which he claims that there are aspects of culture “that are so deeply engrained in the minds of people that they take them for granted or they are repressed to the extent that only knowledgeable outsiders can notice them” (p. 233). It is important to understand that the curricula of the selected Swedish case schools all have a common ancestry in European humanism, while in Asia this humanistic tradition is not present. Sensitivity and caution need to be practiced when introducing Western humanistic values to early childhood education in Chinese societies.

5.5 Epistemological Stance

From an epistemological perspective, I refrained from using a positivist approach, as phenomena that are investigated in line with a positivist paradigm are “external to the individual” (Cohen & Manion, 1989, p. 8), applying to mostly quantitative methods such as experiments and surveys. I opted to unveil the personal reality, applying in-depth interviews combined with classroom and participant observations, and documentary analysis for triangulation in order to increase the reliability and validity of this qualitative study.

5.6 Data Collection Instruments and Sample Size

5.6.1 Instrument

Curriculum analysis, interviews, observations, and triangulation between the different research methods will take place, as described in detail in 5.1 to 5.9.

5.6.2 Sample

Twenty stakeholders in total have been interviewed: two policymakers, one senior and one junior; six educators from an international holistic nature symposium; and four interviewees per case school (Nature, Montessori, and Waldorf), and candidates were school principals, curriculum coordinators, senior teachers, and junior teachers. For full overview of interviewees, see Appendix 3.

5.6.3 Data

This study started with literature research about holistic education to identify the philosophical principles underlying holistic education. Analyzing the work of holistic education theorists led to conceptualizing the area. This was followed by synthesizing the principles of holistic education into broad principles for analysis, identification, and comparison of three school systems in Sweden.

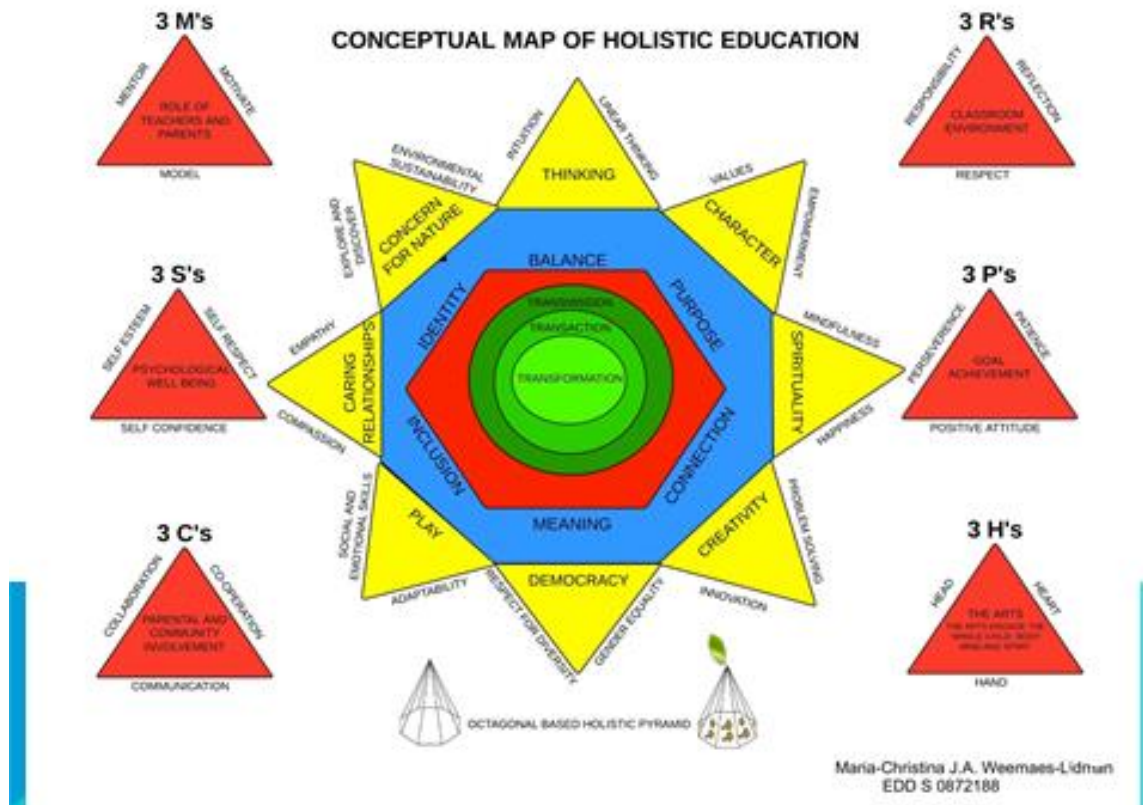
A documentary analysis of Sweden's preschool curriculum documents, and identifying similarities and differences between holistic education guidelines created a conceptual map of holistic education that was then used to analyze the perceptions of education stakeholders, which were elicited through semi-structured interviews.

5.6.4 Analytical Framework

I have developed a conceptual map of H. Ed. based on a literature review and documentary analysis of the case countries. John Miller's (2007) overarching principles of balance, inclusion, and connection have been combined with Ron Miller's (1992) holistic learning through identity, meaning, and purpose, to form the basis of this conceptual map. Documentary analysis of the Swedish curriculum documents revealed keywords that extended this basis. In order to increase the validity and reliability of this conceptual map, and to ensure a good representation of the East and West, I analyzed curriculum documents of additional countries, namely Bhutan, Myanmar, Afghanistan, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, to identify key words related to H. Ed. The key words were then used to make the supporting triangles of holistic education. Documentary analysis of early childhood curricula in the case countries and extended countries revealed eight broad similarities. This analysis resulted in an octagonal-based holistic pyramid, with triangle sides of *thinking*, *character*, *spirituality*, *creativity*, *democracy*, *play*, *caring relationships*, and *concern for nature*. These eight key concepts will be used to analyze and compare curriculum documents and interviews, in order to map the interpretations of H. Ed. in the three case schools in Sweden, and to identify particular emphases per school system.

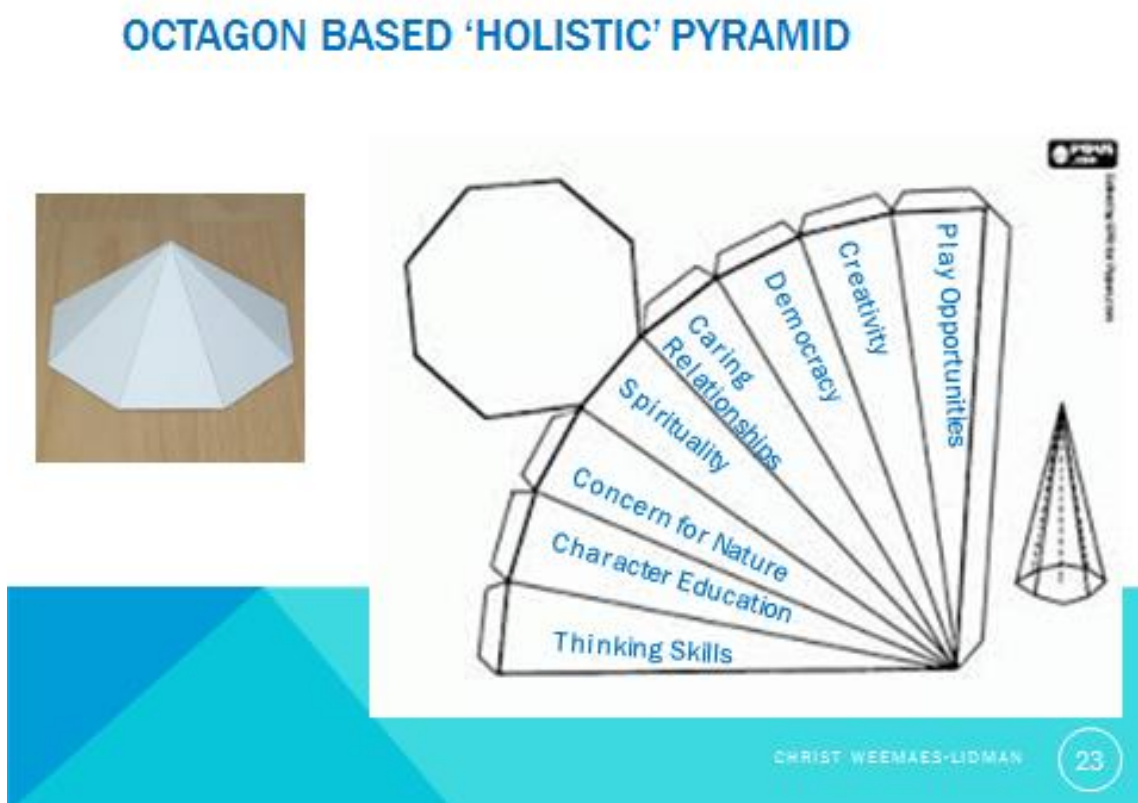
This conceptual map (Figure 1) is organic, and will be used for analytical purposes initially. As the research progresses, this conceptual map could be molded, shaped, and developed to serve as a conceptual 'holistic early childhood framework', used to clarify and simplify a complex paradigm, and could become a welcoming tool for many passionate early childhood practitioners who are committed to implement H. Ed. in their daily classroom routines, but are still puzzled as to how to make it happen.

5.6.4.1 Figure 1: Conceptual Map of Holistic Education



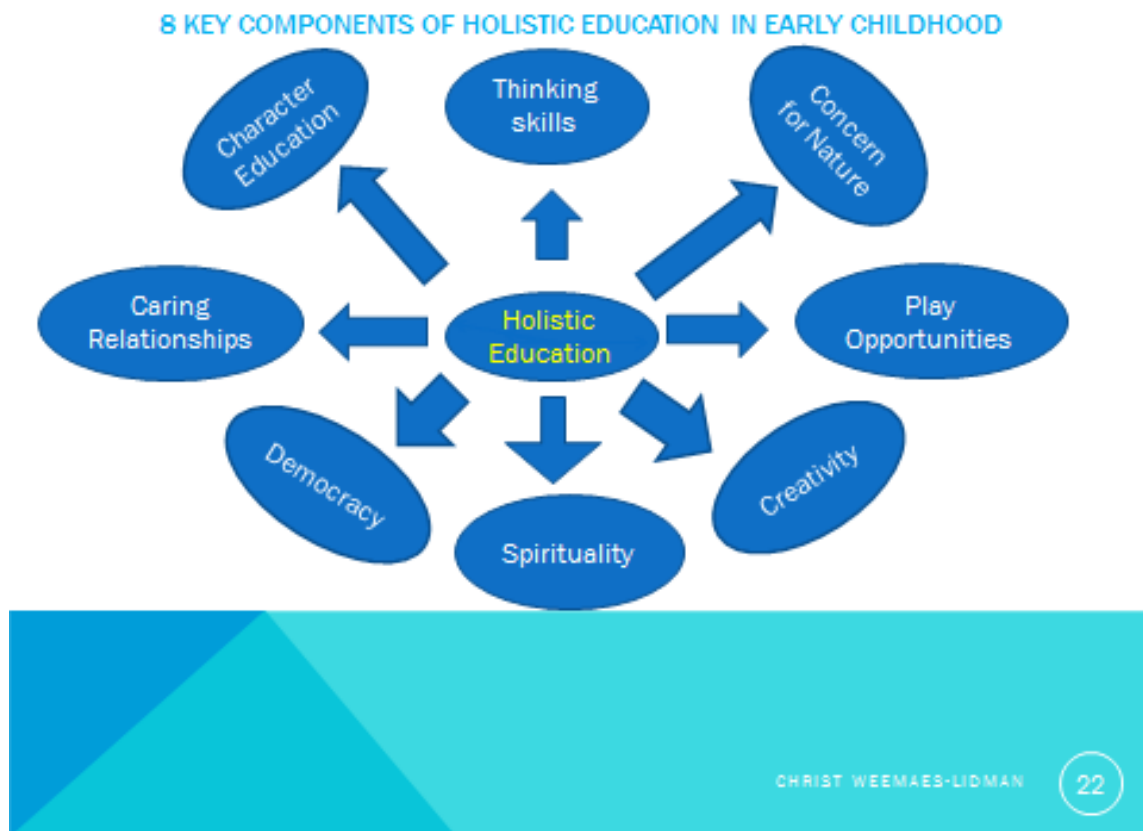
This conceptual map of holistic education will be used for mapping the interpretations of holistic education in the three case studies, and for identifying particular emphases per case country. A documentary analysis will be used for curriculum interpretations and in identifying similarities and differences in definition and interpretation of holistic education between these three case countries. Semi-structured interviews with different educational stakeholders will shed light on the interpretation of holistic education by education stakeholders, its operationalization in school curricula, and its implementation in classrooms.

5.6.4.2 Figure 2: Octagonal Based Holistic Pyramid



According to analysis of curriculum documents, the eight important key concepts underpinning holistic education are: *thinking skills, character formation, concern for nature, caring relationships, importance of play in early childhood, democracy, creativity, and spirituality* (see figure 2). These eight holistic stances will be used in the analysis of curriculum documents, and in mapping stakeholders' perceptions of holistic education.

5.6.4.3 Figure 3: Eight Components of Holistic Education in Early Childhood



5.7 Method of Analysis

This qualitative study utilizes literature research about H. Ed. to identify the philosophical principles underlying H. Ed., and to conceptualize it. The synthesized principles of H. Ed. were categorized into eight broad principles for the analysis, identification, and comparison of the three school systems in Sweden.

A documentary analysis of Sweden's preschool curriculum documents were analyzed against eight holistic stances, and semi-structured interviews with educational stakeholders were conducted to elicit their perceptions of H. Ed., and to identify similarities and differences in defining and interpreting H. Ed.

A comprehensive ‘conceptual map’ of H. Ed. has been used as an analytical framework based on literature review and analysis of countries at different levels of curriculum reform, supplemented with analysis of curriculum documents of additional Eastern and Western countries in order to ensure good cultural representation.

5.8 Added Value of Comparative Approach

Adamson and Morris (2007) define comparisons of curricula as “work-on-progress” (p. 282), indicating the human interactions that occur in planning, implementing, and experiencing, as well as the ‘regularity’ in which curriculum reform is undertaken. As a novice researcher embarking on a ‘holistic research journey’ across three school systems, trying to balance three of Marsh and Willis’ (1995) broad concepts of curricula (experienced learning, personal transformation, and life experiences), with the ideologies of progressivism and cognitive pluralism that holistic education encompasses (Adamson & Morris, 2007, p. 268), this research is as complex as the issue it tries to unveil. However, despite an array of limitations, this study investigating the perceptions of holistic education in three school systems remains valuable, as it could lead to “useful transfers of good practice, informed decision-making, and deepen understandings of the interactions between education and its social, economic, and political contexts” (p. 282). This could be the start of a deeper, integrated theoretical understanding of education stakeholders’ perceptions of holistic education across countries and cultures.

5.9 Methodological Challenges

Although interviewing offers a major advantage in eliciting in-depth research, it is a very time consuming method. A one-hour interview may take up to four hours to transcribe, and an additional two hours to analyze according to the researcher’s analytical framework.

In addition, interviews with teachers were conducted in Swedish, and at times, translations had to be in descriptive form as no corresponding English vocabulary was available.



CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Introduction

In Chapter 6, I will analyze curricula against my holistic octagon (Figure 2), and I will present a detailed overview of the stakeholders’ perceptions of holistic education in individual school systems.

6.1 Analysis of Swedish Preschool Curriculum Documents (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010)

6.1.1 Democracy

“*Democracy* forms the foundation of the preschool” (Lpfo, p.3). The Education Act (2010, p. 800) stipulates that education in preschools aims for children to acquire and develop knowledge and values. It should promote all children’s development and learning, and a lifelong desire to learn. An important task of the preschool is to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental *democratic values* on which Swedish society is based. Each and every person working in the preschool should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person, as well as respect for our shared environment. The foundation on which these values rest expresses the ethical attitude that should characterize all preschool activity.

The activities of the preschool should be carried out *democratically* and thus provide the foundation for a growing responsibility and interest on the part of children to actively participate in society. (p. 3)

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak

and vulnerable are all values that the preschool should actively promote in its work with children. (p. 3)

6.1.2 Caring Relationships

The Lpfo 98 states that solidarity and tolerance should be established at an early age to develop children's ability to take responsibility: "Preschool should be characterized by *care for the individual's well-being and development*". Furthermore, the preschool should "encourage and strengthen the child's compassion and empathy for the situations of others," and "develop social preparedness so that solidarity and tolerance are established at an early age" (p. 3).

Care and consideration towards other people, justice and equality, and the rights of each individual shall be emphasized and made explicit in all preschool activities. Children assimilate ethical values and norms primarily through their concrete experiences. "The attitudes of adults influence the child's understanding and respect for the rights and obligations that apply in a democratic society" (p. 3). For this reason, adults serve as important role models.

Upholding these fundamental values requires that the attitudes from which they are derived are clearly apparent in daily activities. The activities of the preschool should be carried out democratically, and thus build the foundation for a growing responsibility and interest to actively participate in society in the children.

6.1.3 Character Education

The preschool should account for and develop children's ability to take responsibility, and develop their social preparedness, so that solidarity and tolerance are established at an early stage (p. 3).

The preschool should also encourage and strengthen the child's compassion and empathy for the situations of others. Preschool should be characterized by caring for the individual's well-being and development (p. 3).

6.1.4 Spirituality

Swedish preschools aim to develop the child's sense of empathy and concern for others, as well as an openness and respect for differences in people's views and ways of life. This is echoed in the Lpfo 98 stating, "no child in the preschool should be subjected to discrimination due to gender, ethnic group, religion or other faith, sexual orientation of a family member or functional impairment, or be subjected to other degrading treatment" (p. 3).

As Sweden is a country that welcomes a multitude of immigrants with diverse backgrounds, a wide variety of nationalities and ethnicities attend preschools. Swedish preschool documents state that, "Increasing mobility across national borders creates cultural diversity in the preschool, which provides children with the opportunity to show respect and consideration for each individual irrespective of background" (p. 4).

6.1.5 Thinking Opportunities

The Swedish Curriculum Guidelines clearly state that children should be supported in developing confidence in their own ability to think for themselves: to act, to move, and to learn, enabling them to develop from different perspectives such as the intellectual, linguistic, ethical, practical, sensory, and aesthetic (Lpfo 98, p. 6).

The Swedish Education Act (2010, p. 800) states clearly that, "all who work in the preschool should uphold the fundamental values that are set out in the Education Act."

This is reinforced by the Swedish Curriculum documents (Lpfo 98, p. 4) which states that, “all who work in the preschool should clearly dissociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values.”

Swedish children are encouraged to think for themselves. Curriculum documents urge each child “to reflect on and share their thoughts with others in various ways about questions of life” (Lpfo 98, p. 3), which should be supported by adults. Furthermore, children are also given the opportunity to explore an issue on their own in greater depth.

Children should have the opportunity of developing their ability to observe and reflect. The preschool should be a living social and cultural environment that stimulates children into taking initiative, and develops their social and communicative competence. Children should also have the opportunity to explore issues on their own in greater depth, and to search for their own answers and solutions.

The preschool should support children to develop a positive picture of themselves, as learning and creative individuals. They should be supported in developing confidence in their own ability to think for themselves, to act, to move, and to learn i.e. to develop from different perspectives, such as the intellectual, linguistic, ethical, practical, sensory, and aesthetic (holistic view of child).

“The preschool should be open to different ideas and encourage their expression” (Lpfo 98, p. 4). Each child should have the opportunity to form their own opinions and make choices in the light of their personal circumstances. Full participation and belief in their own ability should be established and grown. All parents should be able to send their children to the preschool, and be fully confident that their children will not be prejudiced against in favor of another with any particular view.

6.1.6 Play Opportunities

“Play and enjoyment in learning in all its various forms stimulate the imagination, insight, communication, and the ability to think symbolically, as well as the ability to co-operate and solve problems” (Lpfo 98, p. 6).

According to the Swedish Curriculum for pre-school (Lpfo 98), a conscious use of play should be an “omnipresent activity” in the preschool to promote the development and learning of each child (p. 6). The curriculum also emphasizes the notion of joy and fun during play, and links curiosity and the ability to learn (p. 9).

Play is important for the child’s development and learning. The conscious use of play to promote the development and learning of each individual child should always be present in preschool activities. Through creative and gestalt play, the child is given opportunities to express and work through his or her experiences and feelings.

These curriculum guidelines are in line with Elkind’s (2007) findings that play is how young children enter into and engage in real and imaginary enactments of what is seen around them. Play enables children to articulate and experiment with the living world, and it is through interaction with the world that children can discover ways to transform understanding. Undisturbed quality play allows children to manipulate and shape their connection with the world.

6.1.7 Play from a Swedish Perspective

Sweden advocates that creativity and innovation start with children’s play, and enhances creativity and imagination. If children are allowed to play undisturbed, and without any parents’ rules imposed on them, they will use their imagination and be creative.

Creativity is based on freethinking and cooperation with others. The Swedish society and its values aims to create individuals who learn to solve problems, cooperate, and respect the fact that each person's view and knowledge is relevant. They are also allowed to 'fail'. In a country that promotes confidence and independence as important qualities, people can put their ideas to work and become entrepreneurs. It allows them to believe in themselves and caters for the necessary risk-taking.

Sweden's model for the provision of pre-school and childcare might be considered 'utopian', as its financing requires both parents and industry to contribute. However, Sweden has succeeded in offering quality pre-school education and care for all parents, facilitating a combination of parenthood and work life.

It is important to shed light on the definition of play in Hong Kong and Sweden, and how it is perceived and delivered. An overview of the politics of Swedish pre-schools and their intentions and decisions could unveil why Sweden is regarded as the most innovative country in the world, and that it all starts with children's play.

6.1.8 Creativity

According to Lpfo 98, preschool children should be provided with ample opportunity and variety to develop and enhance their creative skills.

Creating and communicating using different forms of expression, such as pictures, song and music, drama, rhythm, dance and movement, as well as spoken and written language, provide both the contents and methods to be used by the preschool in promoting the development and learning of the child. (p. 6)

This curriculum statement is in line with Ambrose's (2005) stating that "accepting alternative perspectives and representational expressions through the opening of spaces

can lead to continuous movement of reconnection to significant relational experiences and awareness in the classroom community”, since “to create is to transform”.

6.1.9 Concern for Nature

Swedish preschool documents clearly state that, “the preschool should put great emphasis on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation” (Lpfo, p. 7), as well as to “give children the opportunity of understanding how their own actions can have an effect on the environment” (p. 11). Preschools should encourage students to respect all forms of life (p. 8), and to develop an interest and understanding of the different cycles in nature, and how people, nature, and society influence each other (p. 10). This significance is echoed in Splitter’s (2003) statement:

In virtually every region on earth, there are deep conflicts over the policies to be adopted for the conservation of natural resources, as well as the preservation of many aspects of nature which industrialization and population growth are threatening to destroy. Those who would preserve rainforests as the lungs of the earth are seen as jeopardizing the economic wellbeing of farmers and timber workers. Those who would protect the whale as valuable in its own right are seen as threatening the activities of fisher folk whose livelihoods depend upon the cod that the whale consume. Every day heralds warnings of new and previously unsuspected forms of contamination, public awareness of which leads to a realization of how limited are the options for dealing effectively with such problems. (p. 222)

6.2 Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Holistic Education

6.2.1 Policymakers

SPM stands for Senior Policy Maker and JPM for Junior Policy Maker.

During an interview, the JPM lavishly explained the Education Act (2010, p. 800), stipulating that education in the preschool aims for children to acquire and develop knowledge and values, and that democracy forms the foundation of the preschool.

In reply to the question about his perceptions of holistic education, he referred to the curriculum document (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010, p. 4), stating that all activities in preschools should be based on a *holistic view of the child* and his or her needs, and should be designed so that care, socialization, and learning combine to form a *coherent whole*. The SPM added that an important part of holistic education is the partnership with the home, and the responsibility of the preschool to help families by supporting them in their role of raising and helping their children to grow and develop. Another important aspect in holistic education, as perceived by the SPM, is the *support* that all children should receive in relation to their needs, as this shows inclusion and equal value of all people. A sentiment supported by the Lpfo 98 (p. 5), which states that:

Pedagogical activities should be related to the needs of all children in the preschool. Children who occasionally or on a more permanent basis need more support and stimulation than others should receive such support so that they are able to develop to their full potential as well.

From a national perspective, both the SPM and JPM indicated that Swedish children's awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the culture of others is important in a society that enforces high demands on the capability of people to live with and understand values inherent to cultural diversity, as is indicated in the Lpfo 98 (p. 5).

The SPM also stated:

Swedish preschools are based on democratic values in line with national policy. Consequently, all the staff at preschools should respect these values and act accordingly. It is the responsibility of the ‘preschool team’ to anchor these values through their actions and attitudes, showing equality between all students and genders, solidarity with weaker students, valuing individual freedom, and integrity. These values have to be *embodied* in preschool staff’s work attitude continuously.

Our Education Act also states that the *individual* child’s wellbeing, security, development, and learning should characterize the work of the preschool. This implements that some preschools need more resources than other preschools, to reach the target that ‘preschools *irrespective of where it is located*, should be *equivalent*’. As policymakers, we have to ensure that our educators understand and respect the values of cultural diversity, as our preschools offer a social and cultural meeting place for *all* preschool children in Sweden.

The JPM said:

Children learn ethical norms and values through concrete experiences. Adults’ approach in preschool influences children’s understanding and respect for the rights and obligations that underpin a democratic society, and, as a result, all adults that work with children should be exemplary role models.

I was also shown how the Swedish curriculum documents clearly state that, “all personal and/or cultural opinions related to the individual preschool staff that are not in line with this philosophy have to give way to honor Swedish preschools’ democratic values” (Lpfo 98, p. 4).

This policymaker emphasized the importance of parent involvement in the holistic educating of a child. Again, he showed me how this was echoed in Lpfo 98, p. 4. “Our policy documents also clearly state that in order to educate the child ‘holistically’, preschools have to work in co-operation with parents. As a result, we recommend all preschool principals to implement a well-functioning ‘school-parent-child’ support system.”

