

**“Perched on the outside of the box, clinging to threads of familiarity”:  
Incubating imagination through meditation practice in Teacher Education  
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**Vanessa Compton**

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education / University of Toronto**

<begin with the “white light” meditation: breathe in deeply and slowly on the count of four, and exhale on the count of four. Do this at least three times, then create for yourself a ball of white light that you hold in your hands while it slowly spins clockwise or counter-clockwise. Now make it big enough to encompass you, and continue to breathe slowly and deeply while the ball of white light spins slowly through all the tissues of your body. If you wish, make the ball big enough to encompass everyone who is in the room with you. Continue to keep the ball spinning throughout the session, encompassing everyone, or compacted and contained within you.>

This paper describes an “alternative” curriculum course in which teacher candidates combined Egan’s “Imaginative” approach to teaching and learning with Miller’s Holistic Education framework and meditation practice. It examines the rationale for the assignments they were given and how they responded, what the problematic areas were, and why the undertaking generally worked as well as it did.

When I first taught an elective course at Teachers’ College called “*Holistic and non-traditional approaches to curriculum*” to a group of students who had arrived from “all over the map” of subject specialisations, previous careers, family obligations, age, stages and life transitions, I could not assume a common understanding of what a “holistic” or “non-traditional” approach to curriculum might be. For that matter, in the first week of September of an eight month post-graduate Teacher Education program, I don’t know if it’s possible to assume that the class has a common understanding of what curriculum itself is!

The language in the course title sets up a duality between what is normatively “traditional” and what might be considered “alternative,” “non-traditional,” null perhaps, and probably unexamined. Pinar’s *Understanding Curriculum* gives a good picture of this diversity: the table of contents includes sections on curriculum as historical text; as political, racial, and gender text; as phenomenological, post-structural, deconstructed and post-modern text; as autobiographic, aesthetic, and theological text; institutional and international text (Pinar, Reynolds, et al. 1994). The course description in the university bulletin was the only guideline provided:

*Exploration of theories and practices associated with interconnectedness within school experiences; examines models of curriculum design and teaching that respect holistic learning and multi-disciplinary approaches; promotion of self-directed and experiential learning including alternative settings.*

There were no required texts or standard syllabus, so the first step was to ask: given the clues of “interconnectedness,” “multi-disciplinary,” “self-directed and experiential learning,”

- what **is** a “holistic” approach to curriculum?
- what “non-traditional” approach would be both complementary and useful?

### **What is a Holistic approach to curriculum?**

The term *holistic* comes from the word *holon* (from Gk *holos*: “whole”) which Arthur Koestler originally first used in 1967 to refer to that which is a whole in one context but simultaneously a part in another. A biological example would be: molecules are parts of cells, which are parts of tissues, which are parts of organs, which are parts of organisms. Letters are parts of words, which are parts of sentences, and paragraphs; they are holons nested in other holons. According to philosopher and physicist Ken Wilber, reality is not composed of things or processes, but of holons.

Holons display common patterns and tendencies so as to maintain both their *wholeness*, their agency, and conversely, their *a-partness*, their “communities as parts of other wholes” in their environment. We can say that:

**Agency = self-preservation:** the holon's capacity to maintain its wholeness and identity in the face of environmental pressures that would obliterate it. This is true for atoms, cells, organisms, ideas.

**Communion= self-adaptation:** the holon has to be part of something. Its existence depends on its capacity to fit into its environments.

[An excess of either of these two tendencies can deform or kill a holon, whether the growth of a plant or of a system such as the patriarchy.]

Two other fundamental tendencies are

**self-dissolution:** breaking down into original subholons

**self-transcendence:** going beyond what went before, something new emerges, more complex.

"Self-transcendence," is a vertical move. It is the creative force of evolution itself, manifested in the emergence of something new! Indeterminacy, the emergence of the new, is part of the universal pattern. The Future may be understood as exactly this: the emergence of the not-yet-manifested potentiality, the Heideggerian "called-forth". This tendency is most significant for imagination based education, which looks for what might be possible. It calls for a pedagogy that is receptive to and supportive of the newly emerging learner, and the newly emergent learning.

