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The following dissertation argues that our current educational system should be improved for the benefit of the individual and society through the addition of what may be referred to as aspects of holistic education. Holistic Education for the purpose of this paper is defined as an approach, as well as a curriculum style, applied to our general education that integrates matters pertaining to our existential affairs with our educational material. Some topics that are applicable to this approach, and that will be discussed in this dissertation, include mindfulness, critical consciousness, communication techniques, and conflict resolution. The purpose for the addition of these matters to our curriculum are to enhance our abilities to function with a greater understanding of our lives outside of the classroom and to approach the classroom materials with less ambiguity as to education's goals.

Within this dissertation I assert that students and educators sense a distance between the current mandated curriculum and its applicability to their lives. I discuss in detail how I believe that by creating our curriculum to be more meaningful to our daily existence that we may ameliorate what some may call our *existential vacuum*. This dissertation will include an example of a current alternative education process through the use of semi-structured structured interviews with some of this program's participants. The interviews will provide a deeper sense of a holistic educational experience while a sample course structure will also be detailed in order to exemplify how such a class could operate within our public education.

APPROACHING A MORE HOLISTIC EDUCATION

by

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **A REVIEW OF OUR CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

### **Introduction**

My personal moral underpinning for this inquiry into a more humane, connected, and holistic form of education, stems from an analysis of my own educational experience. It also stems from encountering numerous others who have been influenced and molded by our educational system; recognizing they too suffer from an existential educational crisis. It was not until my own experience with higher education that I began to glimpse alternatives to the traditional models of pedagogy. I began to realize that disconnected experiences generated by our educational structures do not have to occur. This realization has created within me an ability to identify, understand, and name how our current educational systems deprive us of becoming more whole and complete individuals.

I find that the current purpose of education in general, appears to be the dissemination of a standardized curriculum. By each primary grade level certain *factual* abilities and knowledge need be satisfactorily demonstrated as learned by the individual student. These *skills*, for the most part, include the recitation of names, dates, and formulas. In order to advance to successive levels of education End Of Grade exams that quiz this knowledge must be passed by the student. Nowhere in our public educational systems is it required that students develop functional life skills such as self-awareness, interpersonal communication, or community building. I believe this current form of

education creates not only a great disservice toward our societies and world, but more importantly to individuals.

Our educational system needs a close evaluation of our current curriculum and teaching methods to determine how and where we may begin to educate our students for their future and encompass more aspects of life. These methods and curriculums need to be holistic in the greater sense of word. They need to take into account the mental, physical, and social aspects of our lives.

I was the model student in elementary school. I completed every assignment, always tried to gain the extra credit points, and desperately strived to be the best in the class. The more I worked on school matters the more I became distanced from myself and others. Even the students who were similar to me knew we were in competition with one another for the ‘pole position’ in the classroom. I made friends in school, but because of competition I never developed close relationships. The older I became, the less interested I was in the rewards of being at the top of the class. I sensed that the rewards were fleeting and with each new school year and class, the struggle and competition simply repeated itself. I found that I could still achieve good, and sometimes even great, grades by putting very little effort into school. I became one of those kids who knew how to work the system. I intentionally scheduled empty class periods into the first and last class of the day. These were the first school periods I would skip. Eventually I would regularly miss entire days.

This is not to say that I did not encounter a few teachers who earned my respect and whose classes I enjoyed. These teachers did exist, but they were few and far between. For most subject matters I taught myself at home. I had become so adept at knowing the system and what questions would be on the test that sometimes quiz and test days were the only days I would show up in the classroom. Both my parents worked full-time during my high-school years and neither had any idea what was really going on with my education. There was no reason my parents would have suspected what I was really doing nor could they know my dissatisfaction with school. My grades were passing or better at all times. I was not motivated to work on course materials that were irrelevant to life.

Fortunately, I pursued higher educational levels. Unfortunately, the same disinterested and manipulative patterns were set before me through my first undergraduate experience. The self-educating style and distancing myself from non-rewarding environments was, by then, all I knew. I had become accustomed to the ins and outs of passing tests and for the most part, college classrooms felt similar to those of my primary education. I found I would rather hold a job or go shopping than to sit for hours in a grand lecture hall where I was disenchanted with professors reading their power point slides. No one knew who I was, so why should it matter? I had become jaded, strongly influenced by the mass media, materialistic, and cold-hearted. I was wounded and hurt by my educational experience because I felt distanced from it. I suffered from general apathy. Worse, there was a increasing distance from my own self. I was hurt and in retrospect I wanted others to hurt and be just as disillusioned as I. I found myself

repeating elitist statements and claiming things such as “*people get what they deserve*” and “*some people are just lazy*”.

In retrospect, I feel these narcissistic lessons were rooted in my educational experience because of the competitive nature of my schooling. I knew nothing at the time of the actual repercussions of this mindset. I was not taught how to be mindful of my actions or words, let alone how to critically reflect on my behavior. I did not learn how to interact with others except on a competitive or even transactional level. Differences or disagreements were matters to be glossed over. Yelling matches between parties meant no one ever really heard what the other person was saying. I had very little passion for anything, most especially myself. I was confused about who that person was supposed to be and what she was supposed to do. Deep down, I was as kind-hearted as my parents had raised me to be. But, I was scared, too overwhelmed, to know how to choose a better path. Despite the added benefit of having an intact family, something had still gone awry in my life. I was one of the lucky individuals who had good family, a roof over my head, food on my plate, clothes on my back, regular vacations, hugs and kisses, and spending money. I was not spoiled, yet I acted as if I was entitled to all that I had and more.

I wanted and craved meaning. I was desperate for genuine connections with others despite what my words and actions indicated. Thankfully, I happened to come across a book entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl (1984). I knew my connection with this book was bringing answers and crafting sincere meaning in my life. After years of suffering inside and encountering a few experiences that made me

critically reflect on my beliefs, I made the decision to seek help through counseling. Surprisingly, my school curriculum began to shift as well through my desire to search for meaning. The institution which inflicted the most hurt was the one I sought out to heal me. I set out to learn about compassion and healthier modes of being. I discovered a graduate program unlike any I had ever conceived. This program was centered on Conflict Resolution and dealt with issues ranging from interpersonal communications to large-scale protracted violent conflicts. I found I empathized strongly with the hurt inside the individuals in the conflict who were most violent. They were merely re-enacting their history. This sudden self-awareness was priceless. My meaning had in part, been found.

My next step along my journey was when I found a program in the field of Education. Even though I did not recognize my motives at first, I realize now that they were so that I might learn the manner in which to educate others. I want to demonstrate and assist people in learning what I am learning; to lead a more holistic life. Given the blindness of the educational process I had traveled through, I feel very sad contemplating that others continue to experience a similar educational disconnect but with less in their favor. In hindsight I know how incredibly lucky I was to have found such a program that so closely answered my interests. I have come to see that my experiences in graduate school and beyond have not been typical for academia. My experiences have been liberating, motivating, and personally rewarding.

My desire is to disseminate, to all levels of education, some of the alternative forms of learning that I ultimately experienced along the way. This goal is important to

me because I recognize how people are impacted through our educational systems touching, for good or for bad, every life on this planet. Heartless and hurtful educational practices affect every aspect of life from our mental health to our planetary health. To sit back and witness deterioration on any level where change could be implemented is, I believe, deplorable. The impact on individuals and the world is often a negative one, but one that I believe can be avoided.

I now try to be sympathetic toward those who are precisely as I was: scared and apathetic. My greatest obstacle is remembering that these types of people were, and still are in some ways, a part of me. It has been stated that the people we dislike the most are merely reflections of parts of us that we like the least. I personally find this statement very true. Because of this, I find an even more compelling reason for me to help others recognize this hurt within themselves and to move forward in life as a more complete person.

I believe a more holistic and healing form of education is not only for those who, by a chance encounter, have known such education. Nor should it be only for those who have financial resources to purchase it for themselves through private specialized schools. Also, these forms of pedagogy should not be restricted to educational programs that go against the grain of the system. I believe at every level of the educational pipeline humane and compassionate ideologies should be taught. Without knowledge of the innate value of every person we are left as expendable casualties of the educational war between

the classroom and our lived existence. We need to understand and recognize more thoroughly the value of the connections that exist in our lives.

### **Public Education**

What I argue within this dissertation is not that we begin a debate regarding the entire curriculum or our philosophical goals of our public educational system, but that we investigate the benefits of adding specific techniques within our classroom. Education throughout history has served various purposes both theoretically and in practice. Even today, debate regarding the function and purpose of education vary greatly depending upon the schools of thought one may subscribe to with regards to one's belief systems. For instance, Maxine Greene has argued that public education in the United States' history had its higher goal as creating institutions for learning centers to develop "democratic decision-making and providing the best protection against tyranny" (Greene, Ayers, & Miller, 1998, p. 79). Despite this loftier ideal, the public educational system has drifted more towards a rigid presence of control, restrictions, and dictatorial learning as taught by deskilled educators who's goals are to encourage economic growth and competitiveness according to Giroux (Giroux, 2011). However, both Greene and Giroux would continue to argue and agree that public education should re-center on education for civic purposes and

to ensure a popular intelligence and an intelligent populace capable of democratic decision-making, schools must cultivate in all students the skills, knowledge, and understanding that both lead them to want to embrace the values undergirding our pluralistic democracy and arm them with a keen intelligence capable of free though. Schools must provide an education that enables critical thinking *and* communal experience so that citizens can intelligently debate competing ideas,

weigh the individual and the common good, and make judgments that sustain democratic institutions and ideals (Greene, Ayers, & Miller, 1998, p. 80).

As educational purpose has been in question over the years, moves towards segmenting schools into both public and private education sectors have occurred. Private education varies from the religious to the secular. There are even some private schools that utilize various aspects of my proposed ideas within their educational curriculum, such as mindfulness techniques taught at The Trinity School in Manhattan (Raghavan, 2011) and the Brockwood Park School in the United Kingdom as founded by Jiddu Krishnamurti which considers itself to be a holistic educational school (Carnie, 2003). Other alternative based schools include The Free School Movement, such as found at the Albany Free School in Albany, NY which also incorporates some of my desires for schooling to be more inclusive of our external concerns of life and allowing for the voice of students to be more a part of their own education (Morrison, 2004). There are private institutions that attempt to teach students how to live based upon religious moral codes and institutions that believe more in the free will learning style of allowing students that direct the course and progress of their studies (with limitations of course), such as the Montessori form of education. All of these private forms of education may be considered to have both pros and cons with regard to their success and benefit for their students and even to society. Religious schools, mostly Christian schools in the United States, for example, were once even more predominant, and sometimes one of the few places of learning in our world's history. Religious schools have served a different purpose than

public schools, and continue to do so, by fulfilling a need within us and society through their holy texts by concerning

itself from the outset with the inner confused side of us, declaring that we are none of us born knowing how to live... helping a part of us that secular language struggles even to name... an additional ethical and transcendent dimension – and to which we may as well refer, following Christian terminology, as the *soul* (Botton, 2012, p. 113).