The SPM communicated his view about play and said:

As your research focuses on early childhood, I need to mention how our Swedish society respects the role of ‘play’ in preschools. We are aware that our point of view can be contradicting to Asian values, where parent’s expectations differ from our Swedish parents’ expectations. We truly believe that conscious use of play promotes the development and learning of each individual and stimulates the imagination. Often at international conferences our country is seen as the most creative and the most innovative in the world, and on a professional level (as a policy maker) *and* (a personal level) as a father of three kids, I agree that giving children the opportunity to play, explore, and fail, will help them later on to be creative, and try to find new solutions to existing problems.

In addition to his interview, I was given a magazine from the Swedish Trade Council, which included a comprehensive article about the Swedish pavilion at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. The article emphasized three key words to represent Sweden: innovation, communication, and sustainability, while indicating that *creativity* and *innovation* start with children’s play. While showing a representative poster board that was used at this pavilion, my interviewee explained that, according to Swedish philosophy, play enhances creativity and imagination, and the more undisturbed children are allowed to play, the less rules parents impose on them during play, and the more they will use their imagination and be creative. The Commissioner General for Swedish

participation at the 2010 Expo, Annika Rembe, introduced her keynote speech about Swedish innovation as follows:

Creativity is based on freethinking and cooperation with others. It all goes back to how we bring up our children. The Swedish society and our values create individuals who learn to solve problems, co-operate, and respect the fact that each person's view and knowledge is relevant. Children are also allowed to 'fail'. Both confidence and independence are important qualities if you want to put your ideas to work and become an entrepreneur. It allows you to believe in yourself and lets you take some necessary risks.

When asked by a Chinese reporter if she saw the Chinese as creative and innovative, Rembe replied that, "from the perspective of play and the way of treating children, the Swedish and Chinese perspectives are very different". She expressed her belief that some Chinese parents might be extremely protective of their children, sometimes to the point that the children are not allowed to explore and learn through healthy trial and error. Chinese children also start school very early, and consequently, the important role of free play is diminished substantially. She also mentioned that, "the Swedes were not so formal and hierarchically inclined, keeping an open dialogue on all levels". This openness helps the flow of ideas, and helps people at all levels to express their opinion. She concluded:

Employees know that they are 'allowed' to state their opinion, experience, and insights; equally, children's views can be shared, listened to, and valued. Just as the higher up you are in an organization, the farther away you tend to be from the customer, so customer-service related innovation should come from the people on the floor who interact with the customers on a daily basis.

This statement can be compared with the importance of listening and valuing children's views when discussing educational change.



Although this article and the policymaker's willingness to illustrate his personal and professional beliefs about the importance of free play leading to creativity and ultimate problem solving is not at a scholarly level, I think it is important to include this in this study, as it was communicated during the interview and it represents how Sweden positions itself in relation to children's rights to play.

6.2.2 Nature Schools

Documentary analysis and staff interviews in Nature schools revealed that exposing children to nature develops them intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and physically. Playing in nature especially promotes problem solving and creativity, as well as emotional and intellectual development. Nature provides children with a perfect playground to live, play, and learn in, and is positively associated with better academic performance. Most Nature schools have a school garden as a basis for experiential learning and hands-on experience with natural ecosystems, enhancing children's understanding of food chains and environmental attitudes and behaviors.

The staff of Nature schools explained that exposing children to the outdoors encompasses all the excitement of a fieldtrip: learning, inquiry, desire to create, sense of excitement, level of curiosity, desire to re-experience, sense of calm, desire to share, awe and wonder, and appreciation of beauty in the natural world. Furthermore, studies related to outdoor learning experiences revealed that students displayed enhanced cooperation and conflict resolution skills, improved self-esteem, positive environmental behavior, increased problem-solving skills, greater motivation to learn, and better classroom behavior.

The biggest hindrance for early childhood educators in exposing young children to nature experiences is "restrictive regulations and a cultural emphasis on eliminating or minimizing physical risk". Another key barrier to physical activity in the outdoors is

competing values, such as priority for educational achievement. One teacher mentioned that offering young students access to green spaces for play promotes peace, self-control, and self-discipline.

Results from this research show that Nature schools offer most play opportunities outdoors, and are directly linked to children's better health and fewer sick days. Research also shows that increased physical activity leads to healthy development and overall well-being.

During my interview at a Nature school, I asked the principal about her interest in becoming a principal at this kind of school. She showed me a journal article from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, titled "Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to protect it" (Chawla 1990), which stated that 'positive direct experience in the out-of-doors and being taken outdoors by someone close to the child – a parent, grandparent, or other trusted guardian – are the two most significant contributing factors to individuals choosing to take action to benefit the environment Chawla's research identified four ways how adults modelled and mentored environmental awareness: care for the earth and respect for its limited resources, disapproval of destructive practices, enjoying being out in nature, and a fascination with the details of other living things and elements of the earth and sky. She concludes that:

The very fact that a parent or grandparent chose to take the child with them to a place where they themselves found fascination and pleasure, to share what engaged them there, suggests not only care for the natural world, but equally, care for the child.

After showing me this article, she informed me that most of the staff that decides to work at Nature schools share similar childhood experiences that triggered their interest to give young children the opportunity to experience nature for themselves.



An interesting and consistent finding was that positive childhood experiences and positive attitude towards natural spaces influenced interviewees' future decision to be engaged in outdoor learning. All interviewees mentioned during their interviews that they had been exposed to nature from a young age, and have passed on these positive experiences to their own children, as well as to the students in the classroom. All educators working in Nature schools need to be qualified 'nature teachers'. From my perspective, they are passionate advocates of a pedagogy they believe in, and have become the embodiment of their philosophy (see appendix for full transcript of nature symposium candidates' interviews).

In reply to *Q1* (What is your understanding of 'holistic education?'), an NSP (Nature School Principal) replied:

A view of the 'whole child', a 'total child approach' where all parts are equally important. Especially the development of the child's personality, where the adult experiences, acts, and explores alongside the child on the child's conditions, respecting the child's wishes, is a very important part of holistic education. My view of the *whole child* is to give children the opportunity to develop all senses, to train body and soul, to be curious, to explore and to experiment, to be creative and use imagination, get experience and knowledge by 'catching the moment', and experience things first and get the facts later: in a nutshell, 'learning by doing'.

She communicated the Nature school's philosophy as cultivating a lifelong interest in nature, and stressed the importance of learning with *all* senses. Her message was:

Through our philosophy, we also give children the basis for a lifelong interest in nature. In nature, our students are exposed to 'learning with all senses' and 'with the whole body' (the head, heart, and hands). Through nature, children are

exposed to concrete experiences on abstract knowledge, which is central to students' learning. Play and activities in nature result in developing children's imagination and creativity. Free play is crucial for development and learning. Through play, children learn social, personal, emotional, physical, and language skills. Holistic education also involves parents' engagement, which is important in Nature schools to reach high quality. Children's 'both worlds' (home and school) must meet and cooperate for developing the child's full potential.

Likewise, teachers replied in more detail about the activities they did in order to implement H. Ed. When questioned *How would you describe your role as a teacher in your school?*, a Nature School Teacher (NST) answered:

Our pre-school focuses on outdoor activities. We expand the Swedish National Curriculum Guidelines of 'developing an interest and understanding for nature's different life circles and how people, nature, and society influence each other'. We do this by giving children an increased knowledge about nature and transmit to them a feeling for nature as well. We offer children an 'ecological view' and, as a result, we create concern for the environment. Teaching children how to behave in nature and how to respect the rights of all people and animals is giving them the 'knowledge tools' on how to act accordingly.

When answering *Q2*, a NST explained how 'holistic education' is embedded in their curriculum:

We make use of the access to the natural environment to stimulate developing the whole child through nature (personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual awareness). Social and emotional competencies are embedded in giving children the opportunity for movement and friendship, building through

joyful play and healthy exploration opportunities, together with other children in nature.

During the interview, all eight key stances of H. Ed. were discussed in detail, and examples were given on how thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature were interrelated. When answering the question, *How much emphasis or priority do you give on thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature?*, a NSP answered:

All these key words are part of nature's 'natural process', and it is crucial that children have the opportunity to be in nature all year round from a very early age. In order to get the right 'feeling' for nature, children must be exposed to frequent visits to the forest and in all kinds of weather. Only then you start to value and enjoy nature, and, as a natural consequence, something you value you also want to take care of. Taking care of nature is also taking care of each other.

6.2.3 Waldorf Schools

During my visit to a Waldorf School, I changed from experiencing a beautiful, natural, outdoor -15-degree snowy landscape, to a peaceful, aesthetically pleasing Waldorf setting. After a tour around the school, I was invited into a cozy conference room to conduct my interviews. In response to the first question about H. Ed., the principal emphasized the crucial role of the teacher. She replied to *Q1* by stating:

I think we differentiate ourselves by the way we see the role of the teacher. At Waldorf schools, the *teacher's role* is to reach every individual child in a *holistic way*. All areas of the whole child should be 'equally nourished'.

This principal informed me that *eurythmy* is central to the Waldorf pedagogy, and how feeling and emotion create action. She explained:

Our eurythmy implements movement, dance, and drama that in unison promote social competence. Students get a feeling of ‘body sensations’, which help them in self-knowledge. To be asked to move in line with the different rhythms of different music is not easy when you have other things going on in your mind.

The Waldorf principal gave a detailed example of the implementation of learning and self-awareness through movement. She showed, explained and translated a famous Swedish poem by Karin Boje called “Det gor ont nar knoppenbristar”, meaning, “it hurts when buds are breaking.” She clarified:

We choreograph this very famous Swedish poem, so children understand the meaning behind the poet’s words. This poem is about a budding flower that is about to open. Through eurythmy, all the senses are used in the body, when students position themselves in a room together with other students. This creates self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence. You can compare this eurythmy with a form of yoga or mindfulness, away from using the head.

A Waldorf School Teacher (WST) gave another example of how she saw H. Ed. through storytelling, and mentioned that storytelling for young children is always immediately followed by asking children to act out the story or retelling the story with their body, so they become the ‘embodiment’ of the characters. In doing so, they also better understand the feelings of the characters and the reasons why characters acted in a certain way.

Replying to the question about her view on the ‘whole child approach’ the principal explained using the metaphor of a ‘sailing boat’:



We profile ourselves with a sailing boat as we give our students ‘wind to sail’, with a pedagogy that inspires ‘independent thinking and creativity’, which leads to expanding children’s inner and outer worlds. As part of our ‘holistic whole child approach’ we offer our students ecological meals, which are artistically presented. We believe that food should be presented in an attractive way and in a pleasant relaxing atmosphere with the use of candles. The building we got allocated to offer our schooling is a simple brick stone office building, but we have proven that the Waldorf pedagogy can be successfully offered to our students, as the building has been transformed by passionate staff. The quality of the food (ecological), together with the atmosphere (dimmed light and candles), and the way the food is displayed, forms a very important component of our Waldorf pedagogy.

This was the only school that stressed the importance of *ecological food* in their holistic education approach. I was impressed by the view and presentation of all the healthy food dishes in the school cafeteria. It looked rather like an upscale restaurant buffet lunch.

While discussing thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature, the principal mentioned that they have created their own holistic hexagon based on the two triangles of *medvetenhet, omtanke, delaktighet* (MOD; awareness, concern, and participation), and *individ, demokrati, ansvar* (IDA; individuality, democracy, responsibility). When asked about her order of priority of the eight key words, based on her perceptions of holistic education, she replied:

Looking at these eight key words, I would rank creativity first, followed by character development and thinking skills. Our philosophy inspires independent thinking and creation. The combination of these three will lead the other five of spirituality, democracy, play, caring relationships, and concern for nature.



At the end of the meeting the Waldorf Principal and Head Teacher insisted to summarize the most important features of Waldorf Education. The Principal added:

“In our school we employ people with the right personality and ability to capture children’s interest through exciting storytelling. When young children are totally immersed in listening to our stories they are able to retell this story long afterwards. They retain the knowledge and what they learn becomes part of them. This learning is unified with ‘expressive arts’ as this is the best way for young children to express what is ‘inside them’, how they feel. We nurture the *inside* as well as the outside. Our pedagogy is based on using all senses with equal value on theoretical and practical supported by strong links to nature, surrounded by a beautiful, aesthetically welcoming learning environment. We highlight three equally important elements in our daily teaching: analytical thinking, movement and creativity through exploring. We also provide ecological meals and make sure that all children have been exposed to songs and a variety of musical activities.”

The Waldorf Head Teacher mentioned:

Independent thinking and own creativity supported by ‘the Arts’ in all forms is key to our daily teaching. Children look forward to our daily storytelling in which we integrate new learning elements, dialogue and discussion and document daily learning through the arts. Once children understand our stories and put their ideas and thinking in a visible form, they will be able to apply this new knowledge in new situations.

This corresponds with Miller’s (2007) holistic transformational learning where new knowledge is taught, reinforced, discussed and applied so the child and the curriculum become one.

6.2.4 Montessori Schools

Answers to interview questions at the Montessori school were short and not elaborate. The principal first explained that Montessori is a pedagogy, *not* a philosophy. In response to what H. Ed. meant to her she replied, “Holistic education is our Montessori pedagogy that takes care of the *whole person* in relation to other persons. We emphasize the interconnectedness through ‘cosmic education’”. Her answer to the meaning of ‘whole child approach’ was “the principles underlying ‘cosmic education’”.

In response to being asked to rank thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature, she replied that:

Thinking skills definitely come first, followed by character development (personlig utveckling in Swedish). The combination of these two is important to become a good democratic citizen, which is the pillar of our Swedish society. Thinking and character leads to democracy, caring relationships, concern for nature, creativity, spirituality, and play.

As the interviewees had the opportunity to add some comments at the end of the interview, the principal stressed again upon the importance of ‘democracy’ in line with the curriculum documents, and gave an example as to how opportunities are offered to students to practice this important part of H. Ed. She stated:

As our policy documents emphasize, students need to experience what democracy means and adults need to be role model. Our school has an ‘elevrad’, a student council that will meet with me, the school’s principal, at regular intervals, usually once a month. Members of the student council have to prepare their case,

summarize students' requests, and they have to write a protocol for dialogue, e.g. if they want new materials, new curtains in the classroom, new layout of the classroom, variety in food etc., they have to discuss among themselves first before presenting it to me in a systematic way. For older students, it's a feeling of influence within borders. They are also responsible in organizing the 'open house' for the school, informing other students about their school, showing parents around, etc. We apply 'Frihet under Ansvar' which means 'freedom under the condition of responsibility'. This is in line with Montessori's belief that 'freedom and discipline are two faces of the same coin'.



CHAPTER 7

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CASE SCHOOLS

Introduction

Chapter 7 deals with the comparative part of this study, comparing the similarities and differences between the stakeholders' perceptions against the backdrop of the eight holistic stances, divided into four groups of two: thinking skills-character education; play-creativity; democracy-caring relationships; and concern for nature-spirituality, as an analysis of the interviews showed strong links between these areas. This chapter also gives an overview of my observations in the three school systems as a triangulation, and identifies additional holistic practices. In section 7.3, I discuss my perceptions in addition to the analyzed eight holistic stances. Specifically, the holistic stance of spirituality was observed in detail across the three case schools, and similarities and differences were revealed. At the end of chapter 7, the similarities and differences are discussed and compared.

Nature schools' goals and methods stimulate an interest in nature, and activate children through their own explorations of nature all year round. The methods strengthen their self-esteem, social competence, and empathy development. Nature leaders are role models and mentors, motivating children to pursue an active and healthy lifestyle and an interest in nature. Teachers in these schools have to be trained and certified outdoor leaders in addition to being an authorized preschool teacher.

Montessori and Waldorf schools emphasize the importance of the 'prepared environment' to educate the 'whole child'. However, the focus of this prepared environment is quite different for each school. Although both accentuate the preparation of the teacher as a crucial part of the prepared environment, Montessori schools focus on neat and structured displays in all learning areas (practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, and cultural)



on low shelves, from concrete to abstract, while Waldorf schools expose the students to a physically beautiful environment, with natural materials and pastel colors, to enrich and nurture the children's inner world.

7.1 Comparison of School Principals' Perception of H. Ed.

Below is a comparison of the principals' interviews in the three systems: the Nature School (NS), the Montessori School (MS), and the Waldorf School (WS). NSP refers to the Nature School Principal, MSP refers to the Montessori School Principal, and WSP refers to the Waldorf School Principal. *The full transcript of NS, WS, and MS interviews can be found in the appendix.*

Q1: What is your understanding of 'holistic education'?

The answers to this first question, about principals' understanding of holistic education, varied considerably. The Nature school emphasized a 'total child approach' where all parts are equally important, and stressing the development of the child's personality together with the adult as 'holistic'. The role of the teacher was "to experience, act, and explore alongside the child on the child's conditions, respecting the child's wishes". The latter refers to the curriculum's section on 'influence of the child' that was underpinned on the democratic grounds on which Swedish society is build.

The Montessori school referred to its curriculum as one "that takes care of the whole person in relation to other persons," and that Montessori's 'cosmic education' emphasizes the interconnectedness between the curriculum, students, others, and the world. This statement was in line with the definition of *spirituality*, the respectful relationship towards self, others, and the world, as well as Miller's (2007) definition of connections in the holistic curriculum.

The Waldorf school's emphasis was on the unification of 'feeling and emoting', referring to the combination of movement, dance, and drama through daily eurythmy, that promotes social competence and triggers 'body sensations' that will help students to grow in self-knowledge. The Waldorf principal added, "I think we differentiate ourselves by the way we see the role of the teacher which implies to reach every individual child in a holistic way which means that all areas of the whole child should be 'equally nourished'". The principal also explained that immediately after a teacher has told a story, the students are asked to tell the story with their body so they become the 'embodiment' of the characters. This facilitates an understanding of the character and its feelings, resulting in an increased reasoning as to why characters act in a certain way, which contributes towards a more understanding approach towards others as opposed to a judgmental attitude. This principal further explained that Waldorf's eurythmy could be compared to a certain form of yoga or mindfulness, away from using the head.

The Waldorf principal's answer corresponds with Binder's (2011) inclusive statement that "Nurturing the core of children's inner landscapes provides the still spaces needed to *connect* to their experiences, the non-judgmental breadth to *explore* their feelings, and the mindful presence to *understand* what is meaningful" (p. 32).

Q2: What is your understanding of 'whole child approach'?

With this question, I attempted to elicit any differences in the interviewees' interpretations of the terms 'holistic education' and 'whole child approach'.

In reply to the second interview question, rich descriptive language was used by the NSP and WSP (in line with researcher's holistic map), while the MSP referred back to the Montessori pedagogy that encapsulates holistic education through exposing the students to 'cosmic education' (see 7.2.4.2 for full details).

The NSP perceived the whole child approach as giving children the opportunity “to develop all senses; to train body and soul; to be curious; to explore and experiment; to be creative and use imagination; to get experience and knowledge by catching the moment,” the latter referring to mindfulness by being fully present in the now, which also corresponds with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) ‘timeless learning’.

The WSP used an interesting metaphor to symbolize her school’s perception of ‘whole school approach’. She stated, “We profile ourselves with a sailing boat as we give our students ‘wind to sail’ with a pedagogy that inspires and is conducive to ‘independent thinking and creativity’, which leads to expanding children’s ‘inner and outer world’”, which is in line with Miller’s (2007) ‘Yin and Yang’ that indicates the importance of ‘balance’ in the holistic curriculum.

In contrast to the NSP and MSP, the WSP mentioned that they offer their students ‘ecological meals’ as part of their ‘holistic whole child approach’, which are always ‘aesthetically’ presented. The WSP supported her statement by saying that “we believe that food should be presented in an attractive way and in a pleasant relaxing atmosphere with the use of candles”. She also mentioned that the building they were allocated by the municipalities was just a simple brick stone building, but that they have proven that the Waldorf pedagogy can be successfully offered to their students even under such conditions, as the building had been “transformed by passionate staff”. She added that the school’s atmosphere (dimmed light and candles) and the way the food is displayed are very important features of the Waldorf pedagogy. To me, the WSP appeared to be proud of her achievements, despite challenging circumstances of moving into the business premises, and saw the key to her school’s success as the action of motivated staff members. In curriculum terms, educators aim to reach ‘transformation’, as introduced by Miller (2007), in their students, meaning that students become one with the curriculum. In this context, the embodiment of empowered and passionate Waldorf staff (see 5.2.2) transformed a sterile office building into the school Waldorf stands for and is proud of.

In other words, the staff walked the talk, and they all took an active part in the change they wanted to see, delivering a true Waldorf experience to all students entrusted to them in a ‘transformed environment’.

In terms of similarities, both the NS and the MS see the role of the teacher as a guide rather than a lecturer, someone who co-experiences and co-explores the child’s learning, and gently expands students’ thinking through a form of ‘sustained shared thinking’. Both the MS and the WS refer to their school as a ‘pedagogy’ and not a ‘philosophy’.

On the other hand, the WS sees the role of the teacher as more central to their pedagogy, while the MS sees the specifically designed Montessori materials as a way to reach the child through a well-prepared teacher. The NS has nature as their play and exploration field with an adult as co-explorer.

7.2 Comparison of Holistic Key Stances by Educational Stakeholders in Three Different Pedagogies

In this section of my study, I compare the answers of teachers in the three case schools in relation to the holistic stances of figure 2. I have paired key words that were discussed during the interviews as they seemed related and this will offer a clearer overview to the reader.

7.2.1 Thinking Skills – Character Education

The staff at the NS school all seemed to be aligned with curriculum guidelines and official documents. This school indicated that their Nature curriculum corresponded with honoring the Rights of the Child (1989), stating that, “children have the right to be involved and to be heard in matters that affect them.” The school principal indicated that, in her opinion, all teachers should be aware of the United Nations conventions. She said,

“In our preschool, we consider children’s perspectives, and we listen to what they have to say, as our national curriculum encourages that children think for themselves.”

The Montessori approach acknowledges, “all is strictly interrelated on this planet” (Montessori, 1973, p. 40). Consequently, in their curriculum, they teach their students about ecology as it investigates the interaction of living things and relationships between living and non-living forms. One teacher added: “As Montessorians, we believe that understanding ecology develops concern for human impact on Earth, and encourages a value system involving a caring commitment for the environment.”

Both the Nature and Montessori schools teach students about ecology and human impact on the Earth. However, only Waldorf schools inform their students about the importance of ecological meals to support personal well-being in holistic sustainability. In the Montessori way of thinking, environmental education and values education are intertwined, and both are essential components of the Montessori curriculum.

WSP:

We link values education with environmental education. Teaching children from an early age to take care of our environment will lead to informed decision as adults. We truly believe that age appropriate information about our environment provides students the skills for positive action, and enables them to offer future generations a better world to live in. We use the definition of values by Halstead, Taylor, and Taylor (2000), that values are ‘...the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behavior, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable’. In school, we embed our national values of democracy and gender equity as well. We are in close contact with university research teams, and we discuss new findings during our staff meetings and find ways to incorporate them in our daily activities – so we keep



up-to-date with best educational practices. We make use of the practical booklet, 'Forskning for klassrummet' (Research for the classroom), published by the Swedish Education department. This booklet inspires teachers and pedagogical leaders to take informed decisions in given situations, based on knowledge, experience, and research.

Waldorf School principal and teachers gave substantial evidence of regularly discussing and critically evaluating their school practices with university research. Teachers showed me how they weave small-scale action research into their classroom routines based on recommendations of a small booklet published by the Education Department. All three case schools indicated that learning about nature is linked to values education, environmental education, and character education, all supported by thinking skills. This echoes Splitter's philosophy that thinking skills might be the 'glue' towards better-informed and improved decision-making related to environmental matters and challenges.

7.2.2 Play-Creativity

NSP:

As a principal of a Nature school, I truly believe that the spirit of the child and his/her capacity to play are intertwined. Nature offers the perfect playground for intensively engaged play that expands children's horizons, their potential, and their capacity. We frequently get visitors from Asian countries, and it seems to me that the right to play as a child, as well as the power of play, is undervalued. Especially in an era of computers, it is important to encourage free play with other children. I think if play is not valued by teachers, it is a huge loss as it deprives the child from making sense of their world.

NST:

In line with our curriculum guidelines, that ‘play promotes children’s creative abilities and ways of expressing them’ (p. 3), we observe, record, and document children’s creativity through play. This is particularly useful during parent-teacher meetings and school inspection. Play and activities in nature result in developing children’s imagination and creativity. Free play is crucial for development and learning. Through play, children learn social, personal, emotional, physical, and language skills.

WST:

In a Waldorf school, we especially pay attention to children who seem to have forgotten how to play. It is crucial for children to see that adults value play. We nourish our students’ imagination through storytelling, including fairy tales and nature tales. We involve children in working with puppets, all forms of artwork, physical movement, and real work, such as cooking, cleaning, woodworking, and gardening. These activities all restore children’s lost play.

MSP:

In our Montessori philosophy, we emphasize the word *work* according to Montessori’s belief that children at the age of three to six are far more interested in ‘working’ than in ‘playing’.” Montessori dedicated her studies to observe how students in this age group explore the specifically designed Montessori materials *independently*, that are displayed purposefully and systematically around the classroom. All children are free to pursue their learning activities, and are allowed to progress at their own individual pace. Montessori believed that ‘freedom and discipline are two faces of the same coin’, and by offering students



the freedom of choosing their own materials to work with, this will trigger an *inner discipline* to keep on task.

7.2.3 Democracy – Caring Relationships

When discussing ‘democracy’ as part of the holistic curriculum, one schoolteacher recommended that there is a need for clearer guidelines, as Lpfo 98 states that “the work team should emphasize and approach the problems involved in ethical dilemmas and questions of life” (p. 9), but no guidelines were given on how to proceed. She raised an issue that in order to be good “role models of democracy,” as stated in the Swedish National Curriculum, the school management has to respect these guidelines towards their *staff* as well. She stressed that the democratic guidelines stated in the curriculum documents, “the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable,” are all values that the preschool should actively promote in its work with children (p. 3). She mentioned the need for conflict resolution guidelines in a democratic preschool. This teacher triggered my interest to research more about ethics and values, when she voluntarily shared her personal experience, indirectly questioning “the ethical attitude” that should characterize all preschool activity (p. 3).