Holistic education is based on the assumption that teaching and learning ought to be in alignment with the fundamental reality of these patterns of nature, which are interrelated and dynamic at all levels of complexity. Holistic educational practices are therefore guided by three basic principles:

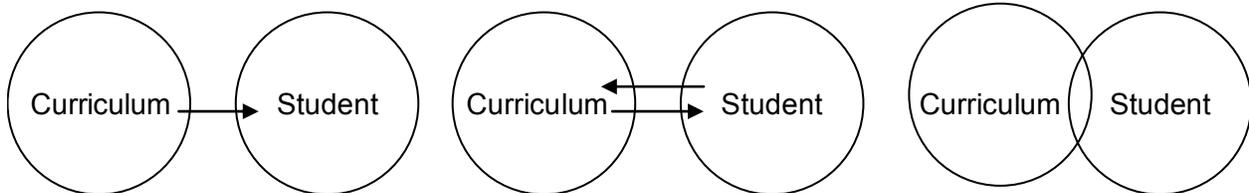
**balance, inclusion, and connection.**

Applying these principles in practice counteracts the fragmentation within, and in the relationships between learner-holons, curriculum subject-holons, community-holons, and the environment-holon, brought about by the atomism of positivist thinking, what's sometimes called in organisational language "silo-thinking."

A holistic approach would seek to **balance** the individual and the group, mind and body, content and process, constructed knowledge and interpretive imagination, rational linearity and intuitive thought, always seeing each component of the binary as a whole and as a part of something larger.

**Inclusiveness** from a holistic perspective can be seen in the three styles or “orientations” identified by Miller: transmission, transaction, transformation. The direction of energy and movement is illustrated in the table.

<b>THREE TEACHING POSITIONS</b>		
<b>TRANSMISSION</b>	<b>TRANSACTION</b>	<b>TRANSFORMATION</b>
<b>AIM</b>	<b>AIM</b>	<b>AIM</b>
mastery of content and basic skills	development of problem solving and decision making skills	personal integration and social awareness
<b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b>	<b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b>	<b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lecture</li> <li>• programmed learning</li> <li>• practice/ drill</li> <li>• recitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inquiry/ discovery learning</li> <li>• decision making models</li> <li>• group investigation and decision making</li> <li>• independent learning</li> <li>• case study approaches and decision making</li> <li>• moral dilemmas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creative thinking</li> <li>• invitational learning</li> <li>• cooperative learning</li> <li>• guided imagery techniques</li> <li>• whole language learning</li> <li>• movement education</li> </ul>
<b>EVALUATION TECHNIQUES</b>	<b>EVALUATION TECHNIQUES</b>	<b>EVALUATION TECHNIQUES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standardized tests</li> <li>• multiple choice tests</li> <li>• true–false tests</li> <li>• completion tests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• checklists</li> <li>• observation and rating scales</li> <li>• evaluation of written decision making</li> <li>• questionnaires</li> <li>• interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interview</li> <li>• journal record</li> <li>• observation and rating scales</li> <li>• questionnaires</li> <li>• self–evaluation</li> <li>• peer evaluation</li> </ul>



from Miller, Holistic Curriculum, 1996, pp. 6-7

The transmission position is typified in competency-based education, where the teacher is a trainer; transactional learning is more interactive and mainly cognitive, the model being the scientific method, where the teacher is a facilitator of inquiry and the learner is a problem-solver; in transformational learning, exemplified by holistic education, the curriculum and the student are not seen as separate, strategies such as creative problem-solving and collaborative learning encourage students to make connections that are personally and socially meaningful to them.