Although I see the need within our public schools to be more concerned with our “inner confused side”, as well as the need to help us learn how to live better, and I believe in allowing more for a self-directed learning style in education; this dissertation will focus more specifically on what I perceive as more immediately attainable changes in public education.

Private schools, just like public schools, all impart societal norms and attempt to affect behavior, whether they are always cognizant of this is a separate matter. Both types of education serve to inculcate their pupils towards supporting what each teaches (Spring, 2012), whether it be a religious doctrine or bolstering nationalistic support. Just as Dewey has stated: “Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group” (Dewey, 1922, pp. 96-97). To proceed without acknowledging Dewey’s comments regarding the general socialization aspect within education and the greater current intent of most forms of education would be naïve. However, by proceeding with this in mind and contemplating the benefits that my proposed educational tools may add to bring

awareness to the subtleties of education, the readers may better grasp or even imagine additional advantages for the inclusion of my forthcoming suggestions to our standard curriculums. While I believe that my ideas for a more holistic form of education would benefit both public and private educational programs, my intent within this dissertation is to focus on the perceived benefits for our current public education within the United States. However, to illustrate some of the benefits for our public schools I will include in my third chapter interviews from students that attended a program outside of the public curriculum. The reason for this decision was due in part to the participants having attended public schools in addition to the summer program that I felt would lend a distinct perspective to this inquiry into a more holistic form of education.

The reason for my focus on public education is that numerous private educational programs exist nationwide and their methods, as well as educational intent, are too vast for a comprehensive analysis. Public education on the other hand, although decentralized and varied by state and county, fall closer to following general *standards-based educational* goals as prescribed by the 2001 *No Child Left Behind* act that regulates annual quantitative testing, which many argue now leave educators in a position of teaching for testing and students in the position of learning the test taking system (Spring, 2012). The United States Department of Education's mission is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” to education (United States Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). Whether we agree or disagree with these goals, my argument

remains that my forthcoming proposed changes, as to how and what we learn within the classroom, would benefit the student, educator, and educational process as a whole.

The U.S. Department of Education's goals of ensuring equal access to education as well as fostering excellence is not too drastic of a departure from Plato's beliefs that all individuals should receive an education and that all be permitted the space within education to develop their own talents through the assistance of the educators and the state. In contrast, whereas the *No Child Left Behind Act* attempts to ensure that all students meet specific learning criteria every year, Plato argued that as students' talents became more evident, they were to be sorted by their aptitudes in order to fill specific societal roles (Rao, 2008). While there can be no argument that each individual excels at some aspects over others, it is my opinion, that making a determination as to their future roles, even if for the supposed benefit for the greater good of the state, is too limiting of potential. It is with equal distaste that I also criticize the U.S. Department of Education's emphasis on "global competitiveness" such that by utilizing the word "competitiveness" we are immediately insinuating that not only is a competition ensuing, but that by necessity there must be winners and losers.

In addition to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the *Race to the Top* financial incentive is a Federally funded points based system created in 2009 that allocates money to schools that comply with certain educational policies (Conley, 2014). The *Race to the Top* (a.k.a RTT) set criteria for which schools are graded based upon accumulating points for their adherence to various requirements that in turn dictate the amount of financial

awards they receive. Points are given for a range of criteria that include: teacher and principal's performance, state reforms in education, educational infrastructure, increasing the performance of low scoring schools and for the development, implementation and achievement of the *Common Core Standards Initiative*. The *Common Core Standards Initiative* defines what students should know and be able to achieve during each year of their academic studies. It attempts to ensure that all students consistently receive the same level and type of education through standardized testing that will reportedly prepare students for advanced educational level or to enter the workplace (Spring, 2014).

Although the goals of attempting to ensure every child has access to the same education and the desire to reduce poverty through providing students with standardized skills to enter into careers, concerns have been raised about these programs. Joel Spring (2014), for example, has argued that not only are the assessment methods unproven, but that corporate firms will profit greatly by providing regulated test scoring and even the information technology required for local and state infrastructure. He also adds that these relatively new incentives, standards, and assessments, serve to place the blame for poverty and inequality upon the educational system as well as create yet another layer of ineffectual criteria on administrators and educators.

Not all educators or public institutions have fallen into the pit of allowing for the dominance of teaching to test or being graded upon abilities to teach to test. Public schools may opt out of vying for the available funds offered through *The Race to the Top* and numerous progressive educators handle their classrooms differently. The higher

education programs in which I have had personal experience are prime examples of individual teachers and departments that are part of a public educational system, but yet still exemplify methods of education that allow students a voice, encourage critical consciousness and employ alternate methods of instruction. Although the higher education that I have experienced is not the norm in our society, there are numerous individual who are exposed to these types of teaching methods in public education both at the higher and primary levels. I believe that as more individuals are exposed to alternative methods of instruction the more that they will experience the differences between our current and alternative methods and desire to see greater change in public education.

Of the various philosophies of education, one highly influential philosophy has been the concept of a democratic education or democracy within education. Again, even the concept of what democratic education should be varies from Locke's "individual independence and self-mastery, but certainly not for individuality and self-expression" (Locke, 1996, p. xii) to Rousseau's interest in matters that may be considered less *useful*, such as enjoying lessons and experiential learning. More recently, educational philosophers such as John Dewey, Maxine Greene, Henry Giroux, and Paulo Freire, to name only a few more influential names, have taken to describing their support and understanding of what a democratic education would look like in practice and theory. All would agree that a democratic education would involve freedom of the students to some varying degree in the manner in which they are educated and how they learn through the

collaboration and guidance of teachers. They would all also agree that democratic *freedom* within education does not imply a complete lack of adherence to any rules. It is *freedom* within constraints through the inclusion of respect for the rights of others.

Democratic education is also generally understood to not be an entirely self-directed form of education without any oversight or input. What democratic education involves in its most general sense, is the voice of the student in conjunction with the voice of the educator. It also involves a continual feed-back loop that further perpetuates learning and communication between student and teacher as well as the modifications of lessons.

Democratic education includes the concept that students are future participants in civil life, that certain concerns for morals and values should be imparted through education (Morrison K. A., 2008). Morrison (2008) argues there is a long history of democratic concepts both in practice and theory with regard to public education (from ancient Greeks, Roman thinkers, and current movements), but that public schools face three main challenges for implementing this concept: students, teachers, and the institutions. For the most part, these three main obstacles are due to the general lack of exposure and practice of more democratic forms of education. This is not saying that students, instructors, and institutions do not exist that have experienced and are familiar with more democratic forms of education, but that in general the mainstream components of public education lack the exposure, tool sets, and mind frames to participate in more democratic forms of education. It is this lack of exposure that I wish to change by offering suggestions within this dissertation of ideas that may be easier to understand, impart, and enact within our

educational system to include aspects of what may be considered a more democratic education.

In spite our current public educational system being stratified by the skill levels of the students (e.g. advanced placement classes), the encouraged global competitiveness, and the long history public schools in the United States has served as indoctrination of teaching what to think and not how to think, I believe an alternative exists. Despite my critiques, our public educational system offers numerous benefits for our society that we should be grateful to have, particularly as compared to many other countries and even in its unfinished and unrefined state. Within my proposed additions to our current public educational system I hope to offer examples of leaning tools that may be added to our daily lessons throughout all educational levels in a relatively easy and complementary manner and yet, at the same time offer a way of being and a form of education within in schools that assists us with living in a more holistic manner.

### **An Incomplete Educational System**

Even if my suggestions are less of a complete over-haul of our public schools than some desire, the idea of revamping our public educational system comes across to some as still too overwhelming or unimaginable. Many believe that it is sufficient to allow some to succeed and give others at least what little chance for success that can currently be provided. But, a chance at succeeding at what and a chance for whom? Success is a vaguely defined catch phrase that most commonly refers to achievement of financial or social status after the educational system considers its job completed. Preparing our

children to succeed through our current educational model neglects the various ways in which *success* should be defined. I have come to believe that success should be defined in terms of moral outlook, happiness with regard to one's life, and possessing positive perspectives on the future for ones self and our world. The way in which to achieve these abilities is by cultivating and developing in each of us a connection to our world through our education.

Unfortunately, when we review the statistics it becomes evident that current academic success is considered making it through high school, learning to suppress our feelings of alienation in school, and perhaps continuing the drudgery into higher education and careers. As of the fall of 2010 the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 49.4 million students attended public school (elementary to secondary) and in 2009 the average rate of high school dropouts was 8.1%. If this dropout rate remained stable then we may safely assume at least 401,000 individuals of the 49.4 million enrolled, failed to graduate and even higher levels will follow in successive years. According to a report from the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation (2006), 69% of dropouts reported they were not "motivated or inspired to work", and 47% said they dropped out because classes were "not interesting" despite the respondents in this category having high GPAs on average.

Of these dropouts, 75% said that having smaller classes and more individual attention would have improved their chances of staying in school. Eighty-one percent said that better teachers with interesting classes and/or "opportunities for real-world

learning (internships, service learning, etc.) to make classroom more relevant” would have enhanced their likelihood to remain in school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006). Other reports surveying American college students on their personal beliefs and attitudes indicate that

in 1967, two-thirds of American college students said *developing a meaningful philosophy of life* was *very important* to them, while fewer than one-third said the same about *making a lot of money*. By 1997, those figures were reversed (De Graff, Wann, & Naylor, 2001, p. 62).

Favorite pastimes of teenagers are now reported to include “shopping as their favorite activity” while “fewer than five percent listed *helping others*” (De Graff, Wann, & Naylor, 2001, p. 57). Childhood incidents of suicides have also increased by three times since the 1960’s (De Graff, Wann, & Naylor, 2001, p. 57).

The statistics indicate that dropouts recognize and crave more personal connections with the educational systems and their lives. Yet educational systems are not created to function in this manner. The question should be raised as to whether the values and goals as reported by students at various levels that create this despondency, depression, and even suicide are directly related to our educational system. The link between opinions of our education system and the factors such as a focus on money, lack of caring for others, developing meaning as unimportant, and suicidal tendencies should not be ignored. We live in an age when false prophets (a.k.a. profits) are followed and believed in hopes of providing us with something more meaningful in this life and this mode of thought is all too prevalent everywhere we look(Salerno, 2005).