As *democracy* forms the foundation of Swedish preschool, I decided to research more about the ethics of teaching and the embedded values. When working with children, our values are reflected in our decisions, in what to do or not to do. However, in relationships with people in management roles, what exists in the mind about the power balance and how to respect people of authority plays a vital part, and can easily lead to conflicts and tensions, as communicated by this teacher when discussing democracy.

It could be argued that usually, people respond to conflict as abnormal, as it is seen as a deviation from a peaceful norm. However, if we accept the reality that conflict is the

norm and peace is the exception, conflict becomes an inevitable part of living, and we can start planning for potential conflict and build conflict management skills for effective conflict intervention (Jacobson & Rycroft, 2007).

In conclusion, all schools promoting democracy ought to find a way to combine ‘the teacher as educator’ with the ‘ethics of teaching’. This interview showed the importance of a code of ethics, suggestions for teachers’ on-going professional development, and the establishment of professional learning communities. Just as Campbell (2000) argues that:

Ultimately, teachers as educators are responsible for the choices they make in classrooms, the motivations that drive them, the actions they take, and the words they use, regardless of whether they may or may not have a direct effect on students or if these implications can be empirically proven.

I truly believe that teachers’ ethical knowledge, combined with a ‘code of ethics’, underpin the characteristics of professionalism in ‘the teacher as educator’.

NSP:

As an educational leader of this school, it is my responsibility to honor the *democratic values* as stipulated in our national curriculum by word and action. Look, as written here on page three of our curriculum guide, ‘Democracy forms the foundation of the preschool.’ Children don’t do as you say but they do as you do. That’s why it is of utmost importance that adults in the school give ongoing examples of what democracy means. As you can see, we have posted this important statement in all classrooms so teachers can remind students and parents if necessary. This sentence ought to be known by all staff, students, and parents: ‘Fundamental values promoted in our preschool are in line with our national curriculum’ (p. 3), and we honor ‘the inviolability of human life, individual



freedom, and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable’.

NST:

All preschools in Sweden have to follow the same guidelines, so all children in Sweden grow up with the same national goals and standards. In order to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of these fundamental values, we decided, as a school, to post them in areas where a lot of interaction takes place e.g. the entrance hall, staff room, meeting rooms, notice board etc. ‘Care and consideration towards other persons, as well as justice and equality, in addition to the rights of each individual, shall be emphasized and made explicit in all preschools’.

NS:

I think it is important that all teachers are aware of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989), stating that children have the right to be involved and to be heard in matters that affect them. In our preschool, we consider children’s perspectives, and we listen to what they have to say, as our national curriculum encourages that children think for themselves.

Staff at this school all seemed aligned with curriculum guidelines and official documents.

7.2.4 Concern for Nature – Spirituality

NSP:

Preschool is the perfect start to plant seeds for environmental awareness. Again, we follow the guidelines from our national curriculum, stating that ‘the preschool

should put great emphasis on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation' (Lpfo 98, rev. 10, p. 7). I believe that care and concern for nature go hand-in-hand. We teach our children facts about our environment and how we can take care of our environment. Our curriculum guidelines state preschools need to have an 'ecological approach', and that children 'acquire a caring attitude to nature and the environment' to understand that they are all part of nature's recycling process (p. 7).

This NSP also emphasized the importance of parents' engagement. She said "Parents' engagement is crucial in Nature schools to reach high quality. Children's 'both worlds' (home and school) must meet and cooperate for developing the child's full potential."

NST1:

In respect of spirituality, I think our philosophy to respect and value all cultures and religions, as well as teaching them positive beliefs in the future, and exposing them to the beauty of nature is...spirituality, I guess". Also we welcome the children of migrants and refugees into our schools and society, so they feel the values of Swedish society. I personally believe that even non-religious people become 'religious' somehow, when confronted with the amazing beauty of what nature has to offer. In Sweden, we are privileged with great outdoors that offer holistic experiences to all its citizens.

NST2:

We make use of the access to the natural environment to stimulate developing the whole child through nature (personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual awareness). Social and emotional competencies are embedded in giving children the opportunity for movement and friendship, building through

joyful play and healthy exploration opportunities, together with other children in nature. Through our philosophy, we also give children the basis for a lifelong interest in nature. In nature, our students are exposed to ‘learning with all senses’ and ‘with the whole body’ (the head, heart, hands). Through nature, children are exposed to concrete experiences about abstract knowledge, which is central to students’ learning.

NST3:

We expand the Swedish National Curriculum guideline of ‘developing an interest and understanding for nature’s different life circles and how people, nature, and society influence each other’. We do this by giving children an increased knowledge about nature and transmit to them a feeling for nature as well. We offer children an ‘ecological view’ and, as a result, we create concern for the environment. Teaching children how to behave in nature and how to respect the rights of all people and animals is giving them the ‘knowledge tools’ on how to act accordingly.

7.3 Comparison of Researcher’s Observations about Holistic Education in Relation to Curriculum Documents and Classroom Observations.

Preschools are tasked not only with developing the child’s ability and cultural creativity, but also with passing on a cultural heritage (its values, traditions and history, language, and knowledge) from one generation to the next. This forms the child’s *identity*. Miller (1992) states that identity, meaning, and purpose are three important aspects of a preschool student. According to curriculum documents, language and learning are inseparably linked together, as are language and the development of a *personal identity*. Preschools should put great emphasis on stimulating each child’s language development, and encourage and take advantage of the child’s curiosity and interest in the written

language. Children with foreign backgrounds and who develop their mother tongue, have better opportunities for learning Swedish, as well as developing their knowledge in other areas. The Education Act stipulates that preschools should help to ensure that children with mother tongues other than Swedish receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish and their mother tongue.

All preschools are encouraged to take into account the fact that children have different living environments, and that they try to create context and *meaning* out of their own experiences. Adults should give children support in developing trust and self-confidence. The child's curiosity, initiative, and interests should be encouraged, and their will and desire to learn should be stimulated. These are all important components for children to find meaning of the activities in preschool.

Preschool should provide a foundation so that children, in the future, can acquire the knowledge and skills that make up the common framework that everybody in society needs. This underlines the *purpose* of preschool.

In relation to observing holistic education practices inside the classroom, I detected a variety of methods across the case schools, as discussed below.

7.3.1 Connections Across NS, MS, and WS

In Nature schools, connections are made through 'nature' by children's own explorations and questions, accompanied by teachers as co-explorers in a natural environment, and through hands-on practical experiences. Adults' skillfully lead students towards 'extended thinking' by asking well-thought and well-formulated questions that lead to stronger connections.

In Montessori schools, connections are made through the theoretical ‘cosmic education’, which interconnects all subjects, and makes students understand the interconnectedness of everything and everybody on Earth. Children are guided to deeply thinking about world issues, and thinking skills are applied through all subjects.

In Waldorf schools, connections are made through ‘the arts’ (storytelling, drama and movement, drawing, painting, poetry, illustrating their own learning books, eurythmy, music, etc.), giving students opportunities to connect to their inside, and illustrating through the arts what’s going on inside.

7.3.2 Embodiment

I observed a strong embodiment of the pedagogies during the visits to the schools. Teachers were knowledgeable and inspired students (model, mentor, and motivate), and informed (communicate, collaborate, and cooperate) parents about the philosophy and activities so the child, in combination of both school and home, could form a coherent whole. This is in line with Miller’s (2006) findings that teachers ought to be inspiring people, just like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. This also corresponds with the earlier findings of Rogers (1969), who identified empathy, respect, and genuineness as key factors in the success of teachers, when their desire to teach is congruent with their expressed beliefs.

7.3.3 Spiritual Practice

I was surprised to discover that all these different school approaches included elements of spiritual education in their daily lesson plans, which is in line with Palmer’s (1998) definition where spirituality is “not something that needs to be ‘brought into’ or ‘added onto’ the curriculum” but claims that “it is at the heart of every subject we teach” (p. 8). This observation was not consistent with questions I asked about my observations



afterwards, as it steered the discussion towards uneasiness. As spirituality is often used synonymously with religion, this aspect of research is at times challenging to obtain interviewees' real opinions.

7.3.3.1 Spirituality in Nature Schools Through Using all the Senses

I noticed a copy of Louv's (2008) *Last Child in the Woods* in the conference room of the NS. This book describes the 'de-natured childhood' and teachers' responsibility to 're-nature' children (p. 53). Louv discusses the critical need for returning experiences to the natural world in order for us to understand the realities of our place in it. He also affirms that, "children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and for learning and creativity" (p. 55). Louv mentions a 'spiritual essential' in nature for young children, as sensorial experiences in nature facilitate the understanding of the inner self, as well as awe and wonder. When I pointed out the book, the NSP informed me that parts of this book were discussed weekly during their staff meetings.

7.3.3.2 Spirituality in Montessori Schools Through Cosmic Education

As the Montessori approach acknowledges that "all is strictly interrelated on this planet" (Montessori, 1973, p. 40), it entails a value system conducive to a caring commitment for the environment. As a result, thinking skills, environmental education, and values education are crucial components of the Montessori curriculum.

Teaching 'peace' in a Montessori classroom starts with teaching children the 'tools', as in expressing their feelings in words rather than in physical ways, such as pushing, pulling, biting, kicking, and grabbing. Peace underpins the cosmic education of the Montessori approach, the awareness that everything in the universe is connected, interdependent, and forms a harmonious whole, and that all people are part of, belong to, and contribute to that whole.

Montessori teachers aim at inspiring their students by modeling peaceful behaviors that the students need to learn. In order to achieve this crucial goal, teachers need to model peaceful attitudes and act in peaceful ways. This is in line with the ‘inner discipline’ that teachers like to develop in Montessori students. Peace comes from within, and in order to enable students to experience this ‘peace’, Montessori designed a ‘silence game’, where children sit still and silently together with the teacher on an ellipse for a short time, to develop inner peace. I observed a great sense of group achievement when the whole class had collectively accomplished the goal of stillness and silence.

7.3.3.3 Spirituality in Waldorf Schools Through Storytelling

Waldorf schools make use of storytelling and the creative arts to nourish the children’s spirit. The arts, poetry, and music are all forms that can be used to express the children’s inner feelings, and includes students who are unable to communicate or those with limited cognition that does not enable them to express freely. They can create their own musical expressions by singing, humming, or chanting, using simple or specially adapted toys or instruments.

According to Mata’s (2006) recommendations, teachers should aim for a classroom environment conducive to collaboration, negotiations, co-responsibility, laughter, and humor. Daly (2004) adds that young children need adequate time for quietness, reflection, and creativity. Teachers can help students to nourish a deep connection to the self by giving children time for solitary reflection, and providing learning activities that encourage reflection and expression through writing or art (Myers, 1997). In Waldorf schools, teachers tend not to make use of textbooks. Teachers will tell stories and students will illustrate their learning in personalized journals. During my classroom observation, a teacher showed me a beautifully illustrated journal of a student, and she emphasized the importance of giving children room to articulate their thinking and feelings, rather than forcing a worldview upon them. This corresponds with Hart (2004)

defining the children's view as the way they see, interpret, and experience the world. He claims there is significance in allowing children to question and express their own vision of understanding. This is endorsed by Noddings (2004), who argues that such experiences are crucial for children to develop critical thinking and an understanding of self and the world around them.

7.3.4 Classroom Rituals related to Mindfulness

All three systems provided 'stillness' during their daily activities. When I visited the Nature school, they invited me to experience a 'hands-on' trip to the forest in the snow. Children were asked to sit down on a tree log, close their eyes, and listen to the 'sounds of the forest'. Afterwards, the children were guided to look up at the sky and describe what they saw. After the precious moments of stillness and silence, the children were encouraged to share what they felt, heard, saw, and smelled. It was impressive how detailed children of such a young age could clearly describe their experience. In the Waldorf schools, the students experienced daily eurhythmic movement, and gathered around a candle for circle time. In the Montessori setting, students, at any given time, can practice the 'silent game', when a student decides to turn the 'silence' sign around in the classroom.

These 'rituals' correspond with Palmer's (1993) findings that providing meaningful classroom rituals embodying characteristics that embrace risk-taking and trust, will provide opportunities for young children to form bonds, bridge interpersonal and intrapersonal issues, and co-create an environment of respect.

7.3.5 Classroom Journals

All three systems provided journals as a means for the children to document their learning by drawing, painting, or writing what was important to them. These journals

were discussed with the teachers afterwards, and provided the opportunity, space, and time for the children to express their voice, or worry through personal stories and drawings. Personal journals give teachers a map of children's 'inner landscapes', allowing the children to get in touch with themselves. The provision of journals for documenting experiences is in line with Sanders (1994), who stated that, "stories spring from emotional roots that grow as large underground as the stories we hear above."

7.4 Comparison of Case School's Pedagogies

7.4.1 Nature Schools

The Ur och Skur philosophy stimulates children's complete development, by using nature as a tool. It sees the teachers' role as to jointly react, experience, explore, and learn together with the child. It claims that its pedagogic approach is unique, as it constantly adds to children's development at all levels. Outdoor learning schools make use of children's natural desire to enjoy the outdoors, where every child will be able to find his or her own challenge, similar to Montessori's allowing children to explore at their own pace and to choose from selected materials. This philosophy claims nature is an endless laboratory for play, constructing, learning, exploring, finding peace, and reflection. In nature, children's self-esteem and self-knowledge increases as they learn how to look after themselves.

7.4.2 Waldorf Schools

The Waldorf philosophy encourages its teachers to integrate academic, artistic, and spiritual qualities. Harmony is of utmost importance, and the teacher, as an instructive moral leader, should create themes of how to care for the community and for the natural world we live in. Children in a Waldorf classroom are encouraged to bring together their "thinking, feeling, and willing," unrelated to what their personalities and temperaments

are. The use of natural materials and color, as well as handmade toys and dolls with minimal detail, all encourage vivid imagination. A typical Waldorf environment is uncluttered, warm, inviting, and homely, with carefully chosen natural props that contribute to an aesthetically pleasing environment.

The International Coordinator of the PISA studies, Andreas Schleicher, commented on the high degree of congruence between what the world demands of people, and what Waldorf schools develop in their pupils indicating the high value on creatively and productively applying knowledge to new areas of learning. Waldorf pedagogy enables ‘deep learning’ that goes beyond studying for the next test, and is in line with ‘timeless learning’ (see 2.1.3).

Eisner (1994) describes Waldorf education as “exemplifying *embodied learning* and fostering a more balanced educational approach than most public schools, leading to a model for other schools to follow” (see 5.2.2).

Uhrmacher (1995) considers Steiner’s view on education worthy of further investigation, as,

Holistic education is rooted in a cosmology that suggests a fundamental unity to the universe, and as such ought to take into account *interconnections* among the purpose of schooling, the nature of the child, and the relationships between the human being and the universe at large

Uhrmacher (1995) also implied that a curriculum need not be technocratic, but may equally be arts-based.

7.4.3 Montessori Schools



Developed by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952), the Montessori method has gained worldwide acceptance as a respected alternative educational approach. Three distinct components underline the Montessori approach: a philosophy of education, a methodology to guide educators, and a set of materials to support the translation of the theory into practice.

Montessori defines the first stage of development from birth up until the age of six, as the ‘absorbent mind’, as young children absorb all aspects of their environment, including language and culture. As a result, Montessori schools put a lot of emphasis on the ‘prepared environment’, to satisfy the child’s sensitive period for order, learning through the senses, eye for details, acquiring language, movement, and social aspects of life. As Montessori believed that the ‘hand’ is the chief instrument of the ‘brain’, she developed a series of sensorial Montessori materials to give young children the opportunity to learn with ‘all senses’. The Montessori teacher’s role is to be an exemplary role model for the students. She shows a lot of respect to the child, and speaks in a pleasant, moderate, and courteous tone. She also demonstrates the behavior that she expects of the children, which means that she strives to be a good example at all times.

A Montessori teacher neither praises a child who finishes an activity, nor scolds a child who does not. She acknowledges positive behavior that allows the child to have his own feelings of satisfaction and accomplishments, as well as facilitating the chance that the child wants to experience these feelings again. In Montessori terms, teachers aim for the ‘inner discipline’, personal satisfaction that comes from within, rather than the ‘outer discipline’, driven by rewards and stickers. A Montessori teacher demonstrates exactness and completeness, which means showing the children that each material has its proper place and should be returned at its proper place after use. Completeness means the preparation and placement of all the materials that are needed for an activity on a tray, which teaches the children to think of what you need before conducting an activity.

The Montessori philosophy tends to see the role of its teachers as *unobtrusive guides* to students who are engaged in self-directed activities, either individually or in small groups. *Observation* underpins all activities in a Montessori classroom. A typical Montessori school provides a carefully prepared, pleasing environment, with low shelves displaying Montessori materials in order, from concrete to abstract, that students are free to manipulate individually or in small groups, at their own pace and in line with their individual capabilities. The Montessori Method and books aim to offer images of the real world in a beautiful way, and, honoring Montessori's philosophy, teachers refrain from introducing fantasy until the age of five or six. Montessori values parent cooperation for the integration of body, mind, emotions, and spirit, which is the basis of holistic education.

7.5 Summary of Comparisons of Stakeholders' Perceptions After Implementation of Compulsory National Curriculum

The principals in all three case study schools perceived their school curriculum as offering students activities and experiences 'in addition to' the standard national curriculum. However, they all expressed a difference in their perceptions regarding the 'holistic perspective' before and after the regulation that all schools are obliged to follow, the Swedish National Curriculum. It seemed to me that 'time' has become an issue for educators committed to deliver truly holistic experiences. Before the curriculum reform, all principals ensured that their respective curricula were implemented ('Ur och Skur', 'Montessori', and 'Waldorf'), while now they also have to guarantee that all national requirements are met. They also have to match these requirements with their own philosophy, and ensure a form of 'quality control' for school inspection purposes, consequently increasing the principal's workload, and decreasing some of the truly holistic activities due to time constraints. This echoes the findings of Korthagen (2013), who states that in times of change "it is important for teachers to learn how they can get (back) in touch with their *core qualities*" (p. 267), and how to stimulate these qualities in

their students, which will lead to *deeper involvement* in the learning process among teachers as well as students. He warns that this involvement is “in danger of being lost” when a technical, instrumental approach to competence is employed (p. 267), such as increased focus on quality report writing. Two of the principals mentioned that there is also a financial drawback, as with the new national curriculum requires that they appoint additional ‘subject teachers’, resulting in decreased hours for the teachers who are appointed in line with their curriculum (e.g. outdoor learning teachers for nature schools, and specialized music and arts and crafts teachers for Waldorf schools). Montessori schools seem to have the easiest transition in following the new national curriculum, as their curriculum offers more than what the national curriculum requires. Both the principal and teachers seem to ‘thrive’, as they acknowledged the academic rigor that encompasses their curriculum, and found it easier to explain to parents what Montessori schools offer ‘in addition’ to the national requirements.

Teachers responded in line with principals, about the change in workload and the decrease in ‘observation opportunities’ and ‘quality discussion time’ in small groups, due to the increased demands on them. It seemed that teachers preferred to focus on their ‘school curriculum’, and that it was the principal’s job to make sure that everything was linked and ‘matched’ with the national requirements.

Teachers explained that they made a conscious decision to work in their respective schools, had studied the schools’ philosophies, and were passionate, committed, and prepared to align their classroom activities with the school’s pedagogical aims. Teachers were knowledgeable about the school’s philosophy and the new compulsory national curriculum guidelines, and they showed a strong belief that what they offered to the children was relevant and meaningful. At the same time, teachers in all three schools perceived the new guidelines as standing in the way of their own school’s philosophy.

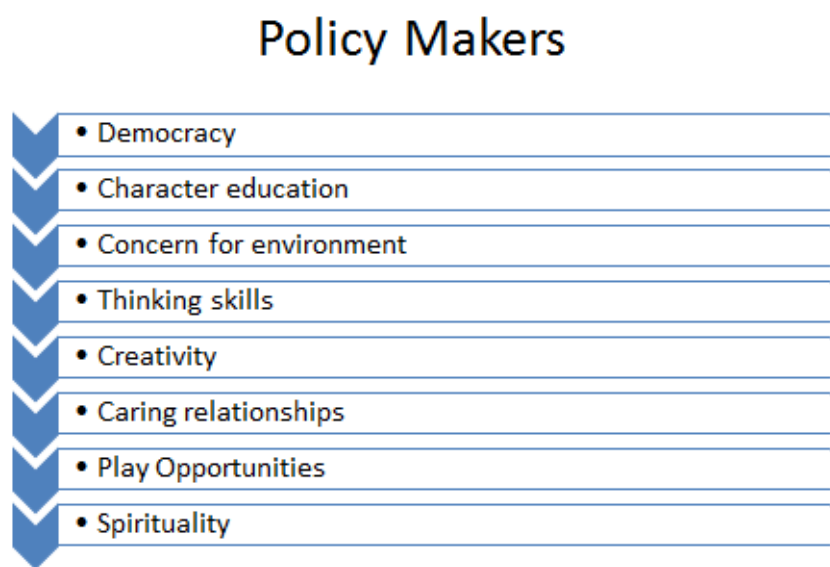


7.6 Tables of Comparison of Stakeholders' Perceptions of H. Ed.

7.6.1 Policymakers

During the interviews, policymakers revealed their perceptions and priorities of H. Ed. Figure 4 shows the order of priority given to holistic stances according to the policymakers' perceptions of holistic education (see 6.2.1 for full details).

Figure 4: Policymakers' Priorities in Holistic Education



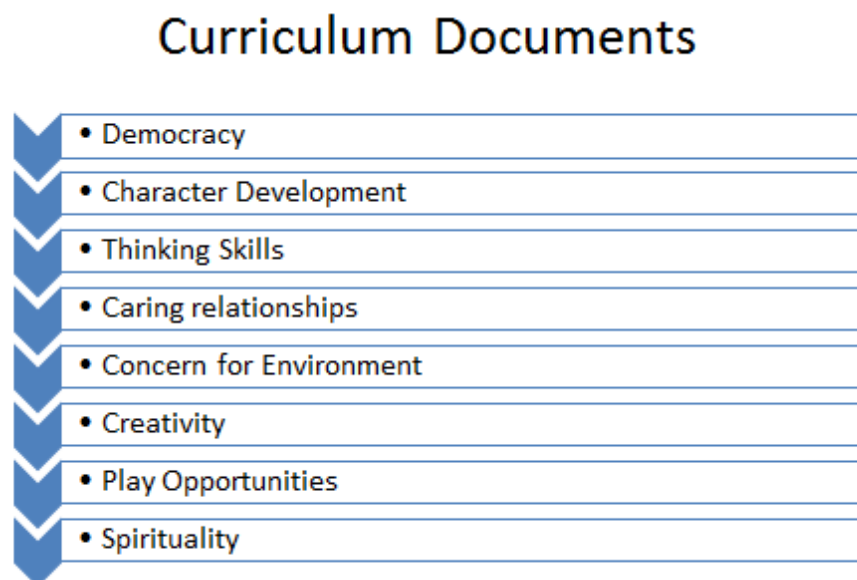
7.6.2 Policy Documents

According to curriculum documents, Lpfo 98, “democracy forms the foundation of the preschool” (p. 3), followed by character development and thinking skills. Care for the individual’s well-being and development; care and consideration towards other people; solidarity and tolerance, the ability to observe and reflect; being encouraged to think for themselves; and a sense of empathy and concern for others, form the top four of holistic stances according to the curriculum documents (see 6.1 for full analysis).

The Lpfo 98's priorities in Holistic Education are shown in Figure 5.

The researcher analyzed priorities by the frequency in which the words appeared in the policy and curriculum documents. This analysis was discussed with policymakers, to make sure the researcher's interpretation was in line with the policymakers' opinions on the priority of the researcher's holistic stances.

Figure 5: Curriculum Documents' Priorities in Holistic Education



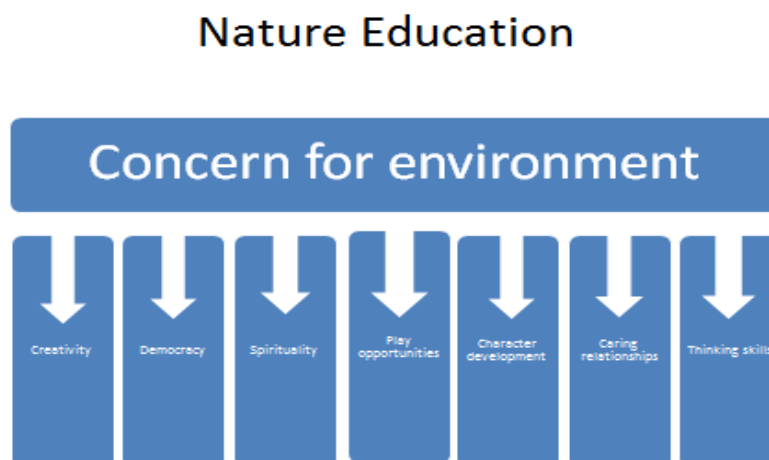
7.6.3 Nature School

In reply to ranking the eight holistic stances, with respect to emphasis or priority, the nature school principal acknowledged the totality of my holistic framework, and stressed the importance of educating 'whole child' through a 'total child approach', where "all parts are equally important" (see 6.2.2, appendix 2.1 and 5). She talked about the development of the child's personality, and the importance of an adult experiencing, acting, and exploring alongside the child on the child's conditions, respecting the child's wishes, as according to nature school's philosophy, and that this is a very important part of holistic education. She continued,

My view of the *whole child* is to give children the opportunity to develop all senses, to train body and soul, to be curious, to explore and to experiment, to be creative and use imagination, get experience and knowledge by ‘catching the moment’, and experience things first and get the facts later: in a nutshell, ‘learning by doing’.