**Connection** is central to holistic education, which focuses on bringing to awareness and consciously working with the relationship between knowledge and imagination, rational and intuitive thought, mind and body, domains of knowledge, and especially between the individual and the community, the earth, and the higher self. With regard to subject matter, this observation from Van Manen is intriguing:

It is probably less correct to say that we learn about the subjects contained in the school curriculum than that the subjects let us know something. It is in this letting us know that subject matter becomes a true subject: a subject which makes relationship possible. This very transformation of subject matter, from object to true subject, is already what we usually call learning. The transformation resides neither in the subject matter nor in me but rather in my realization of the potential to be heedful and answerable to what the subject lets me know (p. 295-6)

From this brief description, one can see how Imagination based approach to teaching and learning would be compatible with holistic education. A Holistic approach to curriculum is an **orientation**, an integrated way of looking at the curriculum and the people involved with it; accommodating an interdisciplinary view of subject areas. The imaginative approach to teaching could be described as a **method**, a navigational device one might say, based in stages of cognitive development that form accretions so that nothing is lost and access to earlier modes of knowing remain available. So, for texts I chose Jack Miller's classic, *Holistic Curriculum* (1996) for background, overview, and philosophy of holistic theory and practice, and Kieran Egan's *An imaginative approach to teaching* (2005)

for its freshness, accessible language, immediate applicability to the tasks of lesson and unit planning, and for the support, resources, and association offered through the IERG website.

In the syllabus, the **Course Goals** (which, as Ron McKellar reminded us, are what ideally we'd like to achieve) were

- To become aware of the philosophical, social, psychological, and ecological dimensions of holistic education with respect to the relationships between and among linear thinking and intuition, mind and body, domains of knowledge, the individual and the community(ies), the earth, and the transpersonal.
- To develop skills grounded in holistic principles for use in the candidate's daily life, subject areas and the learning community

The **Learning Objectives** declared that by the end of the course, teacher candidates would

- be able, using imaginative education frameworks, to conceptualize, plan, and implement lessons and curriculum that exemplify and support holistic principles.
- develop and articulate their own perspective on holistic approaches to curriculum.
- have explored various meditation practices and settled into one appropriate for them.

### **Why meditation?**

It made sense that a course on non-traditional approaches to learning ought to actually *take* a non-traditional approach, and I was concerned that my students, as normal members of North American society, might likely need some practice in accessing their imaginations. Adding to the framework of holistic orientation and imagination based method, meditation can be thought of as a way to "tune" the perceptions and awareness of the practitioner. All three have in common the value given to what Eco calls the "open text," provisional meanings, rather than fixed, canonical interpretations. This gives a certain continuity to the tools and maps and "training" of the explorer-student, although the gifts in this were sometimes ... obscure, especially in the beginning! (This is where the title originated, in a feedback evaluation from the students on how the class was going, the comment: "We are perched on the outside of the box, clinging to threads of familiarity.")

Miller has said that “Among the benefits of meditation to students are wholeness; a sense of purpose; improved attention, alertness, perception, and memory; and reduced stress and anxiety”(2005). Anyone involved in Teacher Education will appreciate the value of learning to reduce anxiety! An important consequence of reducing anxiety is that it frees up the mind to examine its old patterns of thought, allowing the individual is able to play and speculate on new possibilities. On a similar note, as an embodied way of knowing, meditation increases sensorial awareness of one’s surroundings and affective feelings of connectedness which are experienced as empathy and compassion for other creatures. This helps to overcome the sense of isolation and alienation that is pervasive in our time, providing a basis for difference to be construed as diversity and communion. Given the diversity of subject specialties in my classroom, it seemed likely that this outcome might be especially useful for the math and science specialists to find new ways to think and teach and explore mathematical concepts accessible to everyone.