Based on the responses, it is not too far fetched to say that the school dropouts were not experiencing the holistic form of education that they craved and that at-risk individuals in particular may benefit more from more personalized attention to help deal with esteem and even decision making problems (Moffett, 1994). Of course, the above statistics reflect just the percentage of students who drop out of public school and not the opinions of those who graduate. There are most likely students who do graduate yet feel the same regarding their educational experience, much as I felt.

Alice Miller (2002) believed that violence is transmitted generationally through ways in which we continue to perceive socially acceptable norms. I believe non-progressive ideologies are punctuated throughout successive generations of all educational levels through the same manner. These beliefs, what success means and what the function of our educational system should be, are the current ideological norms that I wish to argue need to be altered.

Daniel Willingham, a Cognitive Psychologist, argues that our brains are not meant to function in the way in which standard classes are taught. According to Willingham (2009) our brains are better suited for critical thinking, a manner in which we question assumptions and delve deeper into background and connect ideas rather than learning to repeat vast amounts of often unrelated *facts*. If we may assume that not only dropouts feel our educational system is not meeting their needs and that the majority of ways in which we are taught are not sufficient to engage our minds, then it should be evident that something crucial is amiss and should be corrected in the educational system.

It should come as no wonder that when parents ask their children how school was that day that their children only know how to respond with “*fine*”. Or when asked what they learned in school, their children reply: “*I don’t know*”. How can our students be expected to discuss their education if they found their course materials not of interest and were not motivated to interact in a personally meaningful manner with lessons?

Our education is reflective of a culture that is detached existentially from ourselves, others, and our potential for a more authentic happiness. We all know how genuinely content we feel when happiness is experienced through right action and right thinking. When we know that we have acted in a manner that is in align with moral beliefs, causes no harm physically or mentally and serves to better ourselves, others, and our world, the behavior feels, and is, rewarding. Here, I am referring to something akin to the Buddhist idea of connectedness as well as being mindful of our actions and consequences of how we live (Hanh, 1999). When we experience right action and thinking there is a noticeable difference in our world. I believe students, and even our educators, are not happy with the current educational system. This lack of educational happiness is not merely a lack of general satisfaction, but rather a greater deficit of enjoyment or pleasure within our learning environments due to the distance between our lives and our education.

Haller and Hadler (2006) conducted a multi-national analysis of data addressing the perceived and subjective self-reported status of *happiness* and *unhappiness*. Although their studies were on general populations rather than being specific to educators or

students, the potential ramification of their results, if applied to our educational system, should not be overlooked. Their findings illustrate that across the world individuals who reported experiencing the most happiness in their lives had positive combinations of personal wellbeing in conjunction with positive interpersonal relationships on both a more immediate scale (i.e. family members) and on a grander scale (i.e. community). While economic status had some effect on reported happiness, materialism had a negative effect. For example, in some Latin American cultures where the income discrepancies were rated at some of the highest levels, the economic factors appear to be mitigated by the higher levels of positive social interactions. This factor created these Latin American locals as some of the highest reported scoring regions with regard to happiness (Haller & Hadler, 2006).

This research leaves us to understand that *happiness* is a combination of factors and one primary positive factor is that of personal relationships between the individual, one's community, and the society at large. Other indicators point to individuals who once engaged in unhealthy behavior (violence, drugs, crime) can un-learn these modes of being by replacing them with healthy activities and connections. Healthy activities and connections can range from behaviors such as meditation or exercise to interpersonal behaviors like community outreach and volunteer work. Healthy behaviors enhance self-esteem and strengthen relationships. These types of activities are healthy in the sense that they serve to heal disconnects that individuals previously felt between themselves and their lives. Healthy activities and connections can then become just as addicting (in the

affirming sense) and positively rewarding and with the reinforcement of benevolent behaviors (Taylor, 2010). Studies such as these lend credence to the argument that an engaged holistic form of education, which addresses both our intellectual and emotional lives, is beneficial to the overall wellbeing of our students, including their own personal happiness.

Currently, students' learning materials remain consistently centered around impersonal topics and this limits or negates an education that fosters their potential to engage with their community. This one-sided focus denies us happiness through connections to our world and creates a dualistic system in education. Through the exclusion of subjective experience or matters in the classroom, our education focuses entirely on the objective. Because of this, an *either or* educational style is created. Either the educational material is disembodied, impersonal, and objective or the material is no longer considered educational in nature if it focuses too much on the subjective and our lived experience. What we have in our schools is the "it", the material we are to learn. "It" is separated from the personal. "It" is the subject matter and "it" is in opposition to the personally or communally lived matters. What we do not have in our educational systems is the "I", "we", or "us". We are missing the connections to ourselves, others, and our world. This lack of the "I" and the "other" is what creates within us such apathy and disconnect; what those like Maxine Greene would refer to as our existential emptiness:

Americans seem to be absorbed into a passive, consuming audience. Certain people live out this negative freedom in a persistent 'lightness of being', others

seek shelter in private enclaves or what they think of as their interior lives; still others, assured of their endowment, accede or strive, on their own, for ‘success’. All of these tendencies, as I view them, are antithetical to what I have called education for freedom. They are antithetical because they alienate persons from their own landscapes, because they impose a fallacious completeness on what is perceived. Instead of reaching out, along with others, toward open possibilities in experience, individuals in all groups accept existing structures as given. They may try to make use of them or escape them or move around them or make a mockery of them; but they feel themselves in some way domed to see them as objective ‘realities’, impervious to transformation, hopelessly *there*. To objectify in this fashion, to separate oneself as ‘subject’ from an independently existent ‘object’, is to sacrifice the possibility of becoming the ‘author’ of one’s world; and the consciousness of authorship has much to do with the consciousness of freedom (Greene, 1988, p. 22).

By ignoring the “I” and our personal connection to the material, we learn that the subject matter does not include or pertain to us. By learning to be distanced from the material we learn emotional and personal detachment. This deludes students and educators into believing that objectivity is the only academically acceptable and valued means to be and become within education. This type of education teaches us that there is no space permitted for the inner lives of students and educators (Palmer, 2007). The subjective and objective are two sides of the same coin and without combining the two facets, education will never be a whole education. If we removed all objective matters from the classroom we would not have any scientific basis on which to consider subjective actions. For example, without being taught how to study objective materials such as calculating fractions, emissions of greenhouse gases, or causes of diabetes, our world would be left with a great deficit of *useful* knowledge. As Paul Ernest states:

It should be made clear that the claim that objective mathematical knowledge is sustained by the subjective knowledge of members and society does not imply the

reducibility of the objective. Objective knowledge of mathematics depends upon social institution, including established ‘forms of life’ and patterns of social interaction. These are sustained, admittedly, by subjective knowledge and individual patterns of behavior, as is the social phenomenon of language. But this no more implies the reducibility of the objective to the subjective, than the materialism implies that thought can be reduced to, and explained in terms of physics. The sum of all subjective knowledge is not objective knowledge (Ernest, 2004, pp. 82-83).

Knowledge becomes *useful* when we apply it to our lives, and thusly it includes the subjective. Without adding in the subjective, our motivation, interest, and drive to learn and apply knowledge is diminished. This is, as we have discussed, where our educational system currently resides; in an indifferent state of teaching and learning.

J. Krishnamurti’s suggests is that “as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook on life, it has very little significance”(Krishnamurti, 1981, p. 11). We are failing to develop potential within our students when we do not allow for this type of integrated subjective, objectiveness and for the *otherness* to be safely explored within the classroom. By stating “otherness”, I am referring to something that is foreign to us, something currently unknown, something that may at first pose a challenge to our current ways of thinking. By things being different to us, we define what we are and are not. However, by something being completely *other*, or foreign, we limit our personal growth if we are not taught how to encounter, explore, and understand these differences. We should recognize that without adding the *other* to our education, the purpose of education is superficial as well as split from and irrelevant to our lives.

Our educational system projects students to be disembodied participants in our world that are merely receptacles and regurgitating creatures of *facts* that distance them from our communities. This applies not only at the most elementary levels of education, but also at the latter end of the spectrum. Even at many higher levels of education we continue to rely too heavily on a very disembodied form of lectures and testing. Instead, I argue in this dissertation, we should recognize the holistic nature of the individuals that comprise the classroom. What we have been doing is repeating a system of education that allows for the matriculation of students that lack the ability to link their knowledge with their own life and world. By perpetuating and encouraging forms of *standard* education as they are now, we, as a collective, continue to permit this dehumanizing process. By continuing our current educational we will only succeed in developing more individuals who live a life without deep connections to themselves and the world at large.

Through the failure to integrate or address our personal experiences, we isolate the mind within the classroom. We are preoccupied with transmitting *knowledge* to our students to the fault and extent of forgetting who and what it is that we are aiming at to become. We ignore who and what it is that the students are becoming as a direct result of the core mandatory curriculum that defines what are considered to be valid forms of *knowledge*. We lose the thread to the person, the connection to the community, and the immediate human connection that is present between instructor and student. We lose the thread to relationships that exists between all individuals in the educational setting, the materials they learn, and the external world.

Why then does our educational system fail to encourage and develop those values, skills, and also positions that might promote a more humane future? I believe the answer is that the governing bodies of our educational system and many of our educators do not know how to educate for ways of living and manners of thinking that emphasize the concept of connectedness. Nor, do our teachers and institutions grasp yet the necessity of educating for our future rather than of our past.

As the existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir believed:

freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world; to such an extent that man's project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior (Beauvoir, 1976, p. 79).

Our future freedom (individual and collective) relies upon our abilities to learn and exhibit qualities that engage us with our world and propel us in the right direction just as Freire stated: “critical consciousness is brought about, not through intellectual effort alone, but through praxis – through the authentic union of action and reflection” (Freire, 1985, p. 87).

I believe we are producing ill equipped “half-shells” of humans from our educational systems. The products of our educational system are individuals who are not sufficiently prepared to deal with the world problems we currently face as well as those that we will face in the future. Our educational system at large neglects to bear in mind that our world, including both the educator as well as the student, is continually changing regardless of their physical location within or outside of the educational setting such that:

“the meanings one makes from practice are in a state of continual and contradictory reinterpretation as other contexts and voices are taken into account or are ignored” (Britzman, 2003, p. 37). What occurs when we neglect to consider this important matter of continual change is that we ignore our own and the students’ own respective situation as an embodied person with mind, will, and desires that necessarily must encounter more of life than textbooks and classroom lectures.

Critiquing of our educational system, illustrating its ills as well as causes and consequences of misaligned educational practices, is fruitless without the possibility of offering an alternative vision of what might be a preferable resource for our problems. At the center of this alternative vision is the concept of *holistic education*.