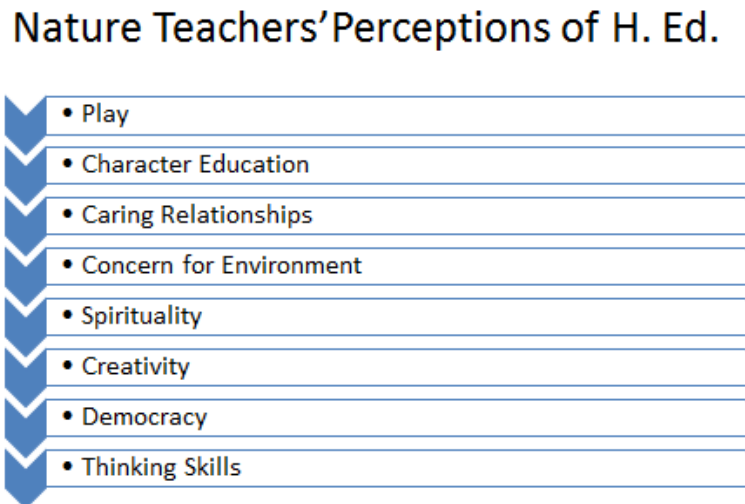
7.6.3.1 Nature School Principal’s Perceptions of H. Ed.

Figure 6a: NSP’s Perception of Holistic Education



7.6.3.2 Nature School Teachers' Perceptions of H. Ed.

Figure 6b: NST's Perception of Holistic Education



7.6.3.3 Comparison of Nature Education Principal and Teachers

Although the NSP emphasized that, “all parts are equally important” in relation to my holistic model, and that through encouraging ‘concern for the environment’ would lead to all the other seven holistic stances (see figure 6a above), NSTs indicated that ‘play’ was still the most important factor for experiencing holistic education, followed by ‘character education’ and ‘caring relationships’. ‘Thinking skills’ came last for these teachers, as they explained that in nature schools, the focus is on children’s ‘experiences’ with all senses, and that ‘thinking’ is introduced much later in their pedagogy. It seems that teachers who deal with the day-to-day instructing of children honor the NAEYC’s (1995) statement that, “play enables children to understand the world, interact with others socially, control and express emotions, and establish their symbolic representation capabilities” (see 4.4.1).

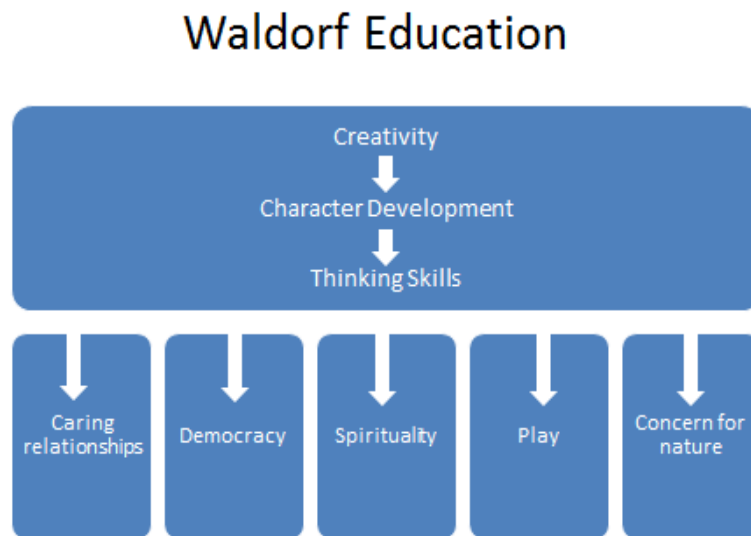
7.6.4 Waldorf School

During my interview with the school principal (see 6.2.3, appendices 2.2 and 7), I was informed that this particular Waldorf school was in the process of formulating their view of holistic education for the parents. When discussing my holistic framework of thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature, the principal mentioned that they had created their own holistic hexagon based on the two triangles of MOD (medvetenhet, omtanke, delaktighet; awareness, concern, and participation), and IDA (individ, demokrati, ansvar; individuality, democracy, responsibility). However, she asked if they could make use of my eight holistic stances, as it seemed “more complete.” When asking about the order of priority, according to her perceptions of holistic education, she replied that creativity would come first, followed by character development and thinking skills. She stated that Waldorf’s philosophy inspires independent thinking and creation. According to her perceptions, the combination of these three will lead to the other five holistic stances of spirituality, democracy, play, caring relationships, and concern for nature.



7.6.4.1 Waldorf School Principal's Perceptions of H. Ed.

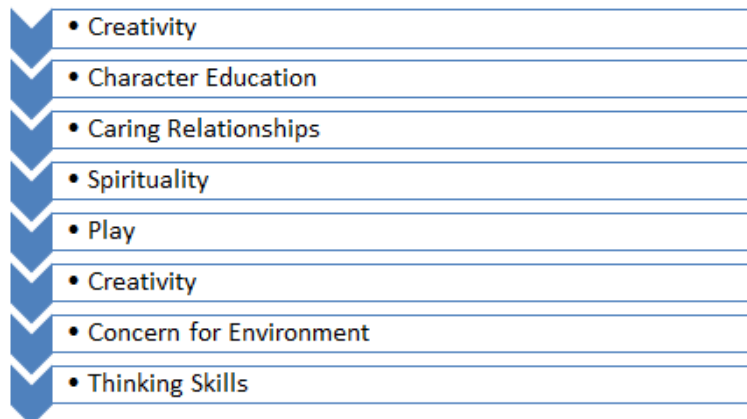
Figure 7a: WSP's Perception of H. Ed.



7.6.4.2 Waldorf School Teachers' Perceptions of H. Ed.

Figure 7b: WST's Perceptions of H. Ed.

Waldorf Teachers' Perceptions of H. Ed.



7.6.4.3 Comparison of Waldorf Education Principal and Teachers

According to the Waldorf teachers, holistic education starts with establishing profound feelings through classroom experiences. Agreeing with reply from the nature schoolteachers, the WSTs argue that thinking skills ought to be introduced at a later time for the preschool child. Concrete experiences are ideal in triggering questions and finding answers, related to involvement and feelings elicited through storytelling. Although the principal's perception of H. Ed is a combination of creativity, character education, and thinking skills, thinking skills are ranked lower down on the teachers' list of perceptions of H. Ed.

7.6.5 Montessori School

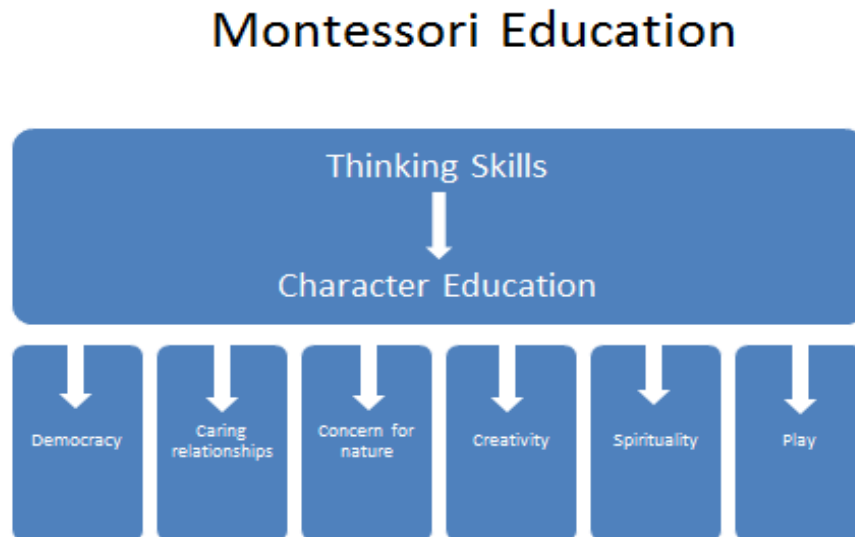
In the Montessori school, the principal compared holistic education to 'whole child approach', and the Montessori philosophy embraces 'cosmic education' (see 6.2.4, appendices 2.3 and 6).

In response to ranking thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships, and concern for nature, she replied that 'thinking skills' definitely come first, followed by character development (personlig utveckling in Swedish). She claimed that a combination of these two is important in become a good democratic citizen, which is the pillar of the Swedish society. In her opinion, thinking and character education lead to democracy, caring relationships, concern for nature, creativity, spirituality, and play.



7.6.5.1 Montessori School Principal's Perceptions of H. Ed.

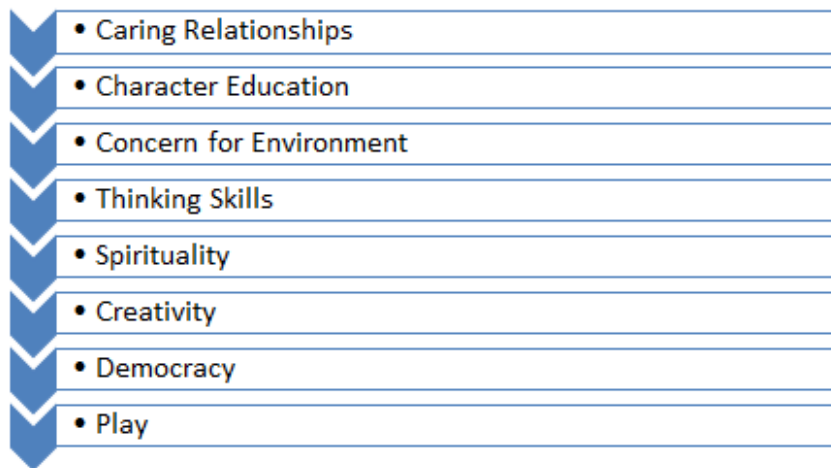
Figure 8a: MSP's Perceptions of H. Ed



7.6.5.2 Montessori School Teachers' Perceptions of H. Ed.

Figure 8b: MST's Perceptions of H. Ed.

Montessori Teachers' Perceptions of H. Ed.



7.6.5.3 Comparison of Montessori Principal and Teachers

While the MSP emphasized that “thinking skills definitely come first,” the teachers rank them 4th, as interviews indicated that caring relationships come first in the Montessori classroom, followed by character education and concern for the environment. These three holistic stances are the platform for ‘cosmic education’, plus good thinking skills according to the classroom teachers. It seems to me that they are very confident in their statement, based on continuous observation that is the key to the Montessori pedagogy. This is in line with Maria Montessori’s quote “Observe the children – they will tell you their needs.”

7.7 Discussion of the Three Pedagogies

An interesting finding was that *all* education stakeholders perceived ‘character education’ as the second priority on the list of holistic stances. Nature schools have environmental awareness first on their list, while Waldorf sees creativity as most important, and Montessori, thinking skills.

However, based on my interviews with the schoolteachers, caution is needed when looking at the teachers’ interpretations of holistic education, as I perceive substantial differences in interpretations according to personality, age, interest in educating the *whole* child, and years of classroom experience. In comparison, school principals’ perceptions, in the three school pedagogies, were much more vigorous.

The teachers in all three approaches saw themselves as nurturers, partners, and guides to the children, as well as ‘co-explorers’. All three systems depended and relied on a specifically prepared ‘learning environment’, which in the Montessori and Waldorf schools had to be ‘aesthetically pleasing’ as a pedagogical tool; and honoring strong messages about the curriculum, while at the same time showing respect for the children.

Another important finding of this study was how much ‘parents in partnership’ was valued. It is, however, very important to understand that these three school philosophies have contrasting views of children’s learning and children’s nature, resulting in acting out different roles.

Children, in all three approaches, are assessed by other means, rather than traditional tests and grades. Extensive, descriptive information is often used to document children’s daily life and learning experiences. Progress is shown through portfolios or group work displays, and is sent home at regular intervals.



Most of the teachers carried a pocket version of the national curriculum (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010), ‘Med laroplanen po fickan’, with them or it was placed in an easy to find location. Teachers inserted personal notes in the assigned places, showing that the Swedish Education Department’s goal of making the revised preschool curriculum a ‘*living document*’ was reached. Teachers showed satisfaction in being provided with a ‘practical tool’ that offered both theoretical guidelines, as well as practical tips (in pocket format) to facilitate their daily work with children. The ‘space for personal reflection and observational notes’ in this pocket version, together with practical questions for daily reflection, created a mind shift in the teachers, from ‘daily lesson plan deliverer’ to actively investigating, reflecting, and trying new solutions on own practices – in other words, action research. These personal reflections were discussed in weekly staff meetings, and resulted in improved teaching practice and better student learning.

In all observed schools, a pocket version of the latest research in early childhood, ‘Forskning for klassrummet’, was available in the staff room as a way to make the latest research accessible to all staff during break time. It seemed to me a perfect way to *bridge* existing practice with scientific research, in an informative yet non-pressured way, so teachers could consult this document in their own time and at their own pace.

All teachers were authorized preschool teachers and had additional qualifications to teach the philosophy of the respective schools (e.g. Nature leaders, Montessori qualifications, Waldorf qualifications).

Teachers of case schools (Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools) were very knowledgeable and passionate about their individual pedagogies, and emphasized that their curriculum offered supplementary learning ‘in addition to’ the compulsory national preschool curriculum.

7.7.1 Nature School's Expansion of the National Curriculum

Nature education, 'Ur och Skur', expands the national curriculum guideline "to develop an interest and understanding for nature's different life circles and how people, nature, and society influence each other," with their own curriculum guidelines stating:

Give children knowledge about nature and transmit a feeling for nature; give children an 'ecological view' and as a result create concern for the environment; give children knowledge how to behave in nature, respecting herewith the right of all people and animals; give children stimulation to develop 'the whole child' through nature (personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual awareness); give children opportunity for movement and friendship building through joyful play and exploring opportunities with other children in nature; and give children the basis for a lifelong interest in nature.

The Nature school's principal explained that, through nature "children are exposed to concrete experiences about abstract knowledge," which is central to students' learning. "In nature, our students are exposed to 'learning with all senses' and 'with the whole body' (the head, heart, hands)." She added that, "play and activities in nature result in developing children's imagination and creativity. Free play is crucial for development and learning. Through play, children learn social, personal, emotional, physical, and language skills." She also stressed the importance of parents' engagement to reach high quality. Children's "both worlds (home and school) must meet and cooperate for developing the child's full potential."

In conclusion, the goals and methods of 'Ur och Skur' are to stimulate an interest in nature, and activate children through own exploration in nature all year round. The methods strengthen their self-esteem, social competence, and empathy development. Nature leaders are role models who model, mentor, and motivate children to lead an



active and healthy lifestyle, and have an interest in nature. Teachers in these schools have to be trained and certified outdoor leaders, in addition to being qualified and authorized preschool teachers.

7.7.2 Waldorf School's Expansion of the National Curriculum

“In line with Swedish National Guidelines, all schools have to follow the national curriculum and cover all subjects. However, *in addition*, our Waldorf curriculum emphasizes more folktales and mythology, more practical crafts, art, and music. Outdoors we construct play shelters with natural materials, such as boards and branches, to promote imaginative play. Our method of delivery may differ for natural science and foreign language teaching for the older children. When our Waldorf students enter high school, their rational abstract power of the intellect emerges, and we focus on ethics, social responsibility, and mastery of complex and rigorous subject matter with specialized teachers.”

7.7.3 Differences Between Waldorf and Montessori from Documentary Analysis

In Waldorf schools, the first developmental stage, from zero to seven years-old, is characterized by strong emphasis on *empathy* and *practical activities*. Children learn by imitating their environment, and the educator's role is to model and mentor. Ample opportunities for creative and imaginative play are offered. This early-years stage seeks to instill in children the idea that the world is good. In contrast, Montessori schools give children up to six years-old a strong platform for math, language, and cultural subjects, through the use of specially designed Montessori materials, promoting learning at the students' own pace through the use of all senses and frequent repetitions. Montessori calls the first plane of development, from birth to six, the 'absorbent mind', as the child will absorb all aspects of his/her environment, language, and culture. She strongly believed that an infant has the capacity to absorb the environment by simply being 'in it'.

This belief can be compared with the way a child learns to speak just by being exposed to the environment and being surrounded by people who talk. Montessori claims that the first three years are those of ‘unconscious absorption’. During this stage of development, children are learning through all their senses, and she argues that “nothing can come to the brain that is not first in the hands,” meaning that the hand is the chief instrument of the brain. Montessori promotes ‘inner discipline’ and presenting ‘the whole world’ at this age.

In Waldorf’s second developmental stage, ages seven to 14, children learn through presentations and activities that engage their *feelings*. The educator’s part is to be an inspiring role model that the children will naturally want to follow. As a result, it is crucial that the teachers succeed in establishing a suitable *connection* with the students. This elementary stage aims at implanting that the world is beautiful. This is in contrast to Montessori, who characterizes the second plane of development, ages six to 12, as the ‘reasoning mind’ to explore the world with abstract thought and imagination. It is important to note that the use of ‘imagination’ is introduced at a much earlier stage in Waldorf schools, through dolls without faces, simple materials, etc. Montessori believed it was better to introduce imagination at a later stage, at a time when children are better able to distinguish fantasy from reality.

In the third developmental stage, age 14 and above, Waldorf accepts that the world is *true*. According to Waldorf’s philosophy, students at this stage have the adequate foundation and maturity to establish their own thinking, judgment, and assumptions. This is in line with Montessori’s third stage, which looks at a developing adult who explores the world with a ‘specialist mind’, taking his or her place in the world.

7.7.4 Differences between Waldorf and Montessori from Researchers’ Observations and Conducted Interviews

Waldorf's Early Years Curriculum was sensory based, offering ample practical activities for children to imitate and learn through example. Students enjoyed a harmonious daily routine, acknowledging daily rhythmic experiences, as well as weekly, monthly, and seasonal activities. The classroom environment was home-like, consisting of natural materials. The children were exposed to the outdoors and learned about the importance of taking a responsible stance toward environmental sustainability. Songs, poems, daily stories, and fairy tales (told by heart), and rhythm and movement were daily practices. Props consisted of simple natural materials to promote imagination and creativity. Formal instruction in reading and numeracy were introduced around the age of seven. An informative parents' bulletin board revealed an article stating the results of a PISA 2007 OECD study, conducted by Suggate (2007), revealed that there was "no association between school entry age and reading achievement at age 15." Similarly, a study by Suggate et al. (2013), comparing 'play arts'-focused and 'academically'-focused five-year-olds, showed that the two groups became inseparable in reading skill. The displayed article highlighted "that the effects of early reading could be compared to watering a garden before a rainstorm," indicating that the earlier watering can not be detected by the rainstorm, so precious water is wasted, and the watering detracts the gardener from other important preparatory groundwork, implying that no harm is done by introducing formal reading and numeracy at a later age. Waldorf teachers did not to use standardized textbooks. Instead, students recorded their own understanding after an academic lesson. Waldorf teachers also promoted cooperation over competition. Main academic subjects were introduced through two-hour 'lesson blocks', in comparison to the Montessori three-hour work cycle, and lessons were incorporated in the practical arts, and incorporated multiple intelligences.

The Montessori materials promoted repetition after teachers' demonstrations, and respected the students' own pace of learning. The case school operated in line with McDermott et al.'s findings that Waldorf education is 'infused with spirituality' throughout the curriculum, including a wide range of religious traditions, without



favoring any single tradition. Waldorf schools celebrate historical and cultural traditions, respecting the diverse student population. Festivals are usually celebrated at school assemblies that showcase students' work.

While my first impression of the Montessori school was the neat and orderly environment, where specific Montessori materials were displayed in a specific order, the Waldorf environment was an 'experience for all senses', involving soft colors, natural materials, classrooms with beautiful artwork on the blackboards, classes where eurythmy is practiced, a cafeteria with aesthetically displayed organic food, etc. According to the principal and teachers, "Connecting with the spiritual is very important as well as integrating the willing feeling and thinking."

Waldorf pedagogy emphasizes the use of imagination in the early years, while Montessori prefers to expose young children to real experiences as ideal educational springboards (as mentioned by one principal), and introduces imagination through fairytales at a later stage, when the child can distinguish between imagination and reality. Teachers have different roles in Waldorf and Montessori schools. A Waldorf teacher is required to incorporate reading, writing, illustrating, movement, and drama into a class lesson. In Montessori schools, the materials promote independent learning, guided by a skillful, observant teacher who monitors and leads the student to the next phase of learning. In Waldorf schools, handwork, knitting, carpentry, and sewing are important parts of 'the arts' to promote an 'all-round' understanding of life, and to respect the value of manual work.

Both pedagogies aim at developing 'the whole individual', and building their lessons on previous experiences, although Waldorf schools clearly keep the spiritual part of children in mind when organizing activities. The principles underlying practices differ in both systems; however observation is used in both systems, to know how to bring the child to the next level of learning.



7.7.5 Discussion of Case School Observations and Interviews

Eight key areas (holistic stances) have been revealed by curriculum analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine how these stances of holistic education were interpreted by educational stakeholders, and to which degree they are implemented in the case schools.

My interpretations of the interviews and my observations of the case schools revealed that the ‘inner lives’ of young children are nurtured in a variety of ways, linking and supporting different areas of the curriculum. From my observations of different pedagogies, and interviews with principals and teachers, Gallegos Nava’s (2001) findings were closest to these observations: that the *spiritual* or inner life of young children is stimulated in a variety of ways that lead to a *common* experience.

In ‘Ur och Skur’ schools, nature is the playfield used to introduce, stimulate, and facilitate an understanding that a human’s role is as the protector of oneself and of nature. In Montessori, ‘cosmic education’, and the interrelatedness of all subjects through the ‘great stories’, nurture the spiritual development of children. Waldorf defines ‘soul life’ through engaging and exciting storytelling.

Additionally, all Swedish pre-schools have access to local churches and priests offering church-based Bible story times. Other traditions, during which children have the opportunity to experience church-related activities, are Lucia (December 13), Easter, Christmas, and a church celebration at the end of the school year, to close the academic year and to welcome the summer holidays.

In conclusion, spiritual education has been observed in all case schools, although in different forms. All schools are agree with Gallegos Nava (2000), who claims that



fundamental to all genuine education, is the spiritual level, inclusive of the individual, community, social, and environmental levels, and that holistic educators should always keep the spiritual level in mind when working at any other level. Swedish pre-schools' spirituality is also in line with Danesh's (1997) findings that all education that helps students develop virtues, directly or indirectly, is spiritual education, and Nava's (2000) multi-dimensional mode of learning, in which the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness. This has been observed, although in different forms, in all three schools.

7.7.6 Teachers' Knowledge & Passion for Teaching - Embodiment

Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schoolteachers were all very knowledgeable and passionate about their schools 'philosophy and curriculum'. They all displayed passionate behavior, and were seemingly the 'embodiment' of their beliefs and practices. Teachers of all these three systems had consciously chosen to further their preschool education with additional qualifications, in line with their interest and conviction in the philosophy. All three schools followed the national preschool curriculum, but the delivery took place in line with the school's philosophy.

7.7.7 Comparison of Storytelling in Three Pedagogies to Enhance Holistic Education

All three school systems made active use of the 'power of storytelling', without books, to trigger students' spiritual development.

Montessori and Waldorf schools have a strong in-built 'holistic' parameter in their pedagogies. However, as all preschools in Sweden have access to 'bible stories' through their local church's priest, I witnessed that these regular 'story opportunities' in local churches offer opportunities to nurture the 'inner self' of the child in a kind, mild, yet very effective way of storytelling. I had the opportunity to witness this storytelling, and

observed that Montessori's 'great stories', Waldorf storytelling, bible stories, and the Nature figures, Mulle, Laxe, Fjallfina, and Nova (see 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3), all captured children's interest, and it seemed like a very effective way of retaining knowledge, especially if these stories are told in an 'exciting' way. Furthermore, all teachers were very passionate about embodying their beliefs in preschool teaching. I observed that the story sessions integrated the powers of: knowing (teacher tells story with new facts), which corresponds with transmission learning; emoting ('How do you feel about this story?'), corresponding with transaction learning through dialogue; and willing ('How can we apply what we have just learned?'), reflecting transformation learning when curriculum and child are connected.

7.8 Conclusion

Teachers in all three case schools displayed an enormous passion for their occupation, and were very knowledgeable about their practices, which were in line with the schools' philosophy. They all possessed a university degree in early childhood and additional professional qualifications in accordance to the school philosophy (Montessori, Waldorf, or Nature studies). Teachers also displayed a professional attitude towards personal development, and a personal interest towards broadening their knowledge by keeping up to date with research findings. Both teachers and principals regularly reflected on the existing practices, corresponding to Connelly and Ben-Peretz's (1980) findings that teachers engaging in educational enquiry will grow professionally from these activities.

I witnessed happy, engaged, and committed students, which was in line with Csikszentmihalyi et al., (1993) and Whalen's (1998) findings that passionate teachers enable students to experience 'flow' through their inspiring, encouraging, motivating, and supporting attitude towards students. This shows that in the role of the teacher, is crucial to accommodate and lead students towards reaching the optimal psychological state of 'flow', in which deep learning can take place.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this final chapter, the findings of education stakeholders' perceptions of holistic education in three Swedish schools are discussed. The results of documentary analysis, analyzing policymakers, school principals and schoolteachers interviews, and evaluating the similarities and differences across Montessori, Waldorf and Nature schools, are conceptualized against the map of holistic education and used to supplement the conceptual map of holistic education with new findings derived from the data. This chapter ends with examining the implications of this research for policymakers, school principals, schoolteachers, students, and parents, and offers recommendations for successful implementation of 'Holistic Education without Borders', accessible to all young learners.

8.1 Divergence and Convergence in Case Schools

This subchapter gives an overview of the observed similarities and differences between Nature, Montessori and Waldorf schools.

Despite having philosophical differences that are seemingly significantly divergent, the three case schools ultimately converged towards offering holistic education, through the unison of thinking, feeling and willing.