### **The assignments**

The meditation assignment required students to experiment with a variety of practices and then settle upon a form of meditation, and keep a journal of their experiences. Journal entries were to be at least a paragraph long, with the date, time, and length of the meditation session. The focus of the journal was to be on the meditation itself, efforts to concentrate, problems or patterns that may arise during the practice, and any connections they noted to their daily life. They were to keep it up for six weeks, handing in the journal every two weeks for marking and monitoring, and a page reflecting on the overall experience with the final submission. The class received copious instructional handouts, links to websites, bibliographic resources; we watched videos on mindfulness and *metta* practice; and devoted time in class to breathing techniques, yoga warm-ups, Brain Gym<sup>1</sup> and progress reports. There was much perplexity and a little resistance, but as it was

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<sup>1</sup> See Hannaford, pp.117–131. The Educational Kinesiology people have a literature review in the research section of their website. <http://www.braingym.org/>

worth 40% of the overall mark, and needed to be done six times a week to earn an A, there was compliance. The intention was to ground the students experientially in the theories of holistic and imagination-based education by giving them the opportunity to listen to themselves, develop awareness of the body, of the passing of time, of self and the environment; to observe and learn about their consciousness, their imaginations and their thought processes; and to challenge them to create, however provisionally, language for and from new and subtle insights, the not-yet-wordable, the pre-known, Cixous calls it.<sup>2</sup>

The class was also assigned a group project to put together a unit plan. The set-up was "Suppose that you all work at one school and are in the staff room one day talking, and you decide to collaborate around a theme." They were asked to make a presentation to the class of lesson plans, based on Egan's frameworks for mythic, romantic, and/or philosophical and theoretical, that address the requirements of the curriculum guidelines for each group member's subject area and preferred grade level. The idea was that they could each go to their practicums with a usable, imagination-based lesson plan that would ALSO relate to other subject areas. Therefore, they needed to have a meta-concept, theme or umbrella idea. They were asked to be deliberate with holistic approaches to material and teaching strategies, highlighting connections between mind and body, individual and society, human and earth and so on.

The intention of the assignment was that they work together across disciplines on a common goal; that they learn to **listen** others whose technical language was perhaps different from their own, and that they be able to hear future potential by letting their "imagination ... disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard,

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<sup>2</sup> "The thing that is both known and unknown, the most unknown and the best unknown, this is what we are looking for when we write. We go toward the best known unknown thing, where knowing and not knowing touch, where we hope we will know what is unknown. Where we hope we will not be afraid of understanding the incomprehensible, facing the invisible, hearing the inaudible, thinking the unthinkable, which is of course: thinking. Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort. Painting is trying to paint what you cannot paint and writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is pre-knowing and not knowing, blindly, with words."

and unexpected” as Maxine Greene says (1995, p. 28), and, as Vera Johns-Steiner so eloquently described in the conference keynote earlier this week, “creating bridges among modalities” by “mutual appropriation of each other’s knowledge” in the struggle for collaboration.

The selection of the group was important. In this class (and throughout the Teachers Ed program in general that year) there was a preponderance of math and science teacher candidates, a scattering of English, geography, and history specialists, and a rare few visual and performance artists. I spent much time and pondering to put together the unit plan groups in order to spread out the math/sci folks, with at least one humanities or social science specialist, and one artist-animateur assigned to each one, like yeast in bread dough. Langer says “artists... speak their own language, Their vocabulary is metaphorical because it has to be plastic and powerful enough to let them speak their serious and often difficult thoughts” (1953, pp. ix-x). The thought was that the artists would facilitate the production of imagery common to the group, and assist everyone in learning to think playfully and communicate metaphorically across disciplines.

### **Meditation 101**

The students could choose from a variety of meditation practices, although they were asked to commit to one primarily, with a couple of recognizable alternates. The majority chose a form of sitting practice, counting breath or mantra focus. Action meditation such as t’ai chi, yoga, and walking meditation were acceptable. Mindfulness was a popular alternative (many Thanksgiving dinner dishes were washed with single-point attention!) and some of the athletic ones chose running, swimming, or rock-climbing. They were encouraged to notice when they’d got into the “zone” although such noticing also tended to break the focus. They complained of being distracted by having to remember things to write down. But they persevered.