### **Holistic Education**

Making the culture of education both far more personal and more social will at once improve academic learning and foster a spiritual and emotional life eventually capable of healing individual and societal ills. This curative culture will be warm and personal and allow for the individual a lot of choice and control over his or her own learning, confident that its powerful emphasis on human relating will balance the emphasis on personal development (Moffett, 1994, p. 56)

Moffett’s “curative culture” of education mirrors the desired end results of my vision for holistic education. The purpose of education, in my opinion, should not only be to enhance our knowledge, but also our understanding of the application of the material and how to function in our lives as more ethical and whole members of society. Holistic education should be concerned with the entire being of the person – one that includes the self and the self in society. It should not limit itself to a passage within a textbook.

Holistic education should integrate the student with the teacher, their fellow classmates, and the world outside of the classroom. Holistic education should not negate the life that the student leads when not in *school*. When holistic education is practiced, our lives should be considered to be a part of the educational process. My definition of holistic education is the practice of overcoming the alienation from our selves, others, and our earth. This definition concerns itself more with restorative acts that serve to connect our lives with what we learn.

In order to understand what precisely holistic education is in the grandest sense, the etymology of the words is helpful. Holistic is derived from the word *holism*. Hol- is the root word means *whole, entire, and total*. *Holos* is the Greek word for *whole* and centers the concept of holism / holistic; from which the word *heal* is derived and related to the proto-germanic *khailaz* . Khailaz literally means to make whole and well (Pieterse, 2010). While the suffix *-ism* is a school of thought, theory, and belief. Thusly, healing to make one sound and well, as in Moffet's view of a *curative culture* in education, implies the necessity for holism. The etymology of the word education is derived from the Latin *educare*, that means to “bring up” and related to *educere*. *Educere* means “to bring out” (Educate, 2010). Therefore, *education* is a word that implies the aiding an individual to progress further while drawing upon, and tease out, their talents.

Taking the etymology of all these words into consideration, my vision of a holistic education would therefore be an educational curriculum, complete with relevant actions of a teacher, which would foster interconnectedness between the individual and

their world. Therefore, holism is a manner of thinking that centers on the whole, entire, and total picture of what is at hand (Pieterse, 2010). Holism implies a belief that life matters should not be broken down into smaller parts or that some parts should be discarded. Rather, holism implies that our lives and selves must be viewed as interconnected (Hoad, 1996)(Johnson, 2008). Holism and holistic should therefore be applied to the mind and existential being in conjunction with circumstance, education, and life in general.

Education in the holistic sense utilized here, is by definition not a passive way of being. It is intended to bring out the person, rather than to weigh an individual down, and to foster integrated beings. Therefore, holistic is addressing the mind in combination with the lived experience and means:

recognizing that for human beings to move towards a less violent and more cooperative and caring mode of existence, the broad development of all our potentialities will be required (Shapiro, 2010, p. 9).

For further clarification of holistic education, it is helpful to look to John P. Miller's explanation. He states that holistic education is: "exploring and making connections as it attempts to move from fragmentation to connectedness" (Miller, 2007, p. 13). Miller's passage refers to the required examination of the broken links between the individual, others, and the existential condition in order to reconnect our education to its root word meaning. Miller continues to clarify his meaning of holistic education by stating that

the focus of holistic education is on relationships: 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 relationship to our souls. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he or she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate (Miller, 2007, p. 13).

He continues:

This definition of holistic education centres on connection and can be explored in a number of different contexts...The holistic curriculum attempts to restore a balance between linear thinking and intuition...The holistic curriculum explores the relationship between mind and body so the student senses the connection between the two...The holistic curriculum sees the student in relation to the community. Community refers to the classroom, the school community, the community of one's town and nation, and the global community. The student develops interpersonal skills, community service skills, and social action skills... This connection involves seeing ourselves as part of the web of life rather than separate from the earth (Miller, 2007, p. 13).

Here we must understand and emphasize the interconnected nature of our world by placing great importance on gaining introspection into our own lives first and then in our students' lives. By better understanding ourselves and our various relationships, we may become more active in the transformation of our lives and world towards a more ethical and just culture.

In this clarification of what is meant in our holistic connection by Miller, we should pause to consider how very few, if any, of these pieces of our existence are currently found in our public educational system. Miller highlights why these connections

are so important by stating that: “ultimately, the holistic curriculum lets us realize our deeper sense of self, our soul” (Miller, 2007, p. 13).

As Miller emphasized the soul in his definition of holistic education, Parker Palmer believed education is a process of holding a mirror to our soul. It is interesting, as well as important, to consider why these writers would place an emphasis on what is such a commonly avoided word within education. The meaning of *soul* within this passage attempts to allude to something that is alive and intertwined mentally and physically within us. The soul in this instance is not an ethereal concept that ascends (or descends) from our bodies upon death into an eternal existence. Rather the term *soul* should be used here as analogous to *life*. In a similar way, Palmer’s use of the word *spiritual* in education means “the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life” (Palmer, 2007, p. 5). It follows when referring to this concept within education, that using *spiritual* also implies something not traditionally thought of as belonging in the classroom. However, it is this connection to our being, our spirit, our soul, our life force (whatever it is that we wish to call our deeper inner sense of being), that we have left out of education and need to reintroduce in order to create a holistic educational curriculum.

My distinction between the more religious interpretation of holistic education and what I consider to be the more applicable form of holistic education, mirrors the comments of David Purpel when he stated that:

(W)e must insist on an education that seeks to integrate *all* facets of human life, being sure to avoid a one-sided or distorted vision of human being. There is, of

course, some intended ironic criticism here since it has been my view that, by and large, holistic educators have tended to focus much more on the personal and spiritual than on the social and moral dimensions of education. This is ironic to me, because I believe that in their zeal to rightfully point out how conventional educators have a truncated vision of learning, holistic educators tend to substitute an equally truncated, albeit more aesthetically satisfying, vision of learning. It is quite true that holistic educators are making an enormously important contribution to our society and culture by emphasizing such neglected area as the intuitive, the artistic, the creative, and the mythopoetic, and for that they deserve our thanks and approbation. What is spectacularly exciting is that the conceptual framework of the current holistic-education movement provides for the possibility of a *truly* holistic education, one that seeks to integrate the inner self with the outer self and thereby connect the personal with our social, cultural, moral, political, and economic contexts (Purpel, 2005, p. 134).

For instance, by substituting the word *life* in place of the term *soul*, as utilized by Miller (2007) and Palmer (2007), we can better understand that my vision of holistic education will center connections in the individual between the existential lived condition and practical education. This vision of holistic education would not substitute an emphasis on the *spiritual* or *soul* for *life* in general and become too short sighted as Purpel has suggested can be a downfall of well-intentioned holistic educators. Just as “good therapy does not begin until the real-life therapist joins with the real life of the client” (Palmer, 2007, p. 5) neither will the good education begin until it includes the real life of the student. By applying these concepts in the classroom, we bring attention to our being. When we know that we are important and that our world which incorporates our “social, cultural, moral, political and economic contexts” is important, then we in turn learn to value these things and take care of them.

In the educational setting, the holistic educator should function as both teacher as well as healer. It is through life experiences and the incorporation of holistic techniques in education that the students *heal* the existential void and that education becomes curative by integrating lives and learning. I am not suggesting here that an educator should be trained as a therapist. However, a holistic educator should be competent enough, mentally healthy enough, and possess the integrity to be able to encounter and engage students' genuine needs and interests. The holistic educator is a guide, a tool, and an example for our lives and future. The holistic educator is not necessarily an individual trained to delve into deep psychological traumas, but, the holistic educator does not shy away from allowing the personal realm to enter into the classroom. When the subjective and the objective meet, holistic education has become personally transforming.

By permitting for the educator / healer analogy, we can begin to understand more clearly how to make education personally transformative as well curative for the student and society. For education to be personally transforming it would necessitate a change and shift in the paradigm of one's thought from a competitive and distanced culture in the classroom to an ethos of inclusiveness and collaboration. Borrowing from the *Transformative Education* theory for a holistic educational practice in school, the classroom would be “based on understanding fair, respectful, and inclusive process(es) as a way of life and envisions outcomes as a commitment to increasing justice, seeking truth, and healing relationships” (Lederach, 1996, p. 22). Through the guidance of educators as a role model and facilitator, education will become personally

transformative for the students rather than stagnate and unrelated to the individuals who comprise the classroom.

Within holistic education, the educator would be familiar with and capable to impart transformative practices such as the ability to critically reflect and integrate lessons with the understanding of one's self, life, and actions. But, the larger gain would be the shift of being and connecting within the classroom. This change would allow students a connection within the classroom and the ability to take this mode of being out into the world. Holistic education is therefore transformative on a personal and societal level. Holistic education brings out the potential within us and it heals the existential chasm that currently exists between our lives and our education.

In order to be holistic, the classroom should not be restricted to the boundaries of a specific room in one geographic location. Although I still believe students should attend class in an organized school, students should be encouraged and shown how to perceive their educational setting as limitless. Our lives and the world need to be intertwined within our concept of a classroom. Not only can students be instructed on how to be mindful of lessons learned outside of the classroom, they can also bring the lessons learned into the classroom to share with others. When students are encouraged and shown that their experiences outside of the classroom are worthy of being considered education, the lives the students live are therefore given merit, credibility, and worth to enhance the holistic aspect of our education. Also, as James Moffett emphasizes in *The Universal Schoolhouse* (1994), when the concept of educational setting is expanded, valuable

lessons may be learned through the interaction and partnership with members of the community. Not only can students be shown how to apply their knowledge in various settings, contribute valuable assistance, and become more integrated and connected to society, but students would also become more involved with their community. An expanded sense of what is considered the educational realm would provide the community at large an opportunity to have a vested interest in the future generations as well as allow for community members to pass on their own personal knowledge and provide community members with feelings of validation as well as continued usefulness (particularly for the elderly members of society). If we are to make any progress with our educational practices, and if the individual as a sentient being is a primary concern, then we need to shift from a competitive, distanced, and objective approach towards a holistic humanistic approach in education that would expand upon our traditional views of an educational setting in order to complete the holistic circle of self, society, and world.

The primary mode, or tool, through which these types of transformative forms of curative education can be created is by holistic educational practices. As holistic educators we can guide our students who are looking for deeper meaning in their lives. We can connect them with tools for healing that include critical reflection on their world and relationships. For those who may not know what they are looking for, we may plant the seeds of wonder and imagination that will flourish into involvement with future possibilities. These educational tools are those that transform the individual and the way they view and interact with their world. They allow for the individual's personal choice,

opinion, and freedom to act. These benefits are precisely why a holistic education is necessary to begin at a young age and to be a part of the curriculum throughout our educational experiences. It is not a lesson for a day; it is a lesson for life.