All case schools mentioned at some point during the interviews, that in order to be able to explore the world, represent their ideas, and communicate with others, young children learn best through the unity of thinking and feeling (which corresponds with linking the outer and inner curriculum), indicating that nurturing the inner lives of children is crucial



in a holistic curriculum. An interesting fact was that the *starting point* towards offering holistic education was different in all three schools; *thinking* for Montessori, *feeling* for Waldorf, and *doing* for Nature schools.

8.1.1 Montessori School

In the Montessori school, *thinking skills* had a high priority. The prepared school environment was dominated by a vast array of well-selected Montessori materials, to facilitate students learning. Holistic education was taught through ‘*cosmic education*’, the spine of the Montessori curriculum, and facilitated children’s understanding of the interrelatedness of all aspects of nature.

8.1.2 Waldorf School

In the Waldorf school, most classroom activities underpinned the development and recognition of *feelings*, especially the relationship between thinking and feeling. Skillful storytelling and daily art activities supported the children’s learning, and ‘eurythmy’ was a crucial part of the Waldorf curriculum that supported holistic education.

8.1.3 Nature school

In the Nature school, exploring and doing were the main activities, with *nature* as a *playground* for learning. The philosophy of Nature schools in general is ‘*life experience first, thinking comes later*’. Stakeholders of this school explained that children attending nature schools are engaged in whole child development, as nature offers a true holistic experience for all senses.



8.1.4 Divergence and Convergence in Case Schools

Figure 13

Divergence and Convergence in case schools

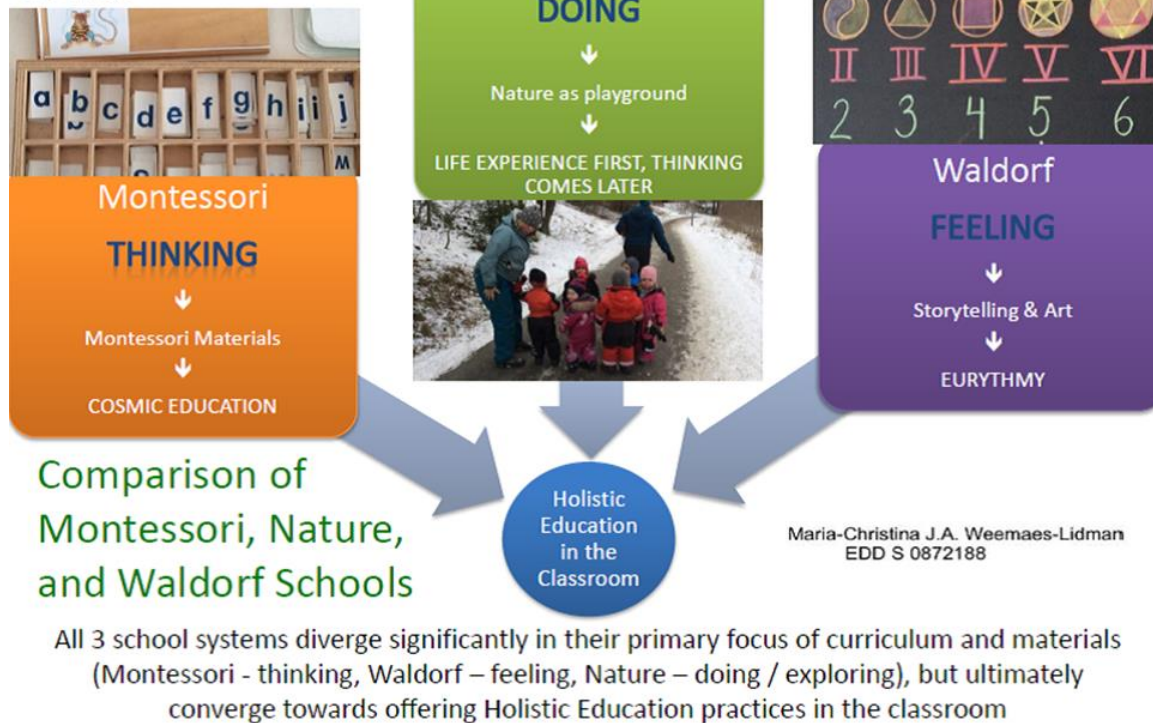


Figure 13 summarizes the main findings of comparison between the case schools related to the Divergence and Convergence in case schools.

8.1.5 Different Meaning of ‘Feelings’ in Case Schools

All schools mentioned the word ‘feelings’ frequently during the interviews. However, the meaning and perceptions of the word varied. When Waldorf teachers described the importance of ‘feelings’ in their curriculum, they referred to the illustration and documentation of children’s *‘inner lives’*, and the importance of the arts to show what’s going on inside their minds and their feelings. When Montessori teachers talked about ‘feelings’, they referred to the *‘inner satisfaction’* that students experience after they have

worked with materials of their own choice, at their own pace and a length of time they determined. This feeling or ‘sense of achievement’ triggers an urge to create this feeling again by choosing new materials and working with them at their own pace, until students feel that they have mastered the new equipment. When Nature teachers talked about ‘feelings’, they indicated that a child exposed to nature explores and learns with ‘*all senses*’, and by experiencing the beauty of nature, this creates a ‘feeling’ of wanting to take care of nature, and this was the starting point of an ecological awareness, from a young age onwards, that contributes to environmental sustainability.

8.1.6 Renewed View of Spirituality in Case Schools

Based on my observations and interviews in case schools, I sensed that spirituality was a *collective* experience that permeated each setting in a different, yet subtle way. As spiritual practice and experience is hard to describe, I would like to compare my observations with the definition of spirituality, described in the New Zealand’s National Curriculum *TeWhariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) as it describes the early childhood curriculum as “the sum of total experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (p. 10).

Although spirituality was articulated differently in each setting, there were commonalities across the case schools, encapsulated in the concept of daily routines, mainly around transition time or food time. The specific environment in the three case schools created a particular atmosphere, in which both students and teachers seemed to thrive and enjoy each other’s company, in a *connected way*, although different from the connections that I observed during classroom activities. During interviews, stakeholders mentioned “connections to people, nature and the universe” as well as “love, friendship, peace, compassion and kindness.”

As spirituality is often confused with religion, and might mean different things to different people, I recommend that schools that are committed to nurturing spirituality, as part of holistic education for young children, establish a ‘spiritual curriculum’ that nurtures the ‘inner child’, along with the formal curriculum that educates the ‘*outer child*’. This curriculum’s spiritual approach needs to be clearly communicated and clarified to *all* educational stakeholders (board members, parents, teachers and students) from the beginning of the school year, with a focus on the importance of *including* this part in holistic education.

8.1.7 Spirituality in the Early Childhood Curriculum

Figure 14

Spirituality in the Early Childhood Curriculum
derived from interviews and observations

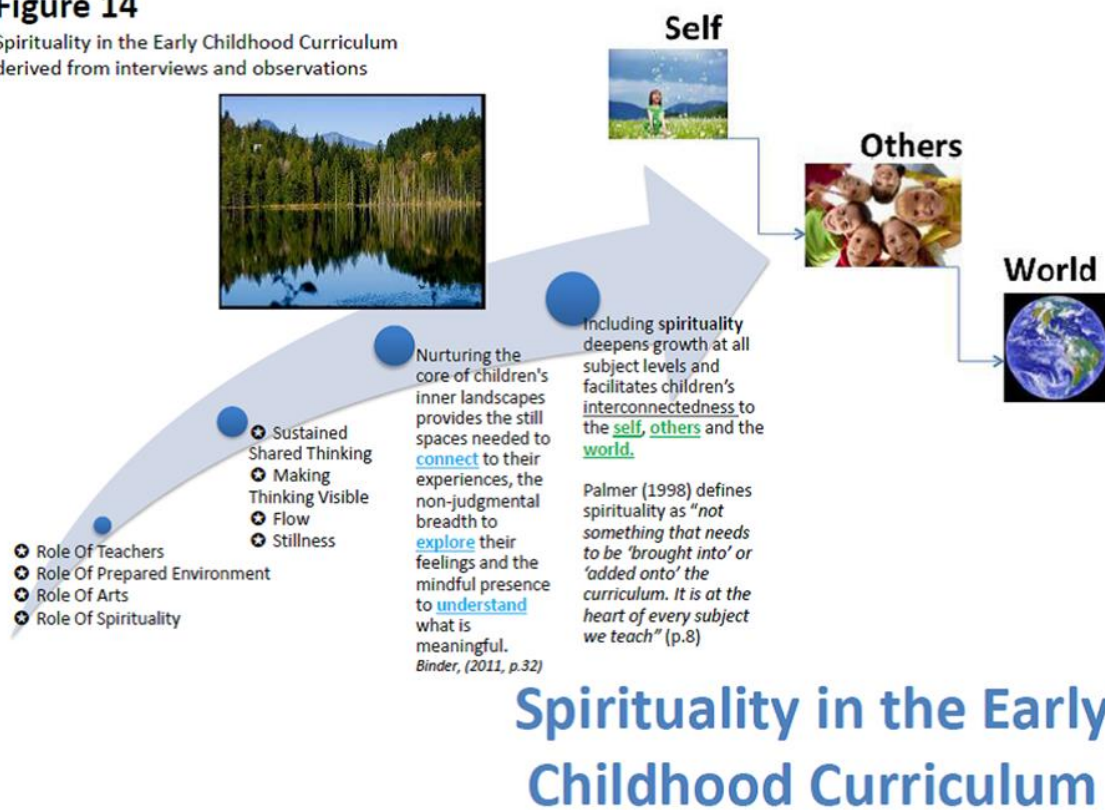


Figure 14 summarizes the main findings of implementing spirituality in the case schools.

8.2 Research Findings

In this dissertation, I have tried to unveil the perceptions of holistic education in early childhood in Sweden, by evaluating, examining, comparing, and interpreting national curriculum documents, and extracting important key areas leading to the provision of holistic education in the case schools providing Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori education. Curriculum analysis revealed eight key areas ('holistic stances') that have been used to compare stakeholders' perceptions through semi-structured interviews. The researcher aimed at understanding how these 'curriculum' stances of holistic education were interpreted by 'educational stakeholders', and to which degree these were understood, interpreted, and implemented in the case schools.

My hypothesis that the wide variety of educational stakeholders' perceptions could create gaps, and cause students to miss out on classroom practice related to holistic education, was *not* valid in this particular study. On the contrary, all stakeholders in this study seemed knowledgeable about what 'whole child approach' entails, what holistic education means, and how implementation can take place.

This study revealed that, after the compulsory implementation of Education Act 2010 (p. 800), all case schools linked their individual school curriculum with the required national curriculum, and offered, *in addition* to the minimum requirements of the national curriculum documents and according to school pedagogy, additional art (Waldorf), nature experiences (Nature schools), or individualized learning opportunities (Montessori).

Montessori schools seemed to have had the easiest transition to teaching in line with the revised curriculum, which could be explained by the fact that Montessori is based on scientific research, and the revised curriculum promotes activities that are scientifically based. The Montessori principal explained that, due to the unique Montessori materials

for math, language, science and cultural subjects, students had the opportunity to advance at individual levels. The children were exposed to exploring, discovering, and thinking throughout the day, as all materials are readily exposed on low shelves, were easily accessible for all students to quest their inquiring minds. All materials were neatly displayed, from easy to difficult and from concrete to abstract, leading to natural differentiation as children were allowed to choose the materials for themselves, depending on their level of readiness. This principal claimed that her school gave ‘additional intellectual stimulation’ through individualized learning opportunities, in addition to the national curriculum.

The Waldorf principal explained that, by comparing her school’s curriculum with the national curriculum and linking their own activities with those in the Lpfo 98, rev 2010, they realized that students were exposed to far more *art* related activities than required, inducing therewith their *creativity*. In addition, she proudly mentioned that recent comments were made by Andreas Schleicher, the International coordinator of the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), acknowledging the holistic approach of the Waldorf curriculum, stating that Waldorf seemed to offer what the new century needed: individuals who are creative and know themselves, thereby enabling them to connect with others. He commented on “the high degree of congruence between what the world demands of people, and what Waldorf schools develop in their pupils,” indicating the high value on creatively and productively applying knowledge to new areas of learning, as well as ‘deep learning’ that goes beyond studying for the next test (TED Global, 2012).

The Nature school principal explained that their outdoor curriculum encompasses children’s urge to learn with all senses and with the whole body, uniting the head, heart, and hands. She indicated that only through nature are children exposed to concrete experiences on abstract knowledge, which is central to students’ learning. This principal communicated that a Nature school’s philosophy is a ‘total child approach’, where all



parts are equally important and equally nourished. She indicated that free play and guided activities in nature result in children learning personal, social, emotional, physical, and language skills. This school expanded the Swedish National Curriculum guidelines by providing the children with a perfect playground for experiential learning and hands-on experience with natural ecosystems, thereby enhancing the children's *environmental awareness*, attitudes, and behaviors.

8.2.1 MRQ: What are Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Holistic Education?

This subchapter answers the main research question, and summarizes the below stated four supporting research questions about “What does ‘holistic education’ in early childhood mean in Sweden?” This study reveals that perceptions of holistic education differ significantly between education stakeholders (policymakers, school principals, and teachers) and different school pedagogies (Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori schools).

Encountering the perspectives of all the stakeholders involved, and offering them the opportunity to voice their opinion, resulted in exciting research and contributed to a democratic representation of all parties involved. This contribution could lead to a re-shift in thinking and policy conceptualizing H. Ed., in order to enhance a holistic view of early childhood practices.

One aim of the outcomes of this study was to bridge possible gaps between the indisputable value of providing H. Ed. during early childhood development as a platform for life-long learning, and the potential alarming consequences of encountering inadequate knowledge, skills, and understanding by education stakeholders, in addressing young children's holistic needs. However, this study shows that these hypothesized ‘gaps’ have been bridged by the provision of a *pocket version* of the Swedish National Curriculum (Lpfo 98), with ample writing space for teachers' reflections. These reflections are discussed at regular intervals, mostly during staff meetings, to ensure that



H. Ed. is clarified through clear curriculum documents that are interpreted as a ‘living document’ by education stakeholders. An additional pocket version of the latest research in early childhood provided supplementary reading and discussion material, to narrow the gap between common classroom practice and scientifically proven practice. This study resulted in recommendations and practical guidelines to facilitate the delivery of H. Ed. in early childhood settings in any country, by exploring, evaluating, observing, and researching practices derived from successful implementation in other countries. It is vital for all classroom practitioners to be given clear guidelines about the content, meaning, and purpose of H. Ed., just as it is the right of all young children to be taught by inspired teachers who have a clear motivation, practice, and purpose to implement H. Ed. in their classrooms.

The findings of this research shed light on the content and importance of H. Ed., as well as the perceptions of H. Ed. by education stakeholders, and has given rise to recommendations on how to ensure that both teachers and students are equipped with the tools that are needed to address the holistic needs of 21st century’s young learners. In addition, my comprehensive CMHE, that originally was derived from curriculum documents and literature and partly used as an analytical framework for mapping stakeholders’ perceptions of holistic education, has been molded to completion and complemented with the results of this research. This updated Holistic Early Childhood Framework (HECF) has the potential to be used in other educational settings to evaluate the provision of holistic education in the classroom.

This CMHE has the potential to result in a comprehensive conceptual framework for the implementation of H. Ed. in early childhood, which could become a welcoming practical tool for all dedicated early childhood educators, who are committed to make a difference in the lives of all young learners entrusted to them, but also to those who are in desperate need of practical guidelines on how to make holistic development happen. Results of this study may also inform policymakers and the Hong Kong Quality Education Fund (QEF)

in their 2014 launch to “Promote Whole Child Development in Kindergarten Education,” and to facilitate H. Ed. and life-long learning in support of the growing needs of kindergarten education in Hong Kong, thereby offering Hong Kong preschoolers a vast platform for benefiting from a holistic ‘whole child approach’ in educational change.

8.2.2 SRQ 1: How is Holistic Education Interpreted and Defined in Early Childhood Policy and Curriculum Documents in Sweden?

This subchapter answers the first supporting research question, and shows how the Swedish early Childhood Curriculum (Lpfo 98/10) systematically cross-fertilizes the importance of democracy, gender equality, and solidarity throughout all sections of the curriculum guidelines and all responsibilities of stakeholders, in line with the values of Swedish society.

One unique feature of this curriculum is the section ‘influence of the child’ (p. 12). The revised curriculum (Lpfo 98, rev. 2010) clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the school head and teachers, as well as the accountability towards high quality in ECEC, and the importance of holistic development through empowerment, parent involvement, and connections with the environment.

Nature schools follow the ‘Ur och Skur’ philosophy, indicating that H. Ed. stimulates children’s complete development by using nature as a tool. They see the teachers’ role as jointly reacting, experiencing, exploring, and learning together with the child. They claim that their pedagogic approach is unique as it constantly adds to children’s development on all levels. Outdoor learning schools make use of children’s natural desire to enjoy the outdoors, where every child will be able to find his or her own challenge. This philosophy claims that nature is an endless laboratory for playing, constructing, learning, exploring, finding peace, and reflection. In nature, children’s self-esteem and self-knowledge increases as they learn how to look after themselves.

The Waldorf philosophy encourages its teachers to integrate academic, artistic, and spirituality qualities. Harmony is of utmost importance, and the teacher, as an instructive moral leader, ought to create themes of how to care for the community and for the natural world we live in. Children in a Waldorf classroom are encouraged to bring together their ‘thinking, feeling, and willing’, unrelated to what their personalities and temperaments are. The use of natural materials and color, as well as handmade toys and dolls with minimal detail, all encourage vivid imagination. A typical Waldorf environment is uncluttered, warm, inviting, and homelike, with carefully chosen natural props, which all contribute to an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Montessori philosophy views H. Ed. as honoring Montessori’s ‘cosmic education’, with the role of its teachers as *unobtrusive guides* to students who are engaged in self-directed activities, either individually or in small groups. Observation underpins all activities in a Montessori classroom. A typical Montessori school provides a carefully prepared pleasing environment, with low shelves displaying Montessori materials, in order from concrete to abstract, that students are free to manipulate individually or in small groups, at their own pace and in line with their individual capabilities. Montessori’s method and books aim to offer images of the real world in a beautiful way, while honoring Montessori philosophy. Teachers refrain from introducing fantasy until age five or six. Montessori also values parent cooperation in the integration of body, mind, emotions, and spirit, which is the basis of holistic education.

In Montessori, just like in Nature and Waldorf schools, children explore at their own pace, and freedom of choice leads to students finding their own challenges. However, the materials and the environment differ from selected Montessori materials in an indoor classroom environment, to the outdoors in nature schools, and eurythmy embedded academic, artistic, and spirituality qualities in a Waldorf environment.



8.2.3 SRQ 2: How is Holistic Education Interpreted by Education Stakeholders: Policymakers, School Principals and Teachers, in Nature, Waldorf and Montessori schools?

This subchapter answers the second supporting research question, summarizes education stakeholders' perceptions of Holistic Education and findings that reveal that education stakeholders tend to see 'holistic education' in direct relationship to their position and responsibility.

Policymakers link holistic education to the values of the country and the pillars Swedish society is built on, democracy, solidarity, and gender equity, and make sure that the policy they write is aligned with the national values and guidelines.

For school principals, holistic education encompasses satisfying policymakers' requirements. However, schoolteachers' concerns also need to be addressed equally. A democratic and equality-based stimulating and nurturing environment is conducive to empowering teachers to practice transformational learning, so students and curriculum become unified.

Schoolteachers see holistic education as planting the seeds of lifelong learning by educating 'the whole child', in line with national curriculum documents in educating the child holistically (personal, social, emotional, environmental, aesthetic, and spiritual).

The principals in all three case study schools expressed a difference in respect to the provision of 'holistic education' before and after the regulation that all schools are obliged to follow, the Swedish National Curriculum. Both principals and teachers in the case schools mentioned that, as a result of the reform, more time needs to be allocated to administrative requirements for accountability purposes, and that this allocated time unfortunately is deducted from holistic educational practice that would benefit students

more. This shows that educators have mixed feelings about satisfying the Swedish Education Department's requirements after the reform and aligning their individual curricula with the national curriculum, with respect to the provision of holistic education before and after the reform.

The interviews with Swedish policymakers about holistic education tended to focus on the country's needs; I received a national lecture on how Sweden has succeeded in investing enormous sums of money to transform the uncertainty about quality and the availability of a pre-school place, into an unquestioned right for each parent to have a good and safe place, with professionally trained staff readily available, when the parents need it for their children. I was informed that the same model that was used for preschools will eventually be implemented for the care of the elderly.

8.2.3.1 Perceptions of Holistic Education in Three School Pedagogies

Montessori and Waldorf are two pedagogies with a strong holistic focus on connectedness to nature. As a result, I decided to investigate Nature schools and find out about holistic education in their pedagogy. Surprisingly, Nature schools don't seem to associate themselves with any kind of spirituality in their pedagogy, although I did find evidence of a vast array of spiritual practices. It could be that teachers and principals are not aware or that they do not want to be affiliated with any kind of spiritual involvement.

All three schools offer pedagogies that are popular with Swedish parents. Before the 2011 reform, these schools could just follow their own school curriculum (Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature), but since July 1st, 2011, all schools have to conform to the national policy and align their respective curricula with the National Curriculum (Lpfo 98). Parents are privileged in Sweden, as they can choose the pedagogy that corresponds with their personal values and beliefs without any financial implications, as each individual



student is assigned a lump sum of money, depending on the community they live in, and this money is paid to the school the student chooses to attend.

In conclusion, all three schools honor the pedagogy that their school curriculum is built upon, offer holistic education in different forms, and follow national guidelines. Policymakers and the Education Department offer space for diversity, while securing the consistency that all Swedish children are taught the same content, but grant freedom in the way that the curriculum content is delivered. This shows how the joint forces of collaborating policymakers and Education Department officials, linked with educational research made accessible to classroom practitioners, have contributed to a successful curriculum reform in which all principals and teachers have been allocated space for: reflection, time to discuss and share, and tools to be efficacious in implementing the revised curriculum requirements, contributing to an engaged educational workforce. This study shows that although *diversion* exists, due to the differences in perceptions of holistic education across different pedagogies, the schools all *converge* in educating the whole child by showing respect towards the child, placing emphasis on the embodiment of the teacher, providing a well-prepared environment conducive to flow in learning, and the unison of thinking, feelings, and actions.

In all three pedagogies, respect towards the child, embodiment of the teacher, and the prepared environment were elements that had been identified as a catalyst for *holistic* learning. All three pedagogies have spiritual and holistic elements that correspond to Nava's (2000) description of integrating "different pedagogies into a global map, which allows us to see with clarity that education consists of at least five levels that need a deep level of awareness and experience that is cosmic or spiritual, which is fundamental to all genuine education."



8.2.4 SRQ 3: What are the Similarities and Differences in Definition and Interpretation of Holistic Education in Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori School Pedagogies?

This subchapter answers the third supporting research question, and clearly shows an array of similarities and differences between the Montessori, Waldorf and Nature pedagogy. From this body of research, and the analysis of stakeholders' perceptions of Holistic Education, emerged different categories and perspectives.

8.2.4.1 Role of Teachers

Teachers in all three approaches see themselves as nurturers, partners, and guides to the children, as well as being 'co-explorers'.

Teachers of Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools were very knowledgeable and passionate about their individual pedagogies, and emphasized that they all comply with the National Curriculum Guidelines, but that they delivered something in addition to the compulsory national preschool curriculum (Lpfo 98/10). In all the observed schools, individual pedagogies were linked with the national curriculum requirements, and it is made visible in school corridors and classrooms, to teachers, students, and parents, *how* the school has bridged these curriculum guidelines, while respecting and keeping their own philosophy.

During interviews, teachers described themselves as being respectful towards the children, calm, peaceful, using inner discipline to get things done (instead of using force), gentle, respectful, and empathetic listeners.

All three schools saw the role of adults as being resourceful and supportive people, problem-posers, guides, partners in the process of discovery and investigation, careful



listeners, and keen observers, who encourage risk-taking and refrain from interfering. However, in Nature schools, the role of the adult is defined as a being a ‘*co-explorer*’, in Montessori, a ‘*guide*’, and in Waldorf, a skillful ‘*storyteller*’, in order to link of all areas of learning.

8.2.4.2 Prepared Learning Environment

All three systems depend and rely on a specifically prepared ‘learning environment’, which in Montessori and Waldorf school has to be “aesthetically pleasing,” as a pedagogical tool honoring strong messages about the curriculum, while at the same time showing respect for the children. Nature schools make use of the changes in seasons to teach important aspects of the natural environment.

8.2.4.3 Parent Involvement

The involvement of ‘parents in partnership’ is valued in all three school systems. However, Montessori, Waldorf and Nature schools’ philosophies have contrasting views of children’s learning, and children’s nature, leading to different roles in parent involvement.

8.2.4.4 Assessment

Children in all three approaches are assessed by other means than traditional tests and grades. Teachers make use of ‘all-encompassing’ descriptive information to document children’s daily life and learning experiences. Progress is also communicated to the parents by means of portfolios or group work display. At regular intervals, parents are invited to the schools to participate and witness their child’s progress, through science fairs, poetry cafes, assignment presentations, international food festival, school fairs, etc.



8.2.4.5 Bridging Individual Pedagogy with National with National Curriculum Requirements

Examples how case schools have managed to bridge the required National Curriculum Guidelines with their own school curriculum documents, can be found in sections 7.7.1 and 7.7.2 of this study. These sections give clear examples of how the schools have managed to both follow national guidelines and expand these guidelines with their own pedagogy.

8.2.4.6 Power of Storytelling Across Pedagogies and Curricula

Another strong ‘holistic’ parameter that I witnessed in these three case schools was the power of storytelling, as discussed in detail in section 4.5.1. Although the schools differed in pedagogy, there was a similarity in the powerful transformation of young learners through storytelling. I had the opportunity to attend storytelling session in all three case schools, as well as to attend a storytelling session for preschoolers lead by a priest in the local church. I was informed that this service is available to all preschools, and they have the opportunity to indicate the kind of story or message that they want to convey to the students in line with the themes or subjects of the curriculum. I was impressed by the way this priest managed to capture the attention of young students, nurturing the ‘inner self’ of each child in a kind, mild, yet very effective way. At the end of storytelling, the following questions were asked: “How do you feel about this story?”; “What can we do in the future with what we have just learned?”—transmission, transaction, and transformational learning.