Meditation did not come easily (it’s called “practice” for a reason). The beauty of the assignment is that it supports the learner through the difficult first three weeks of establishing the routine, after the initial excitement and novelty has

worn off, and before the results start becoming noticeable. Many of the students commented in their final reflection papers that they had often wanted to learn to meditate, but lacked the means to establish the habit, and appreciated the opportunity that the assignment offered. Both Gardiner and Johns-Steiner referred to the necessity of support, nurturance, and encouragement in learning skills and breaking new ground; one student wrote: "I had a negative experience and fell to questioning the practice, but with you as my compatriot and supporter of my meditation I began to feel as if I was getting the hang of it."

Over the weeks of journaling, they took me-the-reader with them as they sat and wriggled and itched and had cramped legs; as they got annoyed with their wandering attention; as they walked slowly through the woods or along the canal, sat on buses thinking compassionate thoughts about the other commuters; found all the quiet spots on campus; listened to the rain; swam endless lengths in the pool; were awake when deer crossed the lawn at sunrise; breathed in synch with their dogs and cats (there IS a book on meditating with animals); watched autumn passing. They began to notice what worked for them, intermittently at first, and then more consistently.

They began to see themselves:

- I am a huge worrier and perfectionist  
There is a lot of pressure about jobs right now. "If you don't do this you won't get a job!" It's as if you can't make any mistakes or you won't get a job and it will be your fault." The meditation helps me to see that I am okay right now and I will be okay no matter what happens.
- I was never able to engage in meditation practice before. It always seemed like a great idea but and following through with it was an unfortunate mess of over analysis unattainable goals of Buddha-like transcendedness.
- Mindfulness meditation in nature has helped me open my eyes to the beauty and grandeur of it. I rarely took the time to simply enjoy the sunrise or notice only what was under my feet. These were new and fabulous experiences for me.

They became aware of the centrality of breath as life force, and how it was taken for granted, like knowledge. They noticed that meditation was helping them soothe their anxieties, alleviate headaches, and get to sleep. They commented that

their colds and flu attacks felt “cleansing.” They kept track of their energy levels fluctuating. They saw that they were changing:

- I have been able to focus longer and harder on tasks that I would usually lose focus quite quickly on.
- I found myself experiencing everyday common things differently. I enjoyed the moment I was in, rather than thinking of the next moment.

Some commented on noticing on how the “Judge” operated in their minds, an influence that was underscored in the presentations by Gardiner, Johns-Steiner, Haskevitz, and Norris at the conference this week, how much the imagination needs a safe place in order to take risks and motivate creativity:

- I like the fact that there is no competition in meditation and that we are expected to fail at it a lot. I like that idea a lot and I’m going to try to be less perfectionist in my life too. It’s good to make mistakes because you learn from them. It’s such a good feeling for me to allow myself to not be perfect and to stop striving for that.
- I have grown as a person and become more adept at critical reflection. I used to get emotional and take offense at criticism, constructive or not. Now I find myself reflecting constructively on my experiences. Meditation has helped me master my fear of criticism.

They could see their minds at work:

- Many times I viewed my mind as something that could be opened and thoughts could be somehow removed to be able to relax.
- I didn’t think thoughts, I thought spaces.
- My consciousness seems more aware of itself.
- The initial entries in my meditation journal are very somatic and perhaps can be likened to Egan’s first ecological zone of understanding. I was very connected to my body, to bodily and environmental sensations. the first entry in which a change seems to have occurred can be paralleled with a mythic understanding. I create a metaphor for my whole self as a quilt which has and is being created by the people I’ve met and the experiences I’ve had, whether they be good or bad. The sum of its parts is only a sum because of the existence of its parts.
- I inherently felt that I was not these thoughts. These thoughts do not define me - they are neither me, or an extension of me.
- My focus is to reach a place of spiritual quiet where I could manipulate my feelings and ideas like floating balls of clay in a cloud-like space. At least that’s

what I see in my head when I'm in the "zone".