Given the above details outlining what my definition of holistic education would incorporate, it is important to note the existence of some schools that currently do exist and can be classified to one extent or another as a holistic educational school. Forbes and Martin (2004) conducted a research study in an attempt to identify and classify educational programs within the United States (and two in Ontario, Canada) that identified themselves as *holistic*. What they found was that a total of 70 kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools existed within the United States alone. Of these schools, 47 were privately funded, 19 were public schools that were classified as public alternative schools, magnet programs, and charter schools, and 6 had a blended source of funding (Forbes & Martin, 2004). The responding schools included programs that claimed a Waldorf (a.k.a. Steiner) based influence, but did not mention Montessori type schools.

To clarify in brief, both Waldorf and Montessori schools are concerned with a belief in teaching the student to think, societal development, and a more interactive hands on approach with students than traditional schools. However, there are some distinct differences such as the Waldorf schools tending towards a more teacher-directed instructional method as compared to Montessori schools that permit for more self-directed learning (Pound, 2011). Despite some differences, both of these types of schools

should be mentioned and noted as being within the realm of holistic education and found throughout the United States.

Although Forbes and Martin did not mention Montessori based schools in their report, they concluded that the holistic schools in their study reported to emphasize at least one of what they termed their six categorical taxonomies: freedom, good judgment, meta learning, social ability, refining values, and self knowledge. Each of these categories varied based upon the intent of each program and what was termed “Ultimacy” by the researchers. Ultimacy in this instance was utilized to refer a higher arching principal that each school appeared to adhere to with regard to their goal within the realm of holistic education. Forbes and Martin referred to some of these ultimate goals as those that fell into their criteria of psychological goals as inspired by Carl Jung (“*unus mundus*”, literally “one world”, a unified reality) and Abraham Maslow (“self-actualization” on his hierarchy of needs in life). They also found various degrees of Ultimacy as they referred to as inspired more by religiosity infused within the promotional literature of the responding schools in their study (Forbes & Martin, 2004).

Given this research, it is important to note that despite the existence of both public and private schools claiming to belong to the holistic education movement, there still remains a broad spectrum of the definition of holistic education in practice as well as theory. As mentioned earlier in this section, my vision of holistic education would be one in which our lives outside of the classroom are better integrated with our knowledge and we become better integrated with others inside the classroom in order to achieve what I

would consider the development of a mentally healthy and capable individual as well as society. Taking my goals for holistic education, as stated earlier, in mind, I believe it would be fair to categorize my *Ultimacy* as defined by Forbes and Martin to be more psychological in nature. This Ultimacy for the purpose of this dissertation would be comprised of a cross functioning emphasis on freedom, good judgment, meta learning, social ability, refining values, and self knowledge. I will briefly clarify in my summary below and go more in depth as to what specifically would lend itself to the development of each of these six taxonomies within the following chapters.

### **Research Focus and Dissertation Structure**

I believe we need to heal the rift between what we are taught we need to know through our current education and what I think we should know in order to achieve a happier, more connected, and better future. I consider this fracture between what we are taught and how we live a wound that each of us carries due to a lack of knowing precisely what our education really means to us. I deem this wound as something that can be healed through a holistic, *curative culture*, of education.

I believe that none of our current concepts of education are so immutable that we, as a collective and as individuals, cannot begin to alter the current path of our educational practices. I do not think it is not enough to assume that an individual's personal life outside of our educational system is sufficient to develop healthy individuals. What I believe we need is a form of education that bridges the gap between what we learn and

what we experience; this is where I feel the concept of holistic education fits into our curriculum.

My central concern within this dissertation is the desire to explore what a shift in the prevailing concept of education would include and look like if we moved from an educational system in which we prepare our students for careers and competitiveness to one that incorporates concern for our selves, our society, and our world. Within this dissertation, I plan to explore what would comprise a holistic form of education and how such a curriculum would function. I wish to question what a curriculum would look like if we were to prepare our students for a more ethical, humane, and interconnected future by addressing the ways in which we may add aspects of holistic education to our curriculum and the benefits of some of these subject matters. I plan to explore topics such as what teaching students mindfulness, inter-personal skills, and critical consciousness would add to their education and thusly their lives. I also wish to portray a successful example of a real program that touches on the importance of teaching to transform and then describe what a holistic curriculum would look like in more detail. I intend to demonstrate the practicality of a holistic education and the benefits of a holistic education in the lives of our students and for those of our educators in the coming chapters.

The ways in which to achieve a holistic pedagogical education are varied and should not be assumed to be a one size fits all solution. Despite the various methods that may be utilized to shape a holistic education, I argue that the over-arching goal for education should mirror Simone de Beauvoir's (1976) perspective on freedom creation

such that we all need to be active participants who are engaged with our world and future. I believe that we should approach others and participate in the world with critical intent and know that “life is occupied in both perpetuating and in surpassing itself; if all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying” (Beauvoir, 1976, pp. 82-83).

Therefore, what is to come in the following chapters will be an exploration of the mechanics and practices of holistic education. I will address the central concerns of how we may link the lives and personal wellbeing of our educators, students, and communities to our education through means that incorporate holistic practices. These changes require more than a modification in opinion and teaching techniques; they require a change in our own mental understanding and vision of education. In an attempt to demonstrate how we may expand our concept of education, chapter two will review some of the more relevant theories that I believe directly apply to creating an educational system that is more holistic. It will shed light on what defines the mechanics of holistic education. Chapter two addresses various dimensions of holistic education such as how mindfulness techniques can be added to our curriculum in order to assist both the student and pupil to focus critical intent towards their thoughts, intent, and actions. Mindfulness will be also discussed as to how this practice may contribute in assessing general well-being of one’s self. How we communicate, what we are thinking, and how we receive messages from others are also critical aspects of our educational practices and will be further discussed in chapter two. I will elaborate on how simple phrases such as *I am*, *I will* or *I feel* can augment education in order for it to become more holistic through the inclusion of being

able to communicate effectively and face conflicts in our lives. Being able to critically think on matters such as these creates within us an ability to comprehend as well as to maintain lessons learned through integrating concepts into our mental framework. Therefore, I will review critical consciousness methods as well in chapter two and consider the benefits of learning to synthesize, integrate, and even question our education. Concluding our second chapter, I will review how we may further expand our holistic educational ideal by looking beyond our classroom walls and including our lived existence, our existential concerns, in our lessons. Alternative views on what education *is* or could be will be included in this review, but, most importantly, the reasons for including more of our lived existence in our education will be discussed.

The third chapter will provide an example of transformative learning in practice through the use of interviews from participants who attended an alternative program that exemplifies a more holistic approach towards learning. This third chapter draws on my interviews of five young adults who credit this particular alternative program with assisting them in altering some of their life paths, and their perceptions, to include a more humanistic approach towards others and a more critically reflective attitude. Each participant from the interviews attended a weeklong alternative learning session during their teenage years and then returned to the same program as young adults to serve as counselors. The interviewees are from varied backgrounds in an attempt to provide multiple perspectives on the same program. Each interview was conducted with the interviewee's consent and the interviews were carried out in private one-on-one sessions.

Interviews lasted upwards of an hour and a half during which time I posed questions to the interviewees that attempted to delve into their personal experiences with facing people or ideas that were foreign to them. They were asked questions regarding their own previous and current viewpoints regarding race, religion, and sexuality during our conversations. Each interviewee was also questioned as to their personal opinion on the functionality of alternative teaching methods, such as the program they experienced, and its applicability on a grander, farther-reaching, educational scale. Their examples will serve as eyewitness accounts as to what and how parts of a holistic education could look like and what it could foster within our students if placed into practice on a daily basis in our standard educational settings. I discuss the methodologies used in these interviews in an appendix to this dissertation.

Our last chapter will link the theories and case example from the second and third chapters into a general outline for an application of a holistic curriculum to our educational systems. My vision of holistic education in our final chapter will address the teacher and the student as irreducible to merely message sender and message receiver. It will demonstrate how we may go about integrating our ideas, concepts, and theories surrounding holistic education within our classrooms. The fourth chapter will describe both the addition of a more holistic education in a general manner that can be built upon as a general structure for future use and an example of a short-term educational program proposal that incorporates aspects of holistic education. The final chapter will also

highlight the challenges and criticisms that may face us as educators who may attempt to make such holistic changes to the educational curriculum.

Although I will review what I perceive as key aspects to a holistic education and how they may be applied, this does not exhaust the range of skills and modes of knowledge transmission that are relevant. Throughout these chapters I invite my audience to carefully consider the suggested educational improvements and to imagine additional tools for creating a more holistic approach to education. Moving toward a different educational future will require both imagination and desire for radical change.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **COMPOSING A FRAMEWORK FOR HOLISTIC EDUCATION**

#### **Introduction**

The word *holistic* has become somewhat of a cliché over the past few decades. Because of the over abundant use of the term *holistic* that ranges from our medicinal practices to the foods we consume, the word holistic has become commercialized. We can understand a more accurate sense of the meaning as it applies to our inquiry at hand when we examine its definition in combination with the word with *healing*, and apply it specifically to education. John Miller (2007) defined holistic education as an educational practice that

involves exploring and making connections as it attempts to move from fragmentation to connectedness (and that) the focus of holistic education is on relationships: the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationship among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship to the earth, and our relationship to our souls (while) in the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he or she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationship where it is appropriate (Miller J. P., 2007, p. 13).

A holistic healing education is one in which restorative processes are utilized to generate a deeper connection within ourselves as well as our society by and through our modes of education. Our current beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes towards education needs

to be broadened in order to develop within us, as educators and students, the ability to see beyond the textbooks, classroom walls, and tests, what function we truly wish education to serve.

We may recall from our own experiences with education that what we learned in the classroom was rarely, if ever, correlated to our own existential being or to our relationship with others. The majority of our educational experiences centered on textbook materials with names, dates, and formulas rather than teaching us to interact meaningfully with the material and the world. While I am not arguing here for the removal of subject matter in the classroom, I am suggesting additional aspects be added to the curriculum as well as recommending a change in our methods of instruction. By altering our teaching methods as well as materials we may assist in creating our educational experiences to be more holistic.

When we consider the student and the teacher as living beings, who by necessity function in the world outside of school, we should note that the educational system is a composite of these individuals and that with them they bring to the classroom their lives as existential beings. There exists an interdependence between what we learn and how we live. As Levinas situates learning and experiencing life through the encounter of the *other* and discourse on its meaning, so too should our education. This discourse of Levinas according to Strhan includes our subjective understanding of ethical implications for our education, and it is through this association between discourse, *others*, and our lives in the world (e.g. consciousness, justice, responsibility) that our education should be based

(Strhan, 2012). Continuing with this perspective, we can argue that because of this relationship between our lives and educational experience an emphasis should be placed on the necessity of connecting a healthier lived experience with education by tools that serve to generate a more holistic understanding of all aspects of life.