Montessorians have their own ‘great stories’ to teach children, about the creation of the Earth through The Big Bang, the history of language and numbers, photosynthesis, etc. In Waldorf education, storytelling is central to learning. In Nature schools, the fiction figures, Mulle, Laxe, Fjallfina, and Nova, all have their specific roles in teaching children



about how to care for nature. Witnessing the narration of these bible stories that are accessible to all preschool children in Sweden at regular intervals, made me conclude that ‘no child is left behind’ in being exposed to the ‘power of stories’. It also gave me evidence of the effectiveness of storytelling to convey powerful messages. It seemed to me that all three school systems made use of this very effective way of retaining knowledge, especially if these stories are told in an ‘exciting’ way.

8.2.4.6.1 Transformation Through Storytelling

I observed the integration of the powers of knowing (teacher tells story with new facts; transmission), emoting (‘How do you feel about this story?’; *transaction* through dialogue), and willing (‘What can we do in the future with what we have just learned?’; *transformation*, what we have learned and what we can do - curriculum and child are connected and become one). Once the child is able to apply what he/she has learned, we can speak about *transformation*, which is the ultimate goal of education, encompassing *transmission* and *transaction*. This corresponds to Jack Miller’s (2007) ‘inclusion’ of holistic education through transmission, transaction, and transformational learning.

8.2.4.6.2 Connection Through Storytelling

As skillful storytelling enables children to connect with their inner feelings, reflect on other people’s feelings, and relate to the wider community, we may conclude that storytelling is a way for children to develop their spirituality, which is another example of Danesh’s (1997) findings that all education that helps students develop virtues, directly or indirectly, is spiritual education.

8.2.4.6.3 Making Thinking Visible – Role of the Arts



All three schools agreed that children want and need to express their ideas and messages through a wide array of different expressive means, such as storytelling, drawings, paintings, sculptures, construction, drama play, movement, and dance.

Teachers in case schools mentioned and agreed that the provision of thoughtfully prepared and meaningful activities, in which different subjects are integrated through the arts, will deepen children's understanding of the interconnections between subjects.

8.2.4.7 Central Elements in Nature, Waldorf, and Montessori Pedagogies

In Nature schools, the *outdoors* is central to their pedagogy, and children learn through being exposed in nature while accompanied by qualified teachers, who through skillful questioning, expand children's thinking and are trained to be 'co-explorers'.

In Waldorf schools, the *arts* are central to eliciting children's feelings. The teacher's role as a skillful storyteller is crucial, as textbooks are kept to a minimum and students make their own notebooks, based on the teacher's story, that they document afterwards.

In Montessori, the specifically designed Montessori materials and the 'cosmic education' form the core of its pedagogy. Through the use of cultural subjects, children learn about the interconnectedness of all subjects and all people on earth.

8.2.5 SRQ 4: Why do Differences Exist in Definition and Interpretation of H. Ed. by Stakeholders in the Three School Systems?

This subchapter answers the fourth supporting research question, and explains the reasons the underpin differences in defining and interpreting the meaning of holistic education across stakeholders, in the three school systems.

Education stakeholders perception of ‘holistic education’ has been widely discussed throughout this study (6.2, 7.2, 7.5). We may conclude that policymakers link holistic education to the values of the country and the pillars on which Swedish society is built (democracy, solidarity, and gender equity), and ensure that the policies are aligned with national values and guidelines. School principals see holistic education as satisfying the policymakers’ guidelines, and satisfying teachers’ demands and students’ wishes holistically, by offering democratic and equality based stimulating and nurturing leadership, conducive to empowering teachers towards improved holistic education in their classrooms. Schoolteachers see holistic education as planting the seeds of lifelong learning, by educating ‘the whole child’ in line with national curriculum documents, and educating the child holistically (personal, social, emotional, environmental, aesthetic and spiritual).

Interviews with Swedish policymakers about holistic education revealed that their policies are aligned with the *democracy* that forms the foundation of the preschool, and the Education Act (2010, p. 800) that stipulates that education in the preschool aims at children acquiring and developing knowledge and values. I perceived the interviewees’ answers more in line with *holistic leadership*, as I was informed by policymakers about the liability that all Swedish preschools have in conveying and establishing respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based, and by promoting respect for the essential value of each person, as well as respect for the shared environment. These policymakers made it *very* clear that all people who work in preschools should uphold the values of the Education Act, and *dissociate* themselves from anything that conflicts with these values. I was shown the curriculum documents that stated these ideas (Lpfo 98, p. 4), as well as the Education Act (2010, p. 800) published by ‘Regeringskansliet’ or the Government Offices of Sweden.

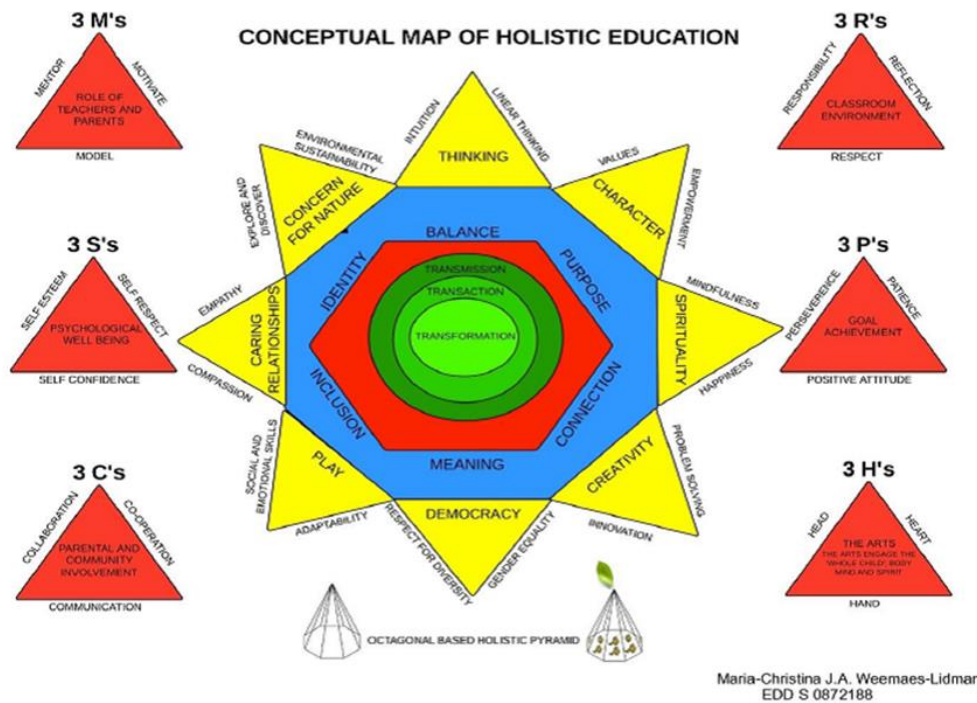


8.2.6 Conceptual Map of Holistic Education Before and After Research

8.2.6.1 Holistic Framework Before Research

Figure 11

Holistic framework before research (CMHE)

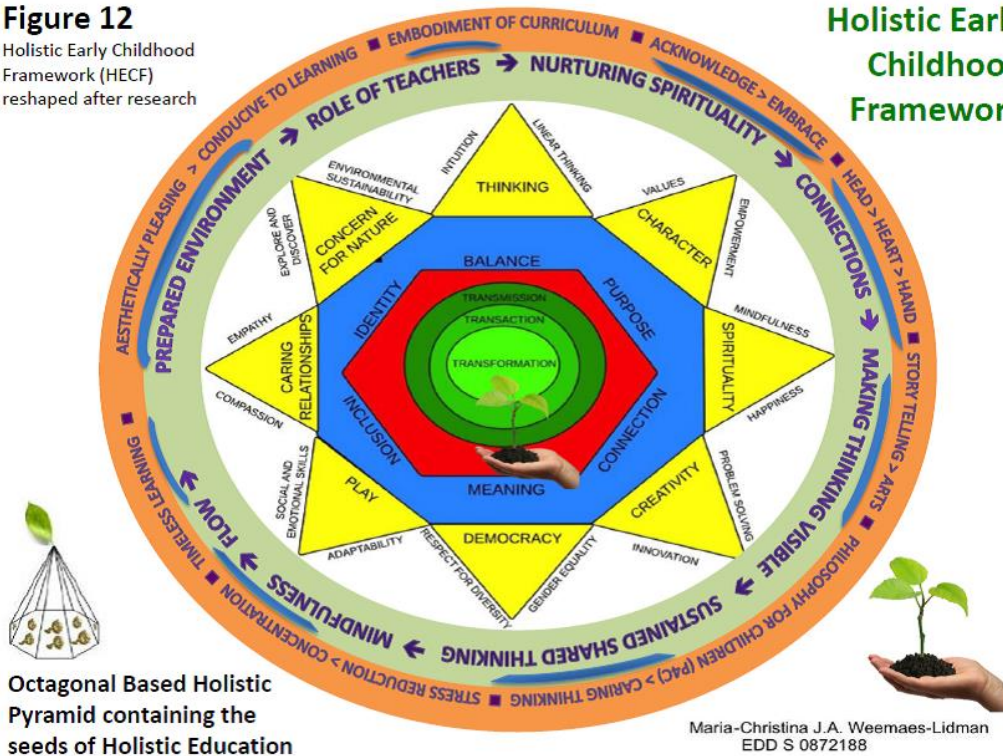


8.2.6.2 Reshaped Holistic Framework with Implemented New Findings After Research

Figure 12

Holistic Early Childhood Framework (HECF) reshaped after research

Holistic Early Childhood Framework



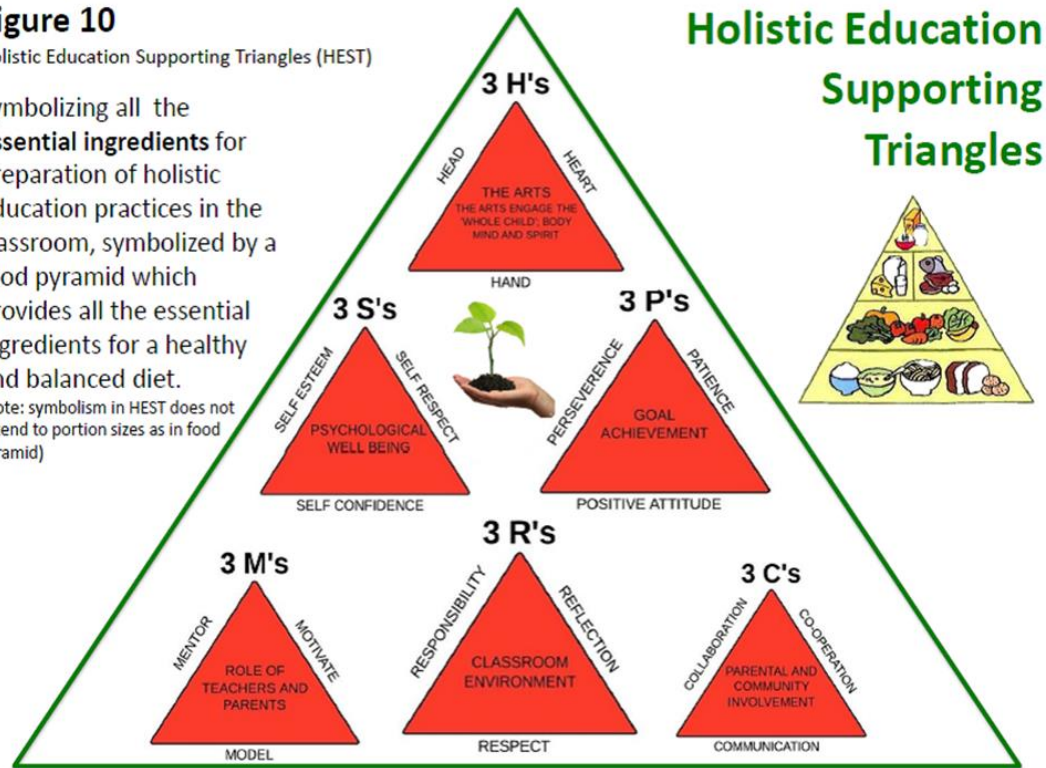
8.2.6.3 Holistic Education Supporting Triangles

Figure 10

Holistic Education Supporting Triangles (HEST)

Symbolizing all the **essential ingredients** for preparation of holistic education practices in the classroom, symbolized by a food pyramid which provides all the essential ingredients for a healthy and balanced diet.

(Note: symbolism in HEST does not extend to portion sizes as in food pyramid)



Maria-Christina J.A. Weemaes-Lidman
EDD S 0872188

These triangles contain easy to remember guiding 'keywords of 3' for teachers to be aware of in daily activities planning and in their daily classroom teacher's attitude.

8.3 Holistic Stances

The below eight holistic stances of thinking skills, character education, environmental awareness, caring relationships, democracy, spirituality, creativity and play, form the basis of this research, and were derived from: documentary analysis of school curriculum documents; literature search; interviews of policy makers, school principals, and teachers

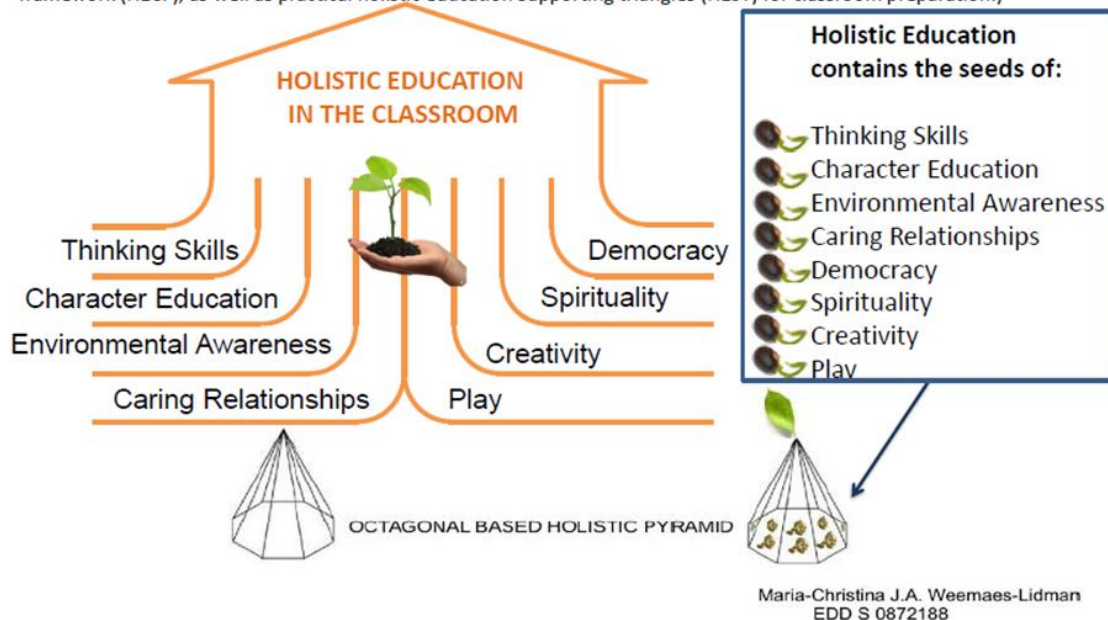
in Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools; observations in case schools; and triangulation of the aforementioned research methods for validity and reliability, leading to generalizable research outcomes and an informative and comprehensive holistic early childhood framework (HECF), as well as practical holistic education supporting triangles (HEST) for classroom preparation.

8.3.1 Seeds of Holistic Education

All case schools acknowledged the importance of these eight holistic stances as being crucial pillars of a Holistic Framework. Figure 15 symbolizes these important seeds of learning as they are crucial for whole child development.

Figure 15

Verification and Explanation of Octagonal Based Holistic Pyramid (OBHP) containing the seeds for holistic learning. (These 8 holistic stances formed the basis of this research, derived from documentary analysis of school curriculum documents, literature search, interviews of policy makers, school principals, and teachers in Montessori, Waldorf, and Nature schools, observations in case schools, and triangulation of the above mentioned research methods for validity and reliability leading to generalizable research outcomes and an informative and comprehensive holistic early childhood framework (HECF), as well as practical holistic education supporting triangles (HEST) for classroom preparation.)



8.3.2 “Cogwheels of Holistic Education”

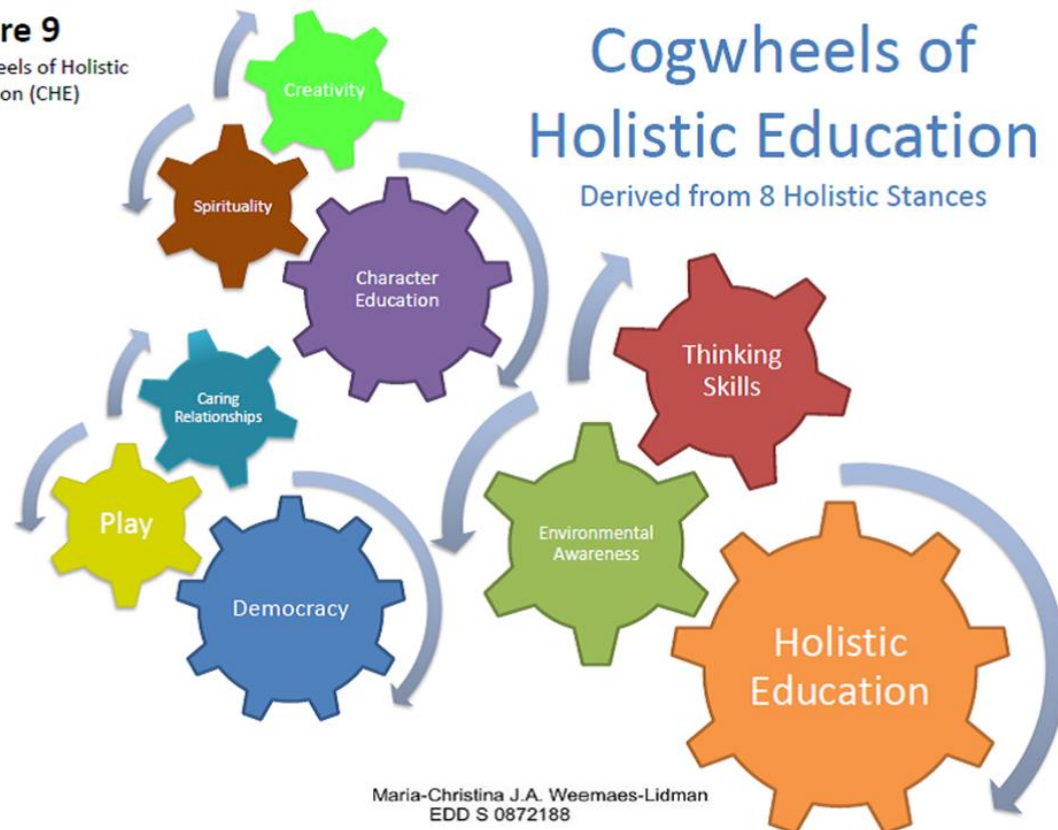
I believe that cogwheels or gearwheels are the best symbolic representation to summarize the findings of this research. Both literature and curriculum documents confirm the importance of the eight holistic stances identified (thinking skills, character education, environmental awareness, caring relationships, democracy, spirituality, creativity and play). The literature review showed that they all emphasize the important part these stance play in holistic education, which was endorsed by the interviews with stakeholders. However, all stakeholders and interviewees had different opinions about the order of priority of these stances in holistic teaching. This shows that all holistic stances are equally important, and I believe that this representation of eight cogwheels shows clearly how all cogwheels will start moving just by the turning of any one cogwheel, as they all are a part of holistic education and they are all interconnected by a single trigger. Fast or slow, it doesn't matter, even the tiniest move will set all others in motion.

During this research I came across different holistic stances that, according to the literature or during interviews, all claimed to be the starting point, glue, or central focus of holistic education, which attracts or triggers other areas of development. The focus of the case Montessori school was on thinking skills, where the case Waldorf school aimed at developing strong links between feeling and thinking, and the case Nature school perceived that a close relationship with nature was the starting point to achieve holistic education by committing to educating the whole child.

As a result of this research, I believe that symbolizing these eight holistic stances as ‘cogwheels’, with the lever symbolizing the prepared environment and the role of the teacher, is the best *visual* representation of how these holistic stances have the potential to work in unison to educate the whole child.

Else (2014) summarizes that through play, children discover the differences between themselves, others, and the world in which they live. These discoveries help them become individuals, independent, self-sufficient, and autonomous. This statement corresponds with the keywords of *spirituality*, and shows how play can be the trigger point that sets all the other seven holistic cogwheels in motion. Gordon (2008) clarifies that through interaction with the world, children can discover ways to *transform* understanding. This is an example how the cogwheels of holistic education can influence each other.

Figure 9
Cogwheels of Holistic Education (CHE)



The diagram shows how a system of cogwheels can benefit holistic education in any classroom, not depending on the initial focus of the school in relation to their philosophy and pedagogical approach. Figure 9 shows that, in a system of cogwheels, the movement

of one wheel immediately activates movement of the other wheels, and changes or perturbations in one part of the system are instantly registered and transformed into appropriate actions in other parts.

8.3.3 Renewed View of Spirituality in Case Schools

Based on my observations and interviews in case schools, I sensed spirituality was a *collective* experience, and it permeated each setting in a different, yet subtle, way. As spiritual practice and experience is hard to describe, I would like to compare my observations with the definition of spirituality described in the New Zealand National Curriculum, *TeWhariki*, as it describes the early childhood curriculum as “the sum of total experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10).

Although spirituality was articulated differently in each setting, there were commonalities across the case schools, encapsulated in the concept of daily routines, mainly around transition time or food time. The specific environment in the three case schools created a particular atmosphere in which both students and teachers seemed to thrive and enjoy each other’s company in a *connected* way, although different from the connections that I observed during classroom activities. During interviews, stakeholders mentioned “connections to people, nature and the universe,” as well as “love, friendship, peace, compassion and kindness.”

As spirituality is often confused with religion, and might mean different things to different people, I recommend that schools that are committed to nurturing spirituality as part of holistic education for young children, establish a ‘spiritual curriculum’ that nurtures the ‘inner child’, along with the formal curriculum that educates the ‘outer child’. This spiritual approach of the curriculum needs to be clearly communicated and clarified



to all education stakeholders (board members, parents, teachers and students) from the beginning of the school year, with a focus on the importance of *including* this part of holistic education.

8.4 Concluding Reflection and Remarks

The combination of literature review and *curriculum analysis*, resulted in a conceptual map that revealed eight key areas of holistic education, which formed the base of a conceptual map of holistic education (CMHE) that was used as an *analytical framework* for the analysis of education stakeholders' *perceptions* of holistic education in Nature, Montessori, and Waldorf schools in Sweden. The eight key stances of H. Ed consist of thinking skills, character education, concern for the environment, caring relationships, democracy, spirituality, creativity, and play, and are symbolized as yellow triangles on the CMHE. I also summarized a *shared vocabulary* around key findings of holistic education, according to curriculum documents from Sweden, Korea, and Hong Kong (symbolized as red triangles on the CMHE). The eight key areas have been expanded with supporting triangles for implementation, based on additional countries' curriculum documents and key words, thereby leading to an *octagonal based holistic pyramid* and extended supporting triangles based on holistic related vocabulary.

I would argue that the time has come for education stakeholders to critically think about the importance of holistic education in a 'heuristic' way, through reflecting on experience-based techniques for problem solving, learning, and discovery about H. Ed., that could lead to possible solutions for implementation that are neither guaranteed nor optimal. However, the benefits of H. Ed. outweigh the imperfections. I would strongly recommend making use of heuristic methods to speed up the process of finding a satisfactory solution for all education stakeholders. This study shows how Sweden has succeeded in linking academic research to classroom practice and has motivated teachers to critically reflect on their own practice, creating *ripples of holistic change* through

empowered individuals, who no longer are passive recipients of a national curriculum, but active participants of their own teaching and learning in holistic education.

This study also shows that the teachers' own personal, social and cultural values, and experiences influence their interpretations of the documents and the values that underpin their teaching, according to the pedagogy that they chose to teach in, in line with Alvstad et al. (2009). The use of professional dialogue to create a shared understanding of values is recommendable. Enhancing the teacher's agency through professional learning, emphasizing the importance of care, relationships, and wisdom, seemed to be a crucial factor and an integral part of any early childhood teachers' identity (Dalli & Cherrington, 2009). Finally, respect, tolerance, and critical thinking, as well as sensitivity and openness to ideas other than one's own, contribute to transforming monologue staff meetings into inter-subjective discussions, to promote ripples of change towards improved holistic education.

This research shows the importance and effectiveness of bridging politics, research, and offering tools for reflection and accountability on existing practices.

This model can be generalized for change in any establishment (school, or company), and in any field (education, medicine, or business), to ensure that all stakeholders engage in critical reflection on existing practices, and compare with new guidelines an understanding of the what, why, how, and for whom.

Providing space and time for personal reflection, quality discussions with colleagues, allocating time during staff meetings, and connecting with the wider community, as well as reaching out to other regions, will create 'ripples of change' through the day-to-day actions of empowered individuals, who become the 'advocates of change' through the embodiment of the change they want to see.

I hope that holistic education can be locally and globally understood as a multi-dimensional mode of learning, underpinning a set of basic assumptions in which individuals are both given the time and tools for personal reflection and discussion, and the opportunities to actively engage in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual levels of awareness, leading to holistic modes of thinking.

This study did not give evidence about my hypothesis that the diversity of educational stakeholders' perceptions about holistic education could lead to *slippage* in the design of curriculum documents, leading to early childhood practitioners who are 'puzzled' as to how to transform their theoretical knowledge about children's holistic development, and how to offer truly holistic educational practices in the classroom. On the contrary stakeholders' perceptions converged, leading to cooperation between politicians, researchers, and educators to make holistic education possible.