The math and science specialists were surprised:

- when my mind does wander, it tends to turn the focus of my meditation into a kind of puzzle, "Where does that noise come from? Why does it go away the moment I have stopped meditating?" But I can now say that I am capable of this, it is an accomplishment.
- My frustration with journaling has been with expressing the inexpressible. I will take from that experience the Need to find the medium to do just that. It makes me want to be more in touch with my Self. This is a surprise to me, a growth of person I did not expect to find.
- I have always been able to immerse myself in problems to exclusion of all else; mathematical problems, that is. I was surprised, even shocked, to learn that I was capable of immersing my thoughts into things that did not seem to require attention, things that had no solution.
- Meditation was also quite daunting and out of character with what I as a lifelong science student had been directed toward. Breaking free of rigid patterns and expectations has always been something I have aspired to do, but is also something that demands and results in a high degree of discomfort.

The science teachers' journals were particularly interesting because they were such skilled observers, and now they were being asked to observe their own minds at work.

- My awareness passes through the breath and I become no longer aware of it. It is once it quietens ... that the silence and clarity seems to come. As the space began to become more defined (starting as a small triangular prism), I began to lose awareness of my physical body. One day, I felt as if the space had some intangible substance to it. I think it was energy ... I truly felt like I had energy at my virtual/mental fingertips.
- On a few occasions I got concentrating on a word hard and long enough that I got into a no-thought meditation. My thoughts just disappeared. I was amazed at this experience.

They saw the effect on their being in the world, and as teachers:

- Meditation has set my mind free to wonder how I would teach math and science.
- I think teachers should practice meditation every day to enhance our ability to affect change in our students and in society. It's important to teach from a

mindful and centered place from which children can learn and discover with a sense of empowerment and resolve.

- When I have established a class that is accustomed to working together in groups, to discussing mathematical ideas that are not fully formed, when I have a class that trusts me, then I will revisit this question of meditation in the classroom.
- As for teacher education, I believe it would be beneficial for everyone to be tuned into their consciousness and be better able to grasp the knowledge they have gained from teachers college in order to teach students how to be great learners.
- Chanting mantras gave me an outlet for stress and also an outlet for my creativity. I made them up specifically for that circumstance and I enjoyed feeling that I was adding to the positive karma bank of the world.

### **The group project**

In the meantime they worked on their lesson and unit plans. The initial challenge of finding enough common ground amongst the specialties to be able to conceptualize a collective unit plan seemed to be bridged through a process whereby the artist-animators got tired of all the boundary setting and insisted on a voice. This appeared as a certain metaphorical looseness prevailing in the meta-narrative. Developing interdisciplinary (art, math, science, humanities, experiential) unit plans, using Egan's developmental literacies approach, resulted in projects both holistic and imaginative in orientation and quality.

The middle school teachers hived off (taking with them both of the music teachers and two of the drama specialists out of a class of 25) and presented an Ecology Field Trip, which overlapped mythic and romantic orientation and was centred round the theme of rescuing and preserving a very specific part of the planet, a marshland north of Ottawa, threatened by a proposed highway expansion. The presentation was striking for its evocation of the lived-through experience of being out on the land, the detail of the social and geographical history, the complexity of municipal decision-making, and the sense of close-up engagement with the lives of the creatures the field trippers would encounter. The musicians developed lesson plans on improvisation, to express in the history and syntax of music the concept of generation and evolution.

Another unit, at secondary school level, presented an at-risk youth wilderness experiential school (aka "Hoods in the Woods"), including the funding plan and contact information for relevant provincial ministries. The math teacher illustrated trigonometry by teaching us how to get a canoe out of a dangerous situation on a fast-moving waterway. The artist in this group was a drama teacher with personal experience as a street kid herself and as a youth worker. It was Brianna who taught me that, for a street kid, meditation would require an environment with a level of safety that was an unimaginable luxury!