In order to fully understand my vision of holistic education, it is important to address additional theories on holistic and healing forms of education and by including ideas that have yet to be applied daily to an educational setting. These ideas include such topics as mindfulness and conflict resolution, through which we may enhance and expand our view and understanding of the potential that exists for the future of education. This chapter will focus on theories and practices that may help us shape an education and an educational system that is holistic and healing. While our examination of these ideas will in no way be exhausted due to the plethora of perspectives related to the meaning of holistic education and pedagogy in general, this chapter will highlight some of what I believe are the key aspects of holistic learning. These key aspects include why such emphasis should be placed on reforming our educational system in order to create a new path that speaks to the needs for future vision which would include a humane, democratic and compassionate stance. Useful ideas will be abstracted from a variety of fields and various individuals. Ideas about how to create a more well rounded educational system can not only be drawn from well-known educational practitioners like Paulo Freire and bell hooks, but from leaders of other fields such as John Paul Lederach, who lends us

insight from conflict resolution strategies and from a Zen Buddhist monk; Thich Nhat Hahn.

Therefore, we will explore a broad range of relevant concepts that include mindfulness, communication techniques, and interpersonal relationships as they apply to the classroom. We will also consider what utilizing the existential world as a center for learning may look like and how critical consciousness plays a crucial role in enhancing our comprehension abilities. All the above-mentioned topics will bear importance in the development of my vision for a holistic version of education.

As Miller (2007) defined holistic education as centering on connections, we may gather that there are numerous paths to follow in order to correct the misalignment of our educational materials and instruction techniques. Some of these useful paths and connections between our education as well as our lives will be highlighted in detail later in this chapter. I have divided this chapter into four sections.

The first section will focus on mindfulness. This section will detail what it means to be mindful and how being attentive to intent can create within us a stronger connection to our lives. Second, aspects of conflict resolution will be reviewed to illustrate ways in which we may learn to have more open and meaningful interactions with others. Third, we will explore what it means to think critically and how this skill may assist us in engaging with our subject matter. Our fourth and last section will investigate how the world outside our traditional school settings may be utilized as learning experiences and increase our connection to society.

## **Being Mindful and Ways of Being in Educational Settings that Heal: Fundamental Mindfulness**

Meditation is commonly referenced as the practice of mindfulness and thought of as the act of concentrated attention while sitting still - often ascribed to practitioners of Buddhism and monks in particular. A well-known practitioner of mindfulness is Thich Nhat Hanh and he considers mindfulness to be the manner in which we restore ourselves, both mentally and physically, as well as connect ourselves to our existence. Meaning, according to Hanh (2011), that mindfulness is a way in which to link our body and mind holistically in a restorative process. It is by being mindful that we can take care of our own conscience and combine our learning plus experience with that which is useful and good for our world. Mindfulness has also been described by Napoli, Krech, and Holley as “the cognitive propensity to be aware of what is happening in the moment without judgment or attachment to any particular outcome” (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005, p. 99). It is this type of connected and restorative mindfulness that is noticeably absent within our educational system and can create a more holistic form of education by centering students in the present with a willingness to be open for thought.

According to Bhikku Sujato, mindfulness comes from a Hindu word, sati, which meant memorizing text, but was adopted by Buddhists to refer to ‘presence of mind’ during meditation (Sujato, 2012). Most commonly, mindfulness in association with Buddhism is used to refer to “good consciousness and hence invariably called ‘right mindfulness’” (Kuan, 2008, p. 1) that is part of the *Noble Eightfold Path*. The *Noble*

*Eightfold Path* is, in summary, a one of four key teachings of Buddhism that is utilized to assist its practitioners with self-awareness (or awakening) and with the cessation of suffering (Kuan, 2008) (Sujato, 2012). As Buddhism teaches that nothing is permanent except impermanence, mindfulness is a path that teaches us to be mentally cognizant of the here and now as well as where our actions and thoughts will lead us in the future (Gunaratana, 2001). Within Buddhism, there are *four foundations of mindfulness* that includes mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena (Langan, 2006). There are also different forms of mindfulness with regard to the various Buddhist teaching as well as goals. For example, in the meditative approach to mindfulness, one form is based on a Buddhist sutra that focuses on one's own breath, while another concerns itself with allowing thoughts to flow freely without passing judgment (Weber, 2003). Still another form of mindfulness from the Buddhist meditative approach is when

the practitioner of mindfulness mediation practices attending to deeper and simple aspects of perceptions, starting with breathing, and ending with the impermanence of all things... the meditator is instructed on how to sit in stillness, attending but not reacting to the many distraction in the body-mind. The meditator as well can maintain and practice mindfulness while walking, eating, and doing chores (Weber, 2003, p. 174).

What is important for our inquiry at hand here is the way in which we may apply a useful technique to our every day educational settings without assigning its intent to be motivated by any desire for conversions of beliefs or purely by current societal trends. Rather, what the larger educational system should recognize here are the proven benefits mindfulness has shown in various aspects of our lives (e.g. science) and the implications

that exist, which will be discussed further below, for our students and teachers. I hope through this discussion that educators and students may come to realize that a key benefit of practicing mindfulness in our education would be learning how “to observe the interaction while participating in it, to step back and reflect even as events whirr along” (Langan, 2006, p. 45).

As mentioned, I believe that mindfulness is highly applicable to our concept of holistic education given that the practice itself teaches us to be aware of our unique positionality and to use that awareness to link and direct our thoughts and actions. Again, Thich Nhat Hanh states the usefulness of mindfulness in education best when he said:

The practice of mindfulness will increase the quality of our learning and also improve the quality of our life – helping us to handle our suffering and to bring about peace, understanding, and compassion. It can help us improve or restore communication and bring about reconciliation so that we can touch the joy of life (Hanh & Community, 2011, pp. 15-16).

### **Mindfulness in the Sciences**

As discussed, mindfulness is in no way a new concept, however, it is one that has been adopted more recently within Western cultures. Mindfulness is now being utilized to address a multitude of existential concerns within various health (mental and physical) fields, but, unfortunately, it is still rarely found within our school curriculum. For instance, within the medical field, biomedical feedback is utilized by various types of patients in order to address such physical symptoms as stress, pain, migraines and even muscle movement. The concept is very basic such that the patient is connected to a

machine or computer that relays to the patient the status of whatever it may be that the machine is monitoring. The patient learns that through paying attention to stimuli that they can control their own physical responses as indicated on the machine. For example, a person who is attempting to lower their heart rate would be connected to an e.k.g. machine that would show the patient their heart rate. The patient in turn learns through this monitor and feedback-loop what type of stimuli increases or decreases their heart rate and how to achieve the increase or decrease through their own actions. Once this is achieved, the patient is now paying mindful attention to their pulse and learns through this pattern how to be mindful of their heart rate and precisely what mental state they need to be in order to do so. What occurs after the lessons in biomedical feedback can be considered an unconscious state of knowing on behalf of the patient such that actual forced and focused mindfulness becomes *second nature* and therefore the patient is better able to control their heart rate with seemingly no exertion (Andreassi, 2007).

Although this goal of the mindfulness feedback-loop is sometimes misunderstood or goes completely unrecognized, it is important to note that mindfulness in all its forms can become something of a second nature. It does not have to be something that requires continual cognitive effort within any form of its use once it has been practiced, learned, and habitual (Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2007). Hence the necessity for mindfulness to be regularly practiced, including within holistic education, and one of the first techniques I believe should to be imparted to others from a young age and continually.

Psychology has also appropriated the term mindfulness to imply paying exquisite attention to how one is feeling, what one is thinking, how one is in relation to others and the external world. This is a practice as well as a goal of holistic teachings and this manner of teaching aligns ones true future goals with current behaviors as well as modes of thinking - all without applying value judgments (Johns, 2009). This type of mindfulness in psychology is more aligned with the Buddhist concept of mindfulness and utilized in the field as a therapeutic tool to enable the patient to better understand their feelings as well as their reactions to them. Two main practices in psychology are mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). These two specific types of therapy have been shown to reduce depression and anxiety and both forms of therapy are accepted and recommended by the American Psychological Association (Gockel, 2010). They each approach the therapist-patient relationship through the teaching of mindfulness practices. These practices in therapy often begin with stress-reduction breathing techniques and can progress into free-flowing thought processes much like the various types of mindfulness as found in Buddhism. Being mindful in therapy and applying it to the external world allows an individual to consider various topics without a preconceived opinion on the topic and permits them the space to approach the stressor from a new perspective.

Therapeutic settings, including psychoanalysis, serve the function of educating (or re-educating) individuals to alter current modes of being and thinking that have proved to be maladaptive in the patient's life because our current reality is often the consequence of

our actions and ways of thinking (Johns, 2009). Because of the ways in which we are taught to make quick and decisive decisions (e.g. timed tests, particularly with multiple choice answers) we are conditioned to apply rapid judgment to our ways of learning as well as our lives. While wise and quick judgment is a necessary and useful mode of being in situations such as those that are dangerous and require fast decisions, rapid and many times impulsive judgments, are often detrimental in our daily lives. Our lack of attunement to our prejudices biases the ways in which we are living, and the way in which we wish to live can cause drastic harm to ourselves and others. This lack of mindfulness may cause us to be living in contradiction to our desired outcomes whether we are cognizant of them or not. We feel disconnected from ourselves, others, and even our futures when we fail to heed mindfulness and because of the discord we create.

Kopp compares “the emotionally troubled man of today” (Kopp, 1972, p. 3) to spiritual pilgrims of the past and present who go in search of meaning or answers for questions that they have not been taught the tools to answer themselves. He states that: “(c)rises marked by anxiety, doubt, and despair have always been those periods of personal unrest that occur at times when a man is sufficiently unsettled to have an opportunity for personal growth” (Kopp, 1972, p. 3). It is at this time of potential for growth that we can most benefit from those such as psychoanalysts who can teach us mindfulness techniques in therapy. Failing to be mindful distances us from our more holistic nature and manner of being and leaves us as emotionally troubled pilgrims. We become disconnected from life when we fail to be mindful, including any perceived

meaning or answers, but yet we continue down the same destructive path due to not knowing how to proceed otherwise. Our current judgments keep us from perceiving life differently and keep us from reaching greater potentials for ourselves and our society. It is at precisely this moment of disconnect, crisis, or pilgrimage that as Kopp stated opens us for the potential for growth through our physical and mental realms of science that apply mindfulness aspects within their respective fields. It is through the trained mindfulness therapist that the patients learn these practices, much as I believe students should learn mindfulness skills through knowledgeable teachers.