However, my assumption that "an urgent need exists to facilitate teachers into reflective and critical practitioners who highlight the need for bridging the gap between the theory and practice of holistic education" was *confirmed*. This research revealed how politicians, researchers, and educators have cooperated to find an effective and respectful way of complementing each other to succeed in offering 'holistic education'. This research also revealed that *fidelity* in curriculum reform is possible, if all stakeholders communicate, cooperate, collaborate, and contribute through professional dialogue.

This study was the response to an international educator's combined curiosity and interest, triggered by a desire to unveil holistic education and to clarify and simplify this complex paradigm, as a goal to uncover this important pillar of education and to make it *visible* through a practical holistic early childhood framework that can be used in classrooms as a model for implementation and a guide for classroom preparation.

This practical and comprehensive framework for holistic education can be used for interpretation and comparison with any school's existing curriculum and can serve as a roadmap for inserting elements that can contribute to the improvement of offering holistic practices to educate the whole child. All educators who are committed to educating children entrusted to them in a holistic way, can consult this framework for reflection of existing practices.

I truly believe that all schools, ranging from urban mainstream schools to rural village schools in developing countries, can benefit. At least it offers guidelines and practical help to teachers who are passionate to develop the whole child, and who are unsure how to make it happen. Below is a summary of recommendations for successful implementation of H. Ed. in any preschool.

What? Define clearly what holistic education is according to scientific evidence and academic literature research.

Why? Inform educators of the reasons why holistic education is crucial for early childhood practitioners.

How? Give teachers the tools and the time for critical reflection on their own practices, and encourage them to write down their findings, as a way to document their own thinking, and to compare it with curriculum guidelines. Give teachers an overview of the latest findings in early childhood research as a supporting tool to acknowledge and bridge academic research with classroom practice.

- Accumulated reflections from staff can become a part of the weekly staff meetings as a follow-up. Systematic small changes can lead to understanding and change in attitude, leading to ensured nationwide implementation of holistic education, where all members are working to reach the same goal.



- **Policymakers** have to insert holistic education in their policy documents, clearly stating the importance and values, supported by research – from education improvement to quality assurance.
- **School principals** have to give the staff the tools and time to reflect on existing practice and how to improve. They also have to be role models, encouraging the staff to make active use of the ‘curriculum/reflection’ booklet, in combination with the latest research in early childhood. Staff meetings are an ideal starting place to insert systematic reviews of parts of the curriculum, and to discuss scientific research.
- Motivated **teachers** can become ‘agents of change’ through their daily actions as empowered individuals.
- My holistic octagon (figure 2) could be used as a cross-cultural framework for ‘holistic education beyond borders’, bridging the holistic perceptions between the East and West. In an era of globalization and internationalization, an awareness of holistic beliefs and underlying theory and practices in different school pedagogies, could lead to better informed decision-making and broader understanding of successful holistic practices that could facilitate holistic education and life-long learning, in support of the growing needs of holistic kindergarten education both locally and globally.

Create a common ‘holistic education vocabulary’: Identify and create a common ‘*holistic education vocabulary*’ that is made visible in and around the classroom, embedding words and phrases such as ‘stimulate, motivate, engage, nurture, enhance learning, supportive environment, dedicated teachers, thriving atmosphere free from stress, innovation, vital, relevant, intrinsic thinking skills, creative and critical thinkers,

competent and confident communicators’ etc. This vocabulary can be created in line with the school’s *vision* and *mission* statement.

Connect thinking with subjects, body, community, earth and soul: I argue that J.P. Miller’s (2007) definition of holistic education as “the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship to the earth and our relationships to our souls” (p. 13) should be experienced and embodied by *all* education stakeholders who are attempting to provide holistic education in their classrooms, including pre-service and in-service teachers.

Redefine spirituality: Although ‘spirituality’ ought to be an integral part of ‘holistic’ education, the unfortunate reality is that it is often overlooked, ignored, misinterpreted, or not discussed at all in curricula that tends to emphasize learning as a sole cognitive activity. A true holistic approach offers opportunities to transform education by attending to all developmental domains: social, aesthetic, language, affective, physical, and cognitive, including the spiritual aspect, thereby fostering wholeness and well-being, and nurtures deep and enduring relationships between individuals and communities. Miller (2000) claims that by integrating spirituality into education, schools will foster an education for the whole child, rather than for a fragmented self, and that spirituality provides a space to address essential human questions related to self-identity, relationships with others, nature, and purpose in life. Unfortunately, in many countries in the world, policymakers and school principals’ views are focused on education reforms that emphasize the academic performance and cognitive development of the child, neglecting to view the child as a whole person (Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003).

Establish rapport among teachers, parents, and communities: A holistic approach also includes building a good rapport between teachers, parents, and communities, so teachers and children can find a sense of belonging and show respect for each other’s

uniqueness and backgrounds. Hooks (2001) also stressed that children need to receive love through guidance and care; embedding spirituality in everyday activities through ordinary conversation, and focusing on the process of teaching and learning.

Establish a ‘Teacher’s Profile’ based on eight important parameters of Holistic Education: Respecting the nature of the school and the cultural diversity of its teachers and students, a ‘*teacher’s profile*’ could be established in line with the vision and mission of the school. For example,

A teacher promoting holistic education offers his/her students *opportunities* to **think**, *finds ways* of practicing **caring relationships**, *models* **character education**, *provides* quality **play opportunities**, *embeds* **spirituality** in daily classroom practice, *promotes* **creativity**, is an *ambassador* for **environmental sustainability**, and *shows* by her daily actions what **democracy** means. In other words, teachers ought to become the *embodiment* for what they try to teach.

I believe that the time to offer holistic education for all children in the early years classroom is ‘now’. I urge all classroom practitioners to start educating our future generation in a holistic way. I translated the findings of this research into a framework for *action*, and I argue that, through communication, cooperation, and collaboration between policymakers, school principals and teachers, this is an achievable short-term goal with a potential high impact in the form of invaluable benefits towards teaching the whole child in a holistic way.



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APPENDICES

1 Transcript of Principal Interviews in Nature, Montessori, and Waldorf Schools

Q1 What is your understanding of 'holistic education'?

NSP Q1 “A view of the ‘whole child’, a ‘total child approach’ where all parts are equally important. Especially the development of the child’s personality, where the adult experiences, acts, and explores alongside the child on the child’s conditions, respecting the child’s wishes.”

WSP Q1 “I think we differentiate ourselves by the way we see the role of the teacher. At Waldorf schools, the teacher’s role is to reach every individual child in a holistic way. All areas of the whole child should be ‘equally nourished’.”

“In Waldorf we emphasize feeling and emoting that leads to action. & emoting = action (Socrates). Our ‘Eurythmy’ implements movement, dance and drama that in unison promotes social competence. Students get a feeling of ‘body sensations’ which help them in self-knowledge.”

Q2 What is your understanding of 'whole child approach'?

NSP Q2 “To give children the opportunity to develop all senses, to train body and soul, to be curious, to explore and to experiment, to be creative and use imagination, get experience and knowledge by ‘catching the moment’, experience things first and get the facts later. In a nutshell: learning by doing.”

MSP Q2 “The principles underlying cosmic education”

WSP Q2 “We profile ourselves with a sailing boat as we give our students ‘wind to sail’, with a pedagogy that inspires ‘independent thinking and creativity’, which leads to expanding children’s inner and outer worlds. As part of our ‘holistic whole child approach’ we offer our students ecological meals which are artistically presented. We believe that food should be presented in an attractive way and in a pleasant relaxing



atmosphere with the use of candles. The building we got allocated to offer our schooling is a simple brick stone office building, but we have proven that the Waldorf pedagogy can be successfully offered to our students, as the building has been transformed by passionate staff. The quality of the food (ecological), together with the atmosphere (dimmed light and candles), and the way the food is displayed, forms a very important component of our Waldorf pedagogy.”

Principal’s comment: “In our school we employ people with the right personality and ability to capture children’s interest through exciting storytelling. When young children are totally immersed in listening to our stories they are able to retell this story long afterwards. They retain the knowledge and what they learn becomes part of them. This learning is unified with ‘expressive arts’ as this is the best way for young children to express what is inside them, how they feel. We nurture the inside as well as the outside. Our pedagogy is based on using all senses, with equal value placed on theoretical and practical, supported by strong links to nature and surrounded by a beautiful, aesthetically welcoming learning environment. We highlight three equally important elements in our daily teaching: analytical thinking, movement and creativity through exploring. We also provide ecological meals and make sure that all children have been exposed to songs and a variety of musical activities.”

2 Transcript of Teacher Interviews in Nature, Montessori, and Waldorf Schools

2.1 Nature Schools

NST Q1 *How would you describe your role as a teacher in your school?*

“Our pre-school focuses on outdoor activities – ‘Ur och Skur’ means rain and shine. It has actual a dual meaning: first that we are outside under all weather conditions – in Sweden we say that there is no bad weather, only bad clothes-; and the second meaning of ‘in rain and shine’ means that we actually take care of each other just as we take care of nature and protect it. Our simple philosophy is that you cherish things you love. We



expand the Swedish National Curriculum Guidelines of ‘developing an interest and understanding for nature’s different life circles and how people, nature, and society influence each other’ (Lpfo, p.10) through hands-on experiences in a natural environment. Swedish preschool documents state clearly that ‘the preschool should put great emphasis on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation’ (Lpfo, p. 7); to respect all forms of life (p. 8); as well as to ‘give children the opportunity of understanding how their own actions can have an effect on the environment (p. 11).

We do this by giving children an increased knowledge about nature and transmit to them a feeling for nature as well. We offer children an ‘ecological view’ and, as a result, we create concern for the environment. Teaching children how to behave in nature and how to respect the rights of all people and animals is giving them the ‘knowledge tools’ on how to act accordingly.”

NST Q2 *How do you offer ‘holistic education’ in your curriculum?*

“We make use of the access to the natural environment to stimulate developing the whole child. Nature promotes personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual awareness through free play in the forest. Social and emotional competencies are embedded in giving children the opportunity for movement and friendship, building relationships through joyful play and healthy exploration opportunities, together with other children in nature. Offering opportunities to children to have direct contact with nature enhances the connections to themselves, others and the world around them.”

“Through our philosophy we also give children the basis for a lifelong interest in nature. In nature our students are exposed to ‘learning with all senses’ and ‘with the whole body’ (head, heart, hands). Through nature, children are exposed to concrete experiences about abstract knowledge which is central to students’ learning. Play and activities in nature result in developing children’s imagination and creativity. Free play is crucial for

development and learning. Through play, children learn social, personal, emotional, physical, and language skills.

Parents' engagement is important in nature schools to reach high quality experiences. Children's 'both worlds' (home and school) must meet and cooperate for developing the child's full potential."

2.2 Waldorf Schools

Q1 Could you describe a typical morning session for young children?

"It would be easier to explain what we do on a weekly basis based on weather conditions and interest of the children. Daily activities include singing songs, painting with water colours, using beeswax crayons for colouring, cooking, storytelling with puppets, going on a nature walk, working in the garden, making constructions with wooden blocks or making a variety of houses using play stands and a variety of fabrics with different textures. These activities promote deep engagement and develop powers of concentration and motivation. We also honour uninterrupted imaginary play and we devote a significant portion of the children's day to this very meaningful activity."

Q2 Could you explain what "eurythmy" means and how you implement it in your classroom?

"It is important for young children to recognise 'rhythm' and a balance of energetic and restful play. All teachers follow a 'cyclical' schedule of daily, weekly and yearly activities including festivals and foods. Our rhythmic musical movement is called 'eurythmy' and symbolises this daily 'rhythm' which forms an important part of our curriculum.

Q3 What would you describe as distinguishing Waldorf schools from other schools?

"I would like to mention two notable differences: first, our students stay with the same teacher and classroom group as they explore the world through conscious imagination or 'feeling intelligence', second, many parents show their surprise when we inform them



during parent info nights that in Waldorf schools lessons are unaccompanied by textbooks. This promotes an integrated, multisensory approach to learning and expression, with more emphasis on aural listening and memory than is found in other early childhood models for the primary years. As an example, even for arithmetical activities, a story is told by the teacher where numbers are characters woven into an exciting story. Our students listen when their teacher presents the material and they integrate what they have learned through designing and illustrating their own lesson books with caution, beauty, and eye for detail. By composing their own texts in their own personalised format, they document and treasure the learning experience of their individual learning journey.”

Q4 What are the curriculum differences between the national and Waldorf curricula?

“In line with Swedish National Guidelines, all schools have to follow the national curriculum and cover all subjects. However, in addition, our Waldorf curriculum emphasises more folktales and mythology, more practical crafts, art and music. Outdoors we construct play shelters with natural materials such as boards and branches to promote imaginative play. Our method of delivery might differ for natural science and foreign language teaching for the older children. When our Waldorf students enter high school, their rational abstract power of the intellect emerges and we focus on ethics, social responsibility and mastery of complex and rigorous subject matter with specialised teachers.”

“In our school we value and integrate storytelling and art in all forms of learning. Learning and expressing are integrated, e.g., when children learn about plants and flowers we look into tiny details and transform our knowledge on paper. Stories about plants and flowers will reinforce students’ learning.”

2.3 Montessori School

Q1 Could you describe a typical morning session for young children?

“In order for you as a researcher to better understand what you will observe in our classrooms, I need to give you a brief explanation what the Montessori method consists



of. This method emerged from a *scientific* pedagogical experience by Maria Montessori when she worked with young children with disabilities in Rome. Based on her *scientific* observations of children's ability to *absorb* knowledge from the environment combined with their natural interest of *manipulating materials*, Montessori created her innovative educational methodology supported by a series of educational materials."

"I would like to stress that Montessori observed what children do *naturally* and *unassisted* by adults". This information was very useful to make sense of the very individualized learning that was observed by the researcher as opposed to an ordinary whole class teaching. Children work in three hours 'work cycle' including teacher's demonstrations and individuals snack time."

3 Interviews with Nature Leaders at International Symposium in Japan

This was an opportunity for me to interview participants in this Nature symposium in Japan with the theme 'Educating the Whole Child through Nature' organised by Skogsmulle in Sweden.

3.1 Overview of Interviewees

Interviewee 1: 32-year-old male Welsh (UK). 10 years in education with 6 years involved in nature education.

Interviewee 2: 45-year-old female British. Based in Scotland (Scotland has a different education system than England.) 20 years in education and 26 years involved in nature education.

Interviewee 3: 65-year-old female British. She wrote a book about the outdoors. 30 years in education and 40 years in nature education

Interviewee 4: 65-year-old female Swedish and Founder of 'Skogsmulle' preschools.

Interviewees 3 & 4 were interviewed in pair. 'R' stands for British interviewee and 'S' stands for Swedish interviewee.

Interviewee 5: 71-year-old female Swedish. Retired.

Interviewee 6: 59-year-old Swedish teacher



Interviewees 5 & 6 were interviewed in pair. ‘I’ stands for Swedish retiree and ‘A’ stands for Swedish teacher.

Interviewee 1

Interview Question 1: Describe what triggered your interest in nature education. Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.

“Childhood experiences set the foundation. I became a sports teacher and looked at ways to extend participation in leisure and sports. Moved into outdoor education and then to nature education. I always kept an interest in the benefits to health.”

Interview Question 2: What words or phrases come into your mind when you hear the word ‘nature’?

“Harmony, sensory experiences, beauty, emotional, health, vitality and resilience.”

Interview Question 3:How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

“Someone keen to further develop my own knowledge and experiences. Promote and facilitate positive outdoor experiences for others.”

Interview Question 4:How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? Is it part of the curriculum?

“Yes, I train teachers to deliver nature education (Forest School) and conservation (John Muir Arends). I hope to extend this to Skogsmulle.”

Interview Question 5:Please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom.

“I do not have an indoor classroom. I use woodlands and other outdoor settings. I have an outdoor classroom with no walls!”

Interview Question 6:How do you see the relationship of nature and values education?

“There is a natural synergy between values and nature. Through promoting one we strengthen the other.”

Interview Question 7:How would you describe the journey of pre-school children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

“They become fascinated by the majesty of their natural environment. They become independent, resilient, healthy and ready, able to solve problems.”

Interview Question 8:What factors facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

“An education framework that we can work within. Good practitioners who are well trained and competent. Access to the outdoors.”

Interview Question 9:What are the factors that hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

“Fear of litigation and risk-averse school principals. Fear of not achieving school goals, i.e., exam results. Time constraints – enough time for children to benefit from regular outdoor nature experiences.”

Interview Question 10:What are the views of parents and policy makers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

“Skeptical – until they experience it for themselves. We need more research in this field to help us convince.”

Interview Question 11:What would you suggest to convince parents and policy makers to accept the importance of exposing children to nature?

“Involvement in programs. Showing them evidence of the impacts of nature education on holistic child development.”

Interview Question 12: Are you aware of any studies conducted in your country about the importance of nature education and the impact on young children?

‘Yes, I currently do research for early years in the outdoors at Master’s level.

3.2 Additional Interview Questions (time permitting)

AIQ1: How do you view nature education? A profession? A calling? Other? Why?

“I see it as a profession that I truly believe in and enjoy!”

AIQ2: What words or phrases describe you as a teacher?

“Interested in engaging children in meaningful experiences.”

AIQ3: Why did you become a teacher? What motivates you to continue teaching?

“Having bad/poor teachers. Did not want others to experience poor teaching!”

AIQ4: What is your ultimate aim or goal as a teacher?

“To feel that I have made a difference and achieved something meaningful.”

AIQ5: Please respond to this quote: “Everything in the universe is interconnected. When we do harm to part of our world, we do harm to ourselves. By observing and learning about nature, children will begin to understand this important relationship. By immersing themselves in nature, children will begin to appreciate the beauty and interconnectedness of the system they are part of, and they will then have a desire to protect it in the future, being in nature can be calming and soothing or it can be exciting and awe inspiring – all of which nourish our inner cores.” (*Educating from the Heart*, Hagee, A. 2003, XI)

“A wonderful summary of how we are part of nature – we cannot continue to be disconnected from nature. It is intrinsic to us – to learn about nature, from nature, in nature!”

Interviewee 2

Interview Question 1: Describe what triggered your interest in nature education. Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.

“Age 7-10 living in the Lake District. When I was 9 I climbed a mountain with my family and realised the beauty of the landscape – a God’s eye view! At age 9 reading about pollution from factories. I was shocked!”

Interview Question 2: What words or phrases come into your mind when you hear the word ‘nature’?

“I have pictures of hills, woods, beaches, lakes, etc. I don’t have words.”

Interview Question 3: How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

“An activist and teacher of other adults. I help people who are not thinking about nature and children to think ‘Aha!’”

Interview Question 4: How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? Is it part of the curriculum?

“Yes. In Scotland we can make teaching of nature part of our entire curriculum if we want. Specifically it is covered by biology and biodiversity in science and landscapes and weather in geography.”

Interview Question 5: Please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom.

“I take children outside and let them learn and play there. One class is currently learning through ‘ropes and swings’ and the other class explores ‘birds and insects’.”

Interview Question 6: How do you see the relationship of nature and values education?

“You can teach about values through considering the world around us, e.g., finding peace, examples of justice, understanding cooperation. For example there is a book, *The Little Book of Values* by Julie Duckworth, and every value can be applied in a nature-based context.”

Interview Question 7: How would you describe the journey of pre-school children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

“It depends upon the amount of exposure to nature and the ethos and climate created by the adults. The more time in nature the better. It is our normal environment. Indoors is artificial!”

Interview Question 8: What factors facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

“Scotland has a curriculum which is flexible so this helps – any keen educator can teach children in nature. We are a small country so our communication is better. We use email and social media to connect like-minded educators locally and globally. Supporting each other and positive communication between organisations help. We have local and national outdoor learning networks. Our Scottish Parliament – all political parties agree with outdoor learning and facilitating nature kindergartens is a priority.”

Interview Question 9: What factors hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

“Confidence, belief and understanding of the majority of teachers. Also change takes time. Motivation and effort. We have to believe ‘Can I do this?’ and ‘Is it worth it?’ for change to happen.”

Interview Question 10: What are the views of parents and policy makers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

“Most do not understand but would probably agree that it is a good thing.”

Interview Question 11: What would you suggest to convince parents and policy makers to accept the importance of exposing children to nature?

“I talk about ‘What is in it for them?’ – in other words, how this makes a positive difference, is cost effective, etc.”

Interview Question 12: Are you aware of any studies conducted in your country about the importance of nature education and the impact on young children?

“Yes. Sarah Munoz 2009 and 2010 Lit. Review and Sowing seeds report 2011 and 2012 by Tim Gill.”

Additional Interview Questions (time permitting)

AIQ1: How do you view nature education? A profession? A calling? Other? Why?

“A right and necessity for every child. In a world of melting ice caps it is not enough to say this is tomorrow’s problem. As the Chinese proverb says: The best time to plant trees is 20 years ago. The next best time is today.”

AIQ2: What words or phrases describe you as a teacher?

“I think outdoors!”

AIQ3: Why did you become a teacher? What motivates you to continue teaching?

“I enjoyed education modules at university. I still teach because I train and work with teachers.”

AIQ4: What is your ultimate aim or goal as a teacher? (not answered due to time constraints)

AIQ5: Please respond to this quote: “Everything in the universe is interconnected. When we do harm to part of our world, we do harm to ourselves. By observing and learning about nature, children will begin to understand this important relationship. By immersing

themselves in nature, children will begin to appreciate the beauty and interconnectedness of the system they are part of, and they will then have a desire to protect it in the future, being in nature can be calming and soothing or it can be exciting and awe inspiring – all of which nourish our inner cores.” (*Educating from the Heart*, Hagee, A. 2003, XI). (not answered due to time constraints)

Interviewees 3 & 4 were interviewed in pair. ‘R’ stands for British interviewee and ‘S’ stands for Swedish interviewee.

Interview Question 1: Could you describe what triggered your interest in nature education? Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.

R: “Family, children, training as teacher, visit to Denmark and Sweden (2004) followed by more visits to Sweden to take more courses on outdoor learning.”

S: “Children, Skogsmulle, GostaFroh”

Interview Question 2: What words or phrases come into your mind when you hear the word ‘nature’?

R: “Freedom, movement, processes, time/natural”

S: “Children, stress free, growth, awe and wonder”

Interview Question 3: How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

R: “Consultant, author, grandmother”

S: “Teaching children and adults”

Interview Question 4: How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? Is it part of the curriculum?

R&S: “Yes, part of the curriculum.”

Interview Question 5: Please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom.

R: “N/A – retired”

S: “Implement outside classroom – bring the inside out.”

Interview Question 6:How do you see the relationship of nature and values education?

R&S “They are the same.”

Interview Question 7:How would you describe the journey of pre-school children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

R: “Increase in confidence to try new things – raises self-esteem.”

S: “They have better motor skills, concentration and stamina. More creative – use imagination more.Kinder to each other.”

Interview Question 8:What are the factors that facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

R: “1. National curriculum, but it can be too prescriptive.

2. fear of obesity”

S: “1. Allerstraten – right of access to public spaces

2. traditional connections with nature”

Interview Question 9:What factors hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

R: “Poor weather/poor clothing/no interest in nature, TV and IT”

S: “Technology and above”

Interview Question 10: What are the views of parents and policy makers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

R&S: “They all agree that it is important”

Interview Question 11: What would you suggest to convince parents and policy makers to accept the importance of exposing children to nature?

R&S: “If we lose our contact with nature, we lose our understanding of life. You need to know ‘nature’ to be able to look after it.”

Interview Question 12: Are you aware of any studies conducted in your country about the importance of nature education and the impact on young children?

R: Rose Joyce *Outdoor Learning Past & Present* (2012) Forest School Association. UK

S: Patrick Grain studies related to ‘Ur ochSkur’ and ordinary pre-school in town

Additional Interview Questions (time permitting)

AIQ1: How do you view nature education? A profession? A calling? Other? Why?

R&S: “A vocational profession”

AIQ2: What words or phrases describe you as a teacher?

R&S: “Dedicated”

AIQ3: Why did you become a teacher? What motivates you to continue teaching?

R&S: “Love children and nature”

AIQ4: What is your ultimate aim or goal as a teacher?

R&S: “To help children build confidence and develop through nature.”

AIQ5: Please respond to this quote: “Everything in the universe is interconnected. When we do harm to part of our world, we do harm to ourselves. By observing and learning about nature, children will begin to understand this important relationship. By immersing themselves in nature, children will begin to appreciate the beauty and interconnectedness of the system they are part of, and they will then have a desire to protect it in the future, being in nature can be calming and soothing or it can be exciting and awe inspiring – all of which nourish our inner cores.” (*Educating from the Heart*, Hagee, A. 2003, XI)

R&S: “This is the Skogsmulle philosophy.”

AIQ6: How important do you think is the teaching of nature education?

R&S: “Essential.”

AIQ7: How do you teach nature education in your classroom?

R&S: “Outside through meaningful practical activities.”

AIQ8: Why did you choose these strategies to teach nature education in your classroom?

R&S: “Things you do practically in meaningful ways, you are more likely to remember.”

AIQ9: What kind of professional development did you participate in related to nature education?

R&S: “Master’s, Skogsmulle training, Forest school training, Teacher training.”

AIQ10: What are your suggestions for teachers who would like to start implementing nature education in their classrooms?

R&S: “Learn to enjoy being in nature yourself. Just go out: Look, listen, touch, feel, respond to what your senses connect with.”

Interviewees 5 & 6 were interviewed in pair. ‘I’ stands for Swedish retiree and ‘A’ stands for Swedish teacher.

Note: these interviews were conducted in Swedish and translated by researchers. Sometimes Swedish terms are challenging to translate.

Interview Question 1: Could you describe what triggered your interest in nature education? Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.

I: “When I grew up I spent all summer holidays on a farm and outside in nature. I worked with animals and plants.”

A: “I am used since early childhood to be outside a lot in field and forest, picking berries and mushrooms and I have continued to enjoy to be outdoors.”