Another unit presented "After Hiroshima," on peace and reconciliation work in Japanese culture since WWII, including the neurobiology of post trauma and the 1000 Cranes Project. The presentation was perhaps less successful as a whole because of the difficulty one of the scientists had with the concept of interdisciplinary planning: her lesson on water was informative, and imagination-based, but noticeably unrelated to the rest of the presentation. "Jackson Pollock", instigated by the artist-animator, a painter, brought out the performer in the science teachers: a slapstick experiment graphing the elliptical motion of a paint-can pendulum dripping paint, and a beautifully illustrated chemical analysis of the painted handprints on a cave wall, linking with Pollock's handprint in some of his painting.

A "Mural about Evolution," also artist-driven, provided opportunities for passionate lesson plans on solar system scale ratios and orbit measurement from the rocket-science teacher, and a slice of the lives of insects from the biologist, equally passionate. This team had been fascinated with Ken Wilber's speculation on evolution's trajectory: as amoeba is to human, human is to ...what? Even the artist-animator had addressed the question, asking, how in design terms does this mural project unfold? The climax, in the class's opinion, was the story of the emergence and evolution of the various kingdoms in biology, composed as a mnemonic in an epic poem and delivered in rap language and genre, in solidarity with those for whom public wall-art (aka graffiti) is a significant way of sharing knowledge in context.

The strongest project, in my opinion, was "Voting on the Olympics"(at

“Holistic High”!), instigated by the drama specialist who had actually lived in Vancouver while the lead up to the vote was occurring. It was this group that struggled the most, as I recall their meetings, staring at each other in dismay and perplexity, then, suddenly, exploding round the table: **that’s brilliant!** as it started to click. Working from the dramatist’s *Vox Populi* approach, they became resource people for the debate. The historian gave a social history lesson on the development of sport training and the demographics of competitive performance. The math specialist did a statistics lesson on country by country correlations between medals won and factors such as GNP; the physicist did a brilliant presentation on friction and resistance, why it mattered at 100<sup>th</sup> of a second in speed record, and how one could (and why a government should) extrapolate the necessity of that sort of precision to energy costs and investment in petroleum challenged economies. The dramatist then bracketed the exercise by telling the story from the point of view of a journalist on the street, in what she called the Gossip period, making social history of life as it unfolded. In doing this she showed us all how to move between our particular focus on our little epic lives, and the Meta-Narrative of which we are all a part.

### **In conclusion**

As a class, we achieved the goals outlined at the beginning. Certainly the unit plans, and the process by which they were created, were most impressive. We forget, I think, how insular specialist teacher candidates can be, especially if they are coming to Teachers College directly from undergraduate studies. They have been in a comfort zone with their own intellectual kind for many years, and need to experience the necessary and difficult process of finding and chasing down language with which to dialogue with, most fundamentally, their own students, who may be very different from them in personality and learning style, and also with other discipline specialists, fellow teachers, who will be important figures elsewhere in the school lives of those same students. While my students went off to their first practicums with the usual shining ideals and dreadful anxiety, they met with a wide range of tolerance for ideas of inclusiveness and connection, which they found discouraging in some cases. To more than one frantic late night emailed plea for

help, I responded: act like a holon! Practice self-preservation, communion, go for the overview, encompass complexity! And breathe! And they did:

"The voices, the noise, the bells and the unruly kids all made me wish I could run in the opposite direction. It felt like *Grade 10* all over again. When I left school I wanted to cry. But I sat in my car and I forced myself to breath."

I wondered if I was trying to do too much with them, if experiential learning, about their imagination and their world, was taxing them too greatly. But if not in teachers college, where are we going to effect change?

I'll close with this quote from Laura:

for good teachers whose doubting analytical minds have opened up to the light:

life is a cycle of learning and knowing. Just like meditation, we evolve. This evolution is not a ladder though, rather it's a circle. We hit all of the points on the circle and then we are brought back to the beginning again, the starting point of a new lesson. This circle is in everything and it begins with our breath. Perhaps the biggest lesson for a teacher in all of this is to fashion a lesson in the form of a circle.

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