### **Adding Mindfulness to the Classroom**

Mindfulness techniques have been found “helpful for adolescents in their search for self-awareness, meaning and life purpose” as well as foster self-awareness and self-esteem to “assist children to build resiliency including improved coping and social skills, as well as problem-solving skills, and better ability to understand the perspectives and values of others” (Coholic, 2010, pp. 91-92). Coholic (2010) also states that individuals who have experienced, or are experiencing, trauma will sometimes have difficulties focusing or closing their eyes for moments of meditation, let alone being fully mentally present to learn educational materials. Mindfulness can and should be included in our standard curriculum as

for learners, young or old, who achieved little at school and associate learning with anxiety, grief and failure, a ‘therapeutic’ concern with foundational skills, attitudes and motivations may be exactly what is called for (Hyland, 2009, p. 123)

Therefore, in order to address these issues, mindfulness becomes more important in the classroom to redirect ones' thoughts and actions particularly for those who may be struggling with life's concerns.

Mindfulness, in a therapeutic setting, such as counseling, often has time constraints, such as the length of the therapy session and the duration and timing in one's life of the session. Also, access to the benefits mindfulness teachings are often simply not currently available to the average person, let alone students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. By including mindfulness in the classroom, the potential exists to introduce mindfulness in simple ways for the youngest students and continue their development of mindfulness as they age over their educational careers. The lengthier, and gradual, development of mindfulness skills would assist students by endowing them with a more ingrained and utilized ability that connects us more holistically with our thoughts and actions. As mindfulness is a continual practice for all, and through all stages of life and learning, it should not be a brief course or even a chapter fleetingly dealt with, but rather an ongoing *life lesson*.

Unfortunately, while there is much research on practitioners of mindful meditation and measurable results (e.g breathing, heart rate, external stimuli responses), there exists less scientific research on the western adaptations of mindfulness as it can be applied to education due to the reluctance of many towards alternative educational approaches. However, some research does exist and is slowly growing within the realm of mindfulness in education and its measurable benefits. Solloway and Fisher (2007)

have demonstrated in their research that mindfulness not only is able to be quantitatively researched, taught, and learned, but that statistically significant results can be obtained from the measurements of students before and after mindfulness education. What this means is that: 1. Mindfulness is indeed a subject matter that one may impart to others in a learning environment, 2. The difference between the students before and after learning mindfulness is great enough to say that mindfulness was directly beneficial and 3. The results of learned mindfulness in education give scientific credit to the concept of inclusion of this practice within education. As McKenzie and Hassed (2012) state

the bottom line is that mindfulness is such an important life skill that it's a core part of education from the beginning. It's such a valuable generic skill that has so many particular applications relevant to learning, growing up and developing our potential, that it needs to be creatively woven into the educational experience at every level --- relevant to time, place, people, and context (McKenzie & Hassed, 2012, p. 213).

Mindfulness implies a state of mind in which we should aspire to achieve within education, not for a specific one-time end goal, but rather as a tool that can be applied in numerous ways, to various situations (e.g. learning materials, sports, interpersonal relationships, etc...). Just as mindfulness is a tool utilized in therapy to enhance well being, “removing delusions, breaking harmful habits or developing more wholesome or nourishing thoughts and actions” (Hyland, 2009, p. 12) we should note the similarities of a healing, more holistic, form of education share the same properties of enhancing our life skills as well as capacity for learning.

Hyland (2009) highlights that there still remains criticism within the realm of educational philosophy with regard towards a “*therapeutic turn*” in education such that subject matter such as mindfulness, self-esteem, and confidence may replace what some perceive as traditional knowledge and skill learning in schools. This fear can be alleviated by highlighting that mindfulness is not a practice that is purely inwardly focused, but rather a learned skill that better prepares and educates a person on who they are and where they stand in relationship to the rest of the existential world which necessarily includes knowledge, skills, and interactions with others. Again, these relationships that we create between our existential word and ourselves joins us in a more holistic manner that fosters the melding of various aspects in our lives. Such an educational system would be radically different from our current practices as adding mindfulness to education has been demonstrated to be statistically significant in reducing anxiety, increasing attention and enhancing social skills. The same benefits have been shown to hold true even for children labeled as difficult to educate for reasons such as ADHD (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005).

Despite the benefits that mindfulness has to offer education, there are relatively few examples of traditional educational settings utilizing this tool. However, some examples do exist. There is the Maitreya Educational Program in India that has been operating for over a decade and incorporates mindfulness into daily living as well as education (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). There have also been random mini-courses test piloted in some US classrooms (Brown, 2007) and there was the *Inner Kids* program

that operated in Los Angeles public schools from 2000 to 2009 (Greenland, 2010). The *Inner Kids* program taught pre-kindergarteners through twelfth grade students varied mindfulness techniques that included teaching them how to be aware of what was going on inside as well as outside of themselves. Each individual school program was between half and hour long to 45 minutes long and met once or twice a week for between 8 to 12 weeks. According to the program summary, *Inner Kids* began

with activities that develop breath awareness, move to activities that develop sensory awareness, and then to activities that develop awareness of thoughts, emotions and worldview... Each class session is divided into three sections – a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning and ending sections both contain introspective practice. The beginning section of each class includes an introspective period usually a sitting practice; the middle section includes games and activities that teach the theme for that week's class (breath awareness, for example, or awareness of where your body is in space, or awareness of interconnection); the ending section of each class includes a second introspective period usually lying down and a friendly wishes practice (our secular term for practices that promote kindness and compassion for self and others)... We use a general formula of play, followed by introspection, and then sharing to help children: (1) better understand their introspective experience; (2) relate it to their daily lives (sic); and (3) understand the importance of helping within their families, community service, and community action. (Greenland)

The *Inner Kids* program may not have been an integration of mindfulness into the daily classroom lesson as I would like to see, but, its teachings and end goals are reflective of my vision for mindfulness in education as it would be taught on a grander scale over longer periods of time. Unfortunately, programs such as Inner Kids and schools such as those advocated by the *Association for Mindfulness in Education* are far from mainstream.

While there are few schools putting mindfulness to practice, particularly in the United States and throughout all grade levels, there are some that exist as mentioned and the utilization of mindfulness in so many other fields (e.g. psychology and medicine) should serve as an example of how and why this practice is not only suitable towards creating a more holistic education, but a valuable life-long lesson to impart to our current students. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests adults as well as children self-report differences in their mindset and life approach after learning mindfulness. For example, a student from a troubled school in Oakland, Ca reported that mindfulness helped him refrain from “hitting someone in the mouth” (Brown, 2007). While this comment may seem like a childish remark, it is important to remember just how pervasive bullying as well as violence and even shootings have become in our schools. With this in mind, it would be detrimental to allow such negativity, unhealthy behaviors, and attitudes to continue in our schools, especially when we consider that tools, such as mindfulness, exist and can be utilized to ameliorate these types of ills.

Mindfulness, as practiced by the professionals, has been compared to unconditional positive acceptance. When mindfulness is demonstrated, it has been shown to have a strong impact on those in the presence of the practitioner. If one is projecting mindfulness on the students, subject matter, and the self, then one is not projecting anxiety, disinterest, fear, or even hate. According to Thich Nhat Hanh (2011), one becomes more open and accepting to others while practicing mindfulness and others can sense a more welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere. This is because being mindful

holds these negative aspects at bay to allow for proper attention to intent (Hanh T. N., 2011). Goeckel (2010) states that in therapeutic mindfulness training we learn that we cannot hold two conflicting opinions at the same time. This means that if our attention is focused on being positive and accepting that we will not be preoccupied with other non-productive behaviors or attitudes (Gockel, 2010).

By suspending judgment and applying mindfulness, educational topics can be driven by higher curiosity levels among the students themselves. When one is permitted the space and training to turn ideas around in one's mind and create connections, they make the topic their own and safe to explore. This type of assisted self-directed learning generates empowerment in the student. Although Gockel (2010) is referring to clinical practitioners in her below statement, the same can be said about traditional educational settings:

Students who are beset by anxiety and fear making mistakes may be less likely to take risks in using their skills and thus less likely to benefit from learning opportunities. In striving to appear competent to supervisors, students may be tempted to share only the parts of their learning process that they think will gain approval. Because mindfulness increases self-acceptance and self-confidence, students who engage in this practice may be more able to tolerate making mistakes and more willing to take the interpersonal risks that promote learning. They may also be more comfortable sharing mistakes or challenges in supervision, which allows them to benefit more fully from the feedback of supervisors and others trainees (Gockel, 2010, p. 8).

Mindfulness in education is therefore not a topic that should be restricted to only adults or more experienced learners. Children, even at young ages, have been found to benefit from modified mindful practices that include games, lessons by examples and

stories or analogies (Hanh & Community, Planting seeds: Practicing mindfulness with children, 2011). When we apply mindfulness in the classroom we are replacing the repetitious request that students *pay attention* with the lessons and skill of mindfulness. This teaches students what it really means to be mentally present with the materials and in the classroom. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, teaching children and adults to be mindful assists them with “the ability to organize tasks, manage time, set priorities, and make decisions... [as well as] becoming less reactive and more compassionate with themselves and others” (Hanh & Community, Planting seeds: Practicing mindfulness with children, 2011, pp. 19-20). By incorporating mindfulness with education, we learn to join ourselves with our education in a manner that generates meanings and connections for us and with us in our lives, which is what differentiates holistic education from our current standard curriculum.

### **Means to Communicating and Reducing Conflict**

It is important to point out how little communication actually occurs in education. We are spoken to in classes and asked to respond with correct answers or questions that are most obviously directly related to the course material. We are penalized for asking difficult questions or ones that may appear to others to be obtuse without the benefit of being allowed to clarify ourselves. Instead of receiving support from our classmates or professors, we are ignored, passed or glossed over with regard to interpersonal communication attempts. In addition to this uncomfortable situation our questions must also be answerable by our educators. As one of the more influential critical pedagogues,

bell hooks (2010), points out this lack of dialogue speaks not only to the fear of professionals that they may not have an answer, but to the incorrect assumption that the educations should have an answer. Students are taught that teachers know or should know everything and teachers more often than not maintain this persona. Jerome Miller speaks to this point when he states that:

The person who is wise in this postmodern sense is not held fast by the constraining limits of one particular universe, nor does he pretend to have achieved a transcendent vantage point outside all our universes; he lives rather in the very midst of them, aware of their irreducible multiplicity, ready to use them but not believe in them, not depressed by his rootlessness but happy to enjoy the freedom it gives him because it enables him to be at his ease in every world he enters. His pragmatic extemporizing makes him a perfect counter image to the philosophically wise man of classical culture whose intuition of eternal verities gave him a fixed, immovable vantage point unaffected by any shifts in human affairs. The person who is wise in the postmodern sense is characterized precisely by his openness to such shifts, his willingness to be historicized, his desire to be all too human instead of vainly seeking to be godlike (Miller J. A., 1992, pp. 15-16).