Interview Question 2: What words or phrases come into your mind when you hear the word ‘nature’?

I: “Explore, experience, rest, restore, real, undisturbed, something people are part of.”

A: “Enjoyable to be outside, great experience with outside cooking and outdoor activities.”

Interview Question 3: How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

I: “Engaged participant to experience and learn”

A: “It is my heart, my soul and my daily work responsibility.”

Interview Question 4: How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? It is part of the curriculum?

I: “Project work as part of my leisure engagement”

A: “Yes, it’s part of our curriculum.”

Interview Question 5: Please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom?

I: “I’m not a nature teacher, just a project leader in nature.”

A: “My classroom is outside in the forest and in nature.”

Interview Question 6:How do you see the relationship of nature and values education?

I&A: “Intertwined, linked, interrelated, connected, woven into each other”

Interview Question 7:How would you describe the journey of pre-school children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

I&A: “A personal transformation”

Interview Question 8:What are the factors that facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

I&A: “We have access to nature and no prohibition of certain areas – so called ‘Allemansratt’ meaning ‘rights of everybody’ to access all areas of nature. Nature education is also part of the pre-school curriculum but there is a need to further develop the guidelines into more specific goals, aims and targets.”

Interview Question 9:What are the factors that hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

I: “Politics and policy makers non-engagement in certain communities”

A: “School’s location, size of pre-school groups and school leader’s willingness to engage in meaningful outdoor activities”

Interview Question 10: What are the views of parents and policy makers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

I&A: “Once experiences of work in the outdoors have been established, these will promote knowledge, skills and understanding of nature education and its importance and positive feedback is the result.”

Interview Question 11: What would you suggest to convince parents and policy makers to accept the importance of exposing children to nature? (ran out of time)

Interview Question 12: Are you aware of any studies conducted in your country about the importance of nature education and the impact on young children? (ran out of time)

4. Sample Questions

4.1 Sample Questions for Policymakers, School Principals, and Teachers

IQ1: What is your understanding of ‘holistic education’?

IQ2: What is your understanding of ‘whole child approach’?

IQ3: How is holistic education defined in educational policy documents, school curriculum, school plans and daily lesson plans?

IQ4: How is holistic education operationalized in your school and classroom? Could you give me some examples of activities that promote holistic education?

IQ5: What kind of teaching and learning resources do you use for the implementation of holistic education activities in your classroom?

IQ6: Does your school provide professional development opportunities related to holistic education?

IQ7: What is the ‘work term’ used in your school for ‘educating the whole child’?

IQ8: How much emphasis or priority do you give on thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships and concern for nature?

IQ9: What are the factors that promote or hinder the implementation of holistic education in your school?

4.2 Sample Questions for Participants of International Holistic Nature Symposium

IQ1: Could you describe what triggered your interest for Nature Education? Please include people, places and events that might have influenced your decision.



IQ2: What words or phrases come onto your mind when you hear the word *nature*?

IQ3: How would you describe yourself as a nature educator?

IQ4: How does your work environment implement the teaching of nature? Is it part of the curriculum?

IQ5: Could you please discuss how you implement nature education in your classroom?

IQ6: How do you see the relationship with nature and values education?

IQ7: How would you describe the journey of preschool children before and after they have been exposed to nature education?

IQ8: What are the factors that facilitate the implementation of nature education in your country?

IQ 9: What are the factors that hinder the implementation of nature education in your country?

IQ10: What are the views of parents and policymakers in your country about ‘nature’ as part of the curriculum?

4.3 Sample Questions related to Gender Reflection in ‘Curriculum in the Pocket’

Q1 How are the curriculum guidelines anchored in yourself?

Q2 What do you as a teacher do to show this in your classroom?

Q3 What is your personal opinion about gender equity? How do you model it?

Q4 What do you do to counteract traditional gender roles?

Q5 Do you give boys and girls the same opportunities to try and develop their capabilities and interests?



The above questions show how teachers gently are prepared to question their own practices and reflect on their own opinions and how these influence their attitude and the way they model these equality values.

5. Perception of H. Ed. in Nature Schools

Q1 What is your understanding of ‘holistic education’?

“A view of the ‘whole child’, a ‘total child approach’ where all parts are equally important. Especially the development of the child’s personality, where the adult experiences, acts, and explores alongside the child on the child’s conditions, respecting the child’s wishes.”

Q2 What is your understanding of ‘whole child approach’?

“To give children the opportunity to develop all senses, to train body and soul, to be curious, to explore and to experiment, to be creative and use imagination, get experience and knowledge by ‘catching the moment’, experience things first and get the facts later, in a nutshell: ‘learning by doing’.”

Q3 How is holistic education defined in educational policy documents, school curriculum, school plans and daily lesson plans?

‘The term ‘holistic education’, I think, does not appear in the Swedish curriculum. In our ‘Ur och Skur’ nature schools we have our own ‘holistic’ circle where the child is in the centre. (Shows the document – see appendix)

Q4 How is holistic education operationalized in your school and classroom? Could you give me some examples of activities that promote holistic education?

“Through activities in nature with ‘Skogsmulle’ as a very important and essential pedagogical help and support tool. (This imaginary person meets the children during their walks in the forest and informs them about important parts of nature). Also ‘free



undisturbed play’ offers a crucial role. Nature offers ‘everything’ which means, training for all senses, gross and small muscle development, social engagement. IN addition nature offers a very interesting environment through all seasons. Children are given the opportunity to ‘discover, experiment and solve problems is a stress free environment at their own pace.

Q5 What kind of teaching and learning resources do you use for the implementation of holistic education activities in your classroom?

First we let the children experience (concrete) afterwards we add the facts. E.g. the question about ‘life and dead’ is easier to explain in nature and is important (has influence) for the child’s ‘moral development’. (we compare with the ‘dead mouse’ pedagogy). We don’t ‘scare’ children with snakes, spiders, etc. The little ‘mystical and exciting’ is an important part of nature as well. It is the ‘balance’ between security and the feeling of ‘exciting –non-security’ that is meaningful as well for children.

Q6 Does your school provide professional development opportunities related to holistic education?

‘Ur och Skur’ illustrate their pedagogical methods with a circle consisting of an ‘eight piece pie chart’ with the child in the centre. All aspects of ‘whole child approach’ are woven into this circle. Education about nature and environmental awareness happens through exposure to nature and play all year round in nature and with the help of nature.

Q7 What is the ‘work term’ used in your school for ‘educating the whole child’?

We use ‘Helhetssyn po barnet’ (total view of the child) emphasizing that in ‘viewing’ or ‘seeing’ the whole child, no parts of development will be neglected.”

Q8 How much emphasis or priority do you give on thinking skills, character development, spirituality, creativity, democracy, play opportunities, caring relationships and concern for nature?



“All these key words are part of nature’s ‘natural process’, and it is crucial that children have the opportunity to be in nature all year round from a very early age. In order to get the right ‘feeling’ for nature, children must be exposed to frequent visits to the forest and in all kinds of weather. Only then you start to value and enjoy nature, and, as a natural consequence, something you value you also want to take care of. Taking care of nature is also taking care of each other.”

Q9 What are the factors that promote or hinder the implementation of holistic education in your school?

“In my opinion, nature offers the totality of holistic education. It encompasses the personal, social, emotional, creative, environmental and spiritual aspects of a total child approach. I can’t see any hinder for the implementation in our school. Our parents believe in our pedagogy and at the same time we also follow the national Swedish curriculum (as all schools have to). Through our pedagogy, children learn to understand the connections in nature and they develop an ecological view which is the best environmental care you can wish for the future!”

Q10 Others

Swedish research has been conducted related to children enrolled in ‘Ur och Skur’ and children joining regular preschools. Results revealed some of the benefits that children joining preschools with a focus on nature displayed: better concentration skills; imagination and creativity is enhanced; undisturbed free play time promoting better quality of play and more variety in play; use of language improves as well as cooperation and collaboration which, in its turn weakens bullying; boys and girls play more with each other; improved gross and fine motor skills; children become more ‘harmonious’ and learn how to take care of themselves promoting independency; increased self-knowledge and self-confidence; children develop a good knowledge of environmental issues and mature in their concern for nature and environment.

“As a principal of a nature school, I truly believe that the spirit of the child and his/her capacity to play are intertwined. Nature offers the perfect playground for intensively engaged play that expands children’s horizons, their potential and their capacity. We frequently get visitors from Asian countries and it seems to me that the right to play as a child as well as the power of play is undervalued. Especially in an era of computers it is important to encourage free play with other children. I think if play is not valued by teachers, it is a huge loss as it deprives the child from making sense of their world.

In line with our curriculum guidelines that ‘play promotes children’s creative abilities and ways of expressing them’ (p.3) we observe, record and document children’s creativity through play. This is particularly useful during parent-teacher meetings and school inspection.

Democracy – Caring Relationships

“As an educational leader of this school, it is my responsibility to honor the democratic values as stipulated in our national curriculum by word and action. Look, as written here on page 3 of our curriculum guide, ‘Democracy forms the foundation of the preschool.’ Children don’t do as you say but they do as you do. That’s why it is of utmost importance that adults in the school give ongoing examples what democracy means. As you can see, we have posted this important statement in all classrooms so teachers can remind students and parents if necessary. This sentence ought to be known by all staff, students and parents ‘Fundamental values promoted in our preschool are in line with our national curriculum, p.3 and we honor ‘the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable’ .

All preschools in Sweden have to follow the same guidelines so all children in Sweden grow up with the same national goals and standards. In order to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of these fundamental values, we decided as a school to post them in areas where a lot of interaction takes place e.g. entrance hall, staff room, meeting



rooms, notice board etc. ‘Care and consideration towards other persons, as well as justice and equality, in addition to the rights of each individual shall be emphasized and make explicit in all pre-school activity.’ (p.3)

Concern for Nature – Spirituality

“Preschool is the perfect start to plant seeds for environmental awareness. Again, we follow the guidelines from our national curriculum stating that ‘the preschool should put great emphasis on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation’ (Lpfo98/rev.10 p.7). I believe that care and concern for nature goes hand-in-hand. We teach our children facts about our environment and how we can take care of our environment. Our curriculum guidelines state preschools need to have an ‘ecological approach’ and that children ‘acquire a caring attitude to nature and the environment’ to understand that they are all part of nature’s recycling process. (p.7)”

“In respect of spirituality, I think our philosophy to respect and value all cultures and religions as well as teaching them positive beliefs in the future and exposing them to the beauty of nature is...spirituality, I guess. Also we welcome the children of migrants and refugees into our schools and society so they feel the values of Swedish society. I personally believe that even non-religious people become ‘religious’ somehow when confronted with the amazing beauty of what nature has to offer. In Sweden we are privileged with great outdoor that offer holistic experiences to all its citizens.”

Q1 How would you describe your role as a teacher in your school?

“Our preschool focuses on outdoor activities, Mulleborg is a Swedish preschools with a focus on nature education. We *expand* the Swedish National Curriculum guideline of ‘to develop an interest and understanding for nature’s different life circles and how people, nature and society influence each other’. We do this by giving children an increased knowledge about nature and transmit to them a *feeling* for nature as well. We offer children an ‘ecological view’ and, as a result, we create concern for the environment.



Teaching children how to behave in nature and how to respect the rights of all people and animals is giving them the ‘knowledge tools’ on how to act accordingly.”

Q2 How do you offer ‘holistic education’ in your curriculum?

“We make use of the access to the natural environment to stimulate developing the whole child through nature (personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative, and spiritual awareness). Social and emotional competencies are embedded in giving children the opportunity for movement and friendship, building through joyful play and healthy exploration opportunities, together with other children in nature.

Through our philosophy we also give children the basis for a lifelong interest in nature. In nature our students are exposed to ‘learning with all *senses*’ and ‘with the whole *body*’ (head, heart, hands). Through nature ‘children are exposed to concrete experiences about abstract knowledge which is central to students’ learning. Play and activities in nature result in developing children’s imagination and creativity. Free play is crucial for development and learning. Through play children learn social, personal, emotional, physical and language skills.

Parent’s engagement is important in nature schools to reach high quality. Children’s ‘both worlds’ (home and school) must meet and cooperate for developing the child’s full potential.”

5.1 Researchers’ feedback:

In conclusion, ‘Ur och Skur’s goal and methods stimulate an interest in nature and activate children through own exploring in nature all year round. Methods strengthen their self-esteem, social competence and empathy development. Nature leaders are role models who model, mentor and motivate children for an active and healthy lifestyle and nature interest. Teachers in these schools have to be trained and certified outdoor leaders in addition to being an authorized preschool teacher.



I observed strong ‘embodiment’ in all observed pedagogies: teachers are knowledgeable and inspire students (model, mentor, motivate) and inform (communicate, collaborate and cooperate) parents about philosophy and activities so child, school and home form a coherent whole. This is in line with Miller’s (2006) findings that teachers just as Gandhi and Martin Luther King ought to be inspiring people who begin to live what will be learned. This also corresponds with earlier findings of Rogers (1969) who identified empathy, respect and genuineness as key factors in the success of teachers when their desire to teach is congruent with their expressed beliefs

Staff at this school seem all aligned with curriculum guidelines and official documents: “I think it is important that all teachers are aware of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989), stating that children have the right to be involved and to be heard in matters that affect them. In our preschool, we consider children’s perspectives, and we listen to what they have to say, as our national curriculum encourages that children think for themselves.

The researcher was impressed by the depth of the knowledge of curriculum guidelines and how staff could give examples of it implementation. Staff at this school ‘walked the talk’ and there was an overall consistency and alignment between national curriculum documents. Specialized nature school curriculum documents, interview with principal and teacher and ‘making the values visible’ by posting important statements in common areas.

6. Perception of H. Ed. in Montessori Schools

Q1 Montessori is pedagogy not a philosophy that takes care of the whole person in relation to other persons. We emphasize the interconnectedness through ‘cosmic education’

Q2 “The principles underlying ‘cosmic education’

Q3 “According to policy documents we have to address Four different perspectives: historical, international, environmental and ethical which is in line with Montessori’s cosmic education as well: international perspectives, interconnectedness, environmental and holistic views.

Q4 ”Through Montessori’s ‘Stora Lektioner’ (Montessori Great Lessons): Big Bang, Jorden (Earth), planeter (planets), språk (language), Mathematics, Tidslinje (Timeline), first appearance of men. (Telephone interview with Montessoriförbundet +4686539286)

Q5 All Montessori equipment and manuals

Q6 Ongoing through weekly staff meetings and upon request of teachers in case of uncertainties of ‘special needs’. Now our school will provide ‘arskurs 6’ till hösten so this means a lot of PD to prepare our staff. (AK 6 tillhör ‘högskoleutbildning’ in Sweden). In September our school will provide a preparation class for secondary school, so this results in an increase of professional development.

Q7 Since 2011 we got ‘mer tydliga riktlinjer’ (clearer and stricter guidelines from our education department. In the past we followed the Montessori curriculum only but now we have to follow the national curriculum as well so, we ‘weave’ our Montessori approach inside the subjects. We have to teach 6 subjects now with central content.

Q8 Thinking skills come definitely first followed by character development (personlig utveckling (personal development in Swedish)- important to become a good democratic citizen.

Q9 “The new ‘Läroplan’ is not a hinder for our Montessori school as we offer the children more than the national curriculum. However, as we have classes of different age groups (3-6, 6-9 and 9-12) the new curriculum is at times challenging to meet specific age-related goals.



Our students take an active role in their learning by making their own individual weekly plans for learning. In doing so they have to engage their thinking and planning skills. They discuss their planning with the teacher.

Q10 As our policy documents emphasize that students need to experience what democracy means and that adults need to be role model. Our school has an ‘elevrad’, (a student council) who will meet with me (principal) at regular intervals, usually once a month. Students have to prepare their case and collect students’ requests; they have to write a protocol for dialogue. E.g. If they like new materials, new curtains in the classroom, new layout of the classroom, variety in food etc. they have to discuss among themselves first before presenting it to me in a systematic way. For older students, it’s a feeling of influence within borders. They are also responsible to organize the ‘open house’ for the school, informing other students about their school, showing parents around etc. ‘Frihet under Ansvar’ (freedom under discipline). This is in line with Montessori’s statement that ‘Freedom and discipline are two faces of the same coin’ .In the Montessori approach to education we acknowledge that “All is strictly interrelated on this planet” (Montessori, 1973, p.40). As a result we teach our students about ecology as it investigates the interaction of living things and relationships between living and non-living forms. As Montessorians we believe that understanding ecology develops concern for human impact on Earth and encourages a value system involving a caring commitment for the environment. In Montessori ways of thinking, environmental education and values education are intertwined and both are essential components of the Montessori curriculum.

6.1 Researcher’s comments:

The Montessori principal explained beautifully that environmental education and values education are intertwined. She said: “In our school we link *values* education with *environmental education*. Teaching children from an early age to take care of our environment will lead to informed decision as adults. We truly believe that age appropriate information about our environment provide students the skills for positive



action and enables them to offer future generations a better world to live in. We use the definition of values by Halstead, Taylor, & Taylor, 2000 that values are "...the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behavior, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable". In school we embed our national values of democracy and gender equity as well. We are in close contact with university research teams and we discuss new findings during our staff meetings and find ways to incorporate them in our daily activities so we keep up-to-date with best educational practices. We make use of a practical booklet 'Forskning for klassrummet' (Research for the classroom) published by the Swedish Education department. This booklet inspires teachers and pedagogical leaders to take informed decisions in given situations based on knowledge, experience and research. "

7. Perception of H. Ed. in Waldorf Schools

Learning and expressing is integrated e.g. "When children learn about plants and flowers we look into tiny details and transform our knowledge on paper. Stories about plants and flowers will reinforce students learning.

Principal: "In our school we employ people with the right personality and ability to capture children's interest through exciting storytelling. When young children are totally immersed in listening to our stories they are able to retell this story long time afterwards. They retain the knowledge and what they learn becomes part of them. This learning is unified with 'expressive arts' as this is the best way for young children to express what is 'inside them', how they feel. We nurture the inside as well as the outside and our pedagogy is based on using all senses with equal value on theoretical and practical supported by strong link to nature and surrounded by a beautiful aesthetically welcoming learning environment. We highlight three equally important elements in our daily teaching: analytical thinking, movement and creativity through exploring. We also provide ecological meals and make sure that all children have been exposed to songs and a variety of musical activities.



Teacher: “Independent thinking and own creativity supported by ‘the Arts’ in all forms is key to our daily teaching. Children look forward to our daily storytelling in which we integrated new learning elements, dialogue and discussion and documenting daily learning through the arts. Once children understand our stories and put their ideas and thinking in a visible form, they will be able to apply this new knowledge in new situations. This also corresponds with Miller’s (2007) holistic ‘transformational learning where new knowledge is taught, reinforced, discussed and applied so the child and the curriculum become one.

7.1 Researcher’s observation:

Both Montessori and Waldorf emphasize the importance of the ‘prepared environment’ to educate the ‘whole child’. However the focus of this prepared environment is quite different. Although both Waldorf and Montessori accentuate the preparation of the teacher as a crucial part of the prepared environment, Montessori focuses on neat and structured display of all learning areas (practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, cultural) on low shelves from concrete to abstract while Waldorf exposes the students to a physically beautiful environment with natural materials and pastel colours to enrich and nurture the children’s inside world.

Waldorf Principal:

Q1 “I think we differentiate ourselves by the way we see the role of the teacher. In Waldorf schools, the teacher’s role it to *reach every individual child in a holistic way*. All areas of the whole child should be ‘equally nourished’.” (This is in line with...see literature review)

“In Waldorf we emphasize ‘feeling & emoting’ as emphasized by Socrates long time ago. This philosopher stated that combining feeling and emoting will result in action. Our ‘Eurythmy’ implements movement, dance and drama that in unison promotes social competence. Students get a feeling of ‘body sensations’ which help them in self-



knowledge. To be asked to move in line with the different rhythms of different music is not easy when you have other things going on in your mind. Compare Karin Boje's dikt : 'Det gor ont nar knoppen bristar' (Famous poem by Swedish poet Karin Boje about the pain that a blooming bud feels when it opens). We choreograph based on this very famous Swedish poem, so children understand the meaning behind the poet's words. Through eurythmy, all the senses are used in the body, when students position themselves in a room together with other students. This creates self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence.

For young children, when the teacher tells a story we ask them immediately afterwards to tell the story with their body so they become the 'embodiment' of the characters. In doing so they also understand better the feelings of the character and the reasons why characters act in a certain way.

You can compare this eurythmy with a form of yoga or mindfulness, away from using the head.

Q2 "We profile ourselves with a sailing boat as we give our students 'wind to sail', with a pedagogy that inspires 'independent thinking and creativity', which leads to expanding children's inner and outer worlds. As part of our 'holistic whole child approach' we offer our students ecological meals which are artistically presented. We believe that food should be presented in an attractive way and in a pleasant relaxing atmosphere with the use of candles. The building we got allocated to offer our schooling is a simple brick stone office building, but we have proven that the Waldorf pedagogy can be successfully offered to our students, as the building has been transformed by passionate staff. The quality of the food (ecological), together with the atmosphere (dimmed light and candles), and the way the food is displayed, forms a very important component of our Waldorf pedagogy."

Q3 In the past we only followed our own Waldorf curriculum 'Vagen till Frihet' (attached). Now, according to the new education act, all schools have to follow the



national curriculum. We also have to follow the ‘national exams’ at grades 3-6 and 9. We have a school nurse, a curator, a psychologist and when we need additional resources, we contact our local municipalities for support.

Q4 “We don’t make use of ‘ready-made’ materials. Each student document their own learning in a learning journal e.g. when we learn about the 1st world war children *listen* to the teacher, then they *formulate* their own thoughts about what they have learned and they *document* their thoughts after consulting their notes. In this way they also practice their questioning abilities and their study independence in preparation for further studies”.

Q5 “We promote a ‘living classroom’. Personal experiences are crucial for full integration of learning. Learning with all senses

Q6 “Andlig dimension” – likabehandlingsplan (Spiritual dimension – democratic opportunities for all)

We make use of seminars and workshops presented by university lecturers and we work closely together with researchers (learning studies). We reflect on our approaches and teachers conduct their own ‘action research’ for continuous reflection and improvement. We have ample opportunities for professional development part general for all staff and part individual for personal development. There is mutual respect among staff and students and as a principal I care for the wellbeing of my staff by offering a functional cosy staffroom with educational and non-educational reading materials, healthy refreshments, choice of music, office equipment and pleasant design of sofas and cushions. In short a ‘holistic atmosphere’ that promotes productivity as balance is created between teaching periods and short breaks away from the students.

Q8 MOD = **m**edvetenhet, **o**mtanke, **d**elaktighet IDA= individuality, **d**emocratic, **a**nsvar

“We use similar words for our philosophy MOD represent consciousness. Empathy and participation/inclusion and IDA stands for respect for the individual and individual differences, showing democracy in actions and responsibility.

“Looking at these 8 key words I would rank the first three (according to my opinion) 1. Creativity 2. Character development and 3. Thinking skills. (In line with Q2) Our philosophy inspires to independent thinking and creation. The combination of these 3 will lead to the other 5.”

Q9 The government pays us per student. Parents can choose the school and pedagogy they believe in, so we have students who travel far to come and study here. The government district they belong to will pay us, so we receive money from different parts of Stockholm.

“In a Waldorf school we especially pay attention to children who seem have forgotten how to play. It is crucial for children to see that adults *value* play. We nourish our students’ imagination through storytelling, including fairy tales and nature tales. We involve children in working with puppets, all forms of art work, physical movement and real work such as cooking, cleaning, woodworking and gardening. These activities all restore children’s lost play through ‘healthy nourishment.

Q1 Could you describe a typical morning session for young children?

“It would be easier to explain what we do on a weekly basis based on weather conditions and interest of the children. Daily activities include singing songs, painting with water colours, using beeswax crayons for colouring, cook, storytelling with puppets, go on a nature walk, work in the garden, making constructions with wooden blocks or make a variety of houses using play stands and a variety of different textured cloth. These activities promote deep engagement and develop powers of concentration and motivation. We also honour ‘uninterrupted imaginary play’ and we devote a significant portion of the children’s day to this very meaningful activity.”

Q2 Could you explain what ‘eurythmy’ means and how you implement it in your classroom?

“It is important for young children to recognize ‘rhythm’ and a balance of energetic and restful play. All teachers follow a ‘cyclical’ schedule of daily, weekly and yearly activities including festivals and foods. Our rhythmic musical movement is called ‘eurythmy’ and symbolizes this daily ‘rhythm’ which forms an important part of our curriculum.

Q3 What would you describe as distinguishing Waldorf schools with other schools?

“I would like to mention two notable differences: first our students 7-14 stay with the *same* teacher and classroom group as they explore the world through conscious *imagination* or ‘feeling intelligence’ according to Finser (1995).

Second, many parents show their surprise when we inform them during parent-info nights that in Waldorf schools lessons are *unaccompanied by textbooks*. This approach promotes an integrated, multisensory approach to learning and expression, with more emphasis on oral listening and memory than is found in other early childhood models for the primary years. As an example even for arithmetical activities, a story is told by the teacher where numbers are characters woven into an exciting story. Our students listen when their teacher presents the material and they integrate what they have learned through designing and illustrating their own lesson books with caution, beauty, and eye for detail. By composing their own texts in their own personalized format, they document and treasure their learning experience of their individual learning journey.”

Q4 What are the curriculum differences between the national and Waldorf curriculum?

“In line with Swedish National Guidelines, all schools have to follow the national curriculum and cover all subjects. However, *in addition*, our Waldorf curriculum emphasizes more folktales and mythology, more practical crafts, art, and music. Outdoors



we construct play shelters with natural materials, such as boards and branches, to promote imaginative play. Our method of delivery may differ for natural science and foreign language teaching for the older children. When our Waldorf students enter high school, their rational abstract power of the intellect emerges, and we focus on ethics, social responsibility, and mastery of complex and rigorous subject matter with specialized teachers.”