This fear of appearing human and not the vassal of infinite knowledge, or even power, alludes to the idea that if it were to be known it would throw the classroom equilibrium off balance. Yet, there is no equilibrium in the classroom to begin with; there is merely a status quo. Education does not currently foster active listening, critical questioning, conversation, or the safe space to create education to become more personally meaningful. The fear of including such means of communication stems from a learned fear of conflict and ways in which to effectively communicate. Although schools profess to be educating its students for their future, the future that they are preparing us for is one

without dialogue and means to handle or approach differences. How this current form of passive education can be perceived as a healthy well-rounded base for our future is questionable.

Although many have different conflict styles (e.g. confrontational, avoidance), we are ill equipped to know when and how to utilize each conflict style as well as how to approach others at such times. Conflict is perceived as such a negative word, but can actually be perceived as a beautiful moment. Conflict occurs both within one's mind and between others when perceived interests, beliefs, ways of being, etc. are challenged, but with proper guidance these uneasy situations can be transformed into times of learning and positive development for the future. Trujillo & Bowland et al. define conflict resolution as "a way of seeking change, social justice, social responsibility, health freedom, liberation, and the elimination of oppression for all" (Trujillo & Bowland, 2008, p. xxvii). As we are not taught to actively listen, critically question, or sit with resistance we have limited tools in which to engage with others towards the positive aspects that Trujillo, Bowland, et al. describe. Bell hooks notes that: "Fear of conflict often leads teachers and students to refuse direct confrontation of issues when they may serve as useful teaching moment" (hooks, 2010, p. 74). This type of avoidance as well as not knowing how to handle direct confrontation creates within us an unhealthy fear of engagement with others. What we learn is that if we stick to so-called facts we are safe. We learn that encountering differences, whether it be a different person or idea, is dangerous unless the idea comes directly from a book. We learn to ostracize those who

are different from us and we learn to become *yes-men*. We also fail to learn how not only to encounter strangers in the world, which we must necessarily cross paths with, but also how to interact with even our own loved ones. This disconnect can be debilitating in our lives, in interactions with others, and segregates us from a more holistic view and alliance between what we experience and how we live. The current form of education that neglects to teach us these skills is doing us a disservice by failing to teach us healthy modes of communication and conflict resolution.

Conflict involves various levels and types of concern. Conflict occurs due to perceived or actual material, communicative, and or symbolic disagreements. The disagreements are aspects of what we, or others, deem as non-compatible with our wishes or wants. The symbolic level includes our internal notions that we use to define ourselves (our identity). It is this subjective type of conflict that is often neglected as a consideration during discordant moment in the classroom. Instead of the addition of the subjective life in the classroom we currently favor focusing on the more tangible observable items at hand that create conflict such as the material issues. Therefore, as LeBaron (2003) states, a key aspect of attempting to resolve conflict and promoting a healing space in the classroom involves the recognition of these more personal and individualistic aspects. According to LeBaron (2003), the symbolic level of the conflict is the level that has meaning to us and is highly personal to how we define ourselves. Therefore if our identity - our subjective level, is threatened in the classroom, conflict is likely to occur. However, if we are being mindful, we may be able to reflect more deeply

and realize that perhaps the feeling of threat or conflict is stemming from a lack of knowledge, guidance in being open to new ideas, or with assimilating new concepts. These types of symbolic conflicts can be manageable, or even dealt with proactively, by understanding their origins, and in ways in which to approach the conflict. Similarly, if we are taught how to critically question or sit with resistance then, for instance, something that may be perceived as a challenge to our belief system, particularly if the belief is strongly held, then the perceived threat may be approached with more open mindedness and even curiosity rather than with anger or fear.

Maalouf reiterates LaBarons's sentiments in his book, *In the Name of Identity* (2003), that our egos are sensitive and for the most part we are not raised or taught to be comfortable with ideas that do not mimic our own or are perceived as a threat to how we define ourselves. This means that if we are confronted with an idea that is paradoxical to our beliefs, we may not only be resistant to a new way of thinking (without help that is) we may even be hurt by it or hurt others. Because of this avoidance of the more symbolic levels of conflict and lack of communication in the classroom, we do not know what a person may be thinking or what kind of damage we may be creating from an educator's standpoint.

The possibility exists that perceived irreconcilable differences are merely different approaches and perceptions between individuals towards the same topic. This type of conflict can be more constructively addressed in the classroom through the active engagement of discussing the differences as well as allowing for the space for others to

have divergent views. Approaches to differences should not be something each of us learn only as a retroactive step, as in bringing in outside intervention when bullying (or worse) has reached drastic levels, but rather these basic human interaction skills are necessary preemptively for a healthy life. Without them, conflicts can create stress, mental and physical symptoms, and interfere greatly with our abilities to learn.

There are various techniques that may be employed to address what many instructors fear in the classroom; discord and a poor learning environment. LeBaron (2003) identifies some of these techniques that include suspending judgment, sitting with resistance, employing imagination, embracing paradox, and exchanging passions or stories. Each of these concepts teaches valuable interpersonal and personal lessons to us, assist us with questioning where we currently stand within our abilities and give us tools on how to enhance them. By allowing us the ability to be more open with others and ourselves we enhance our capabilities to experience new ideas and learn by various methods that are more holistic and healing. They are more holistic because we incorporate more ways of knowing and more healing as we no longer feel the threat of conflict or attack on who we believe we are.

Suspending judgment and sitting with resistance are similar concepts to mindfulness. When we sit with resistance we face and contemplate what troubles us. We do not act, we sit with the discomfort and just *be*. In LeBaron's (2003) application of this idea to conflict, this is a step to actively and positively engaging in resolution and even reconciliation. In education, it can be a step in creating harmony in the classroom as well

as critical consciousness by both teachers and students. It is when we refrain from mentally rehearsing our responses even before the other has finished speaking and actively listen to what is being said. By suspending judgment we refrain from applying our preconceived notions. We listen in a safe space (even if it is only a safe space we create within our own minds) that permits all ideas to free flow without engaging in applications of our *truths*. Through suspending judgment long enough to hear the other side and engaging in the more holistic spirit of inquiry we may be capable of answering many of our questions and even ones we did not know we had until we opened ourselves to ideas. Dialogue that refrains from binary rights or wrongs, true or false, and yes or no reactions permits for a deeper investigation of the topics to be pursued and therefore leads to a greater understanding. Rather than ignoring topics we are then called upon to receive them and act on them as a witness rather than a direct participant. This may take some practice for some and certainly can take some intentional behaviors that are learned (hence the necessity for including these tools in all levels of education and in all classrooms regardless of topics), but by stepping out of our own shoes, becoming an observer, for a moment, we may then be better capable of receiving information and of reaching a point of letting go of our existing notions (LeBaron, 2003). Utilization of techniques such as sitting with resistance and suspending judgment permits for the exchange of personal information. These communication tools necessitate that at least one party is capable of these measures; so the education of at least one party with regard to communication skills is necessary to enhance the dynamic relationship. The next

measure according to Hart (2004) includes active listening that involves rewording and even summarizing what one has just said.

By exchanging passions or stories we gain insight into the other. If we allow the information to be processed with a mind frame of suspended judgment we may hear from others what holds true for them and what stories, or life moments, have been defining. The same for when we share with others our stories or passions. This is our subjective self-allowing itself to be revealed. It is personal, private sometimes, and for some, perhaps secretive. When individuals become friends it is often through shared mutual trust, sharing of stories, likes and dislikes, and when the atmosphere is one that is without judgment our friendships and respect deepen. Who would not like to see an atmosphere of respect and trust in the classroom? Both Lederach (2005) and hooks (2010), despite their varied field interests, include the benefit of allowing the personal into spaces we typical reserve as private. When passions or stories are shared we are more apt to listen to others and to be more receptive to statements coming from others. We learn better by and through situations that include our whole being, a holistic setting, and when we incorporate ourselves into our education what we learn becomes more personal and relevant. If my classmates or professors are strangers, I have no personal motivation to allow their ideas or perspectives to enter my mind unless I am previously open or taught how to do this, but if they are no longer distant others and neither am I to them, interest or curiosity may be peaked for learning.

For ideas that pose a challenge, be it in the classroom or other aspects of our lives, we may utilize imagination or the embracing of paradoxes as positive approaches to the situation. As Lederach states: “To live between memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a creative space, pregnant with the unexpected” (Lederach, 2005, p. 149). When we begin by suspending judgment and allow for imaginative ideas to flow, no solution or future potentiality is off the table. By visualizing or contemplating what the desired future outcomes may be, we are rehearsing for what we hope to achieve. We are healing our futures based upon what we imagine now and are healing our past by reframing it and utilizing whatever the hurt may be to move forward with positive intent. By doing so we are embracing the paradox of restoring our future. According to both Lederach (2005) and Curle (1971) conflict progresses through certain aspects of human relations that go from unbalanced to balanced power and inharmonious to harmonious. Classrooms are unavoidably microcosms of the larger world, but yet our current educational system suppresses this flow. In its current stage, our educational classrooms can be viewed as inharmonious, unbalanced in power, and with low awareness of conflict. What we need to do is to bring an awareness to the teachers, the higher powers, and even to the students to create a sustained and all encompassing, holistic, model of education.

While we have addressed the physical and communicative presence in the classrooms, it now becomes necessary to acknowledge that the traditional form of classrooms can also be re-envisioned to become more connected to the world outside of

the traditional school. When we consider the various individuals we may come in contact with in a setting that is greater than a schoolroom and more resembling of our lives we take note of the benefits that being mindful, knowing how to communicate, sit with resistance, and handle perceived and actual conflicts may have on our lives.

### **Critical Consciousness in the Classroom**

Critical thinking has been vaguely defined as *reflecting on thinking* or even *thinking on thinking* (Kerr, 2009) and sadly most often found in reference as a teaching tool, goal for gifted students and higher education levels, or merely as something we need to apply in order to solve problems such as those found in a math course. Palmer (1993) argued that our current forms of critical thinking in education serve more to disengage students from ethics and community. It is currently being applied more as a tool to use to compete for grades (often perceived as a form of scarce commodity) and to distance the knowledge we gain from its actual applications. As Palmer states:

if we teach students to think of reality as a collection of atoms to be rearranged at our convenience, we are teaching an anti-community ethic. If we teach students to think of intellect as a tool for distancing and disconnecting ourselves from the world, we are teaching an anti-community ethic... It need not be this way. Critical thinking can be taught as a mode of citizen participation, and tolerance of ambiguity can be taught as a way of listening to others without losing one's voice (Palmer P. J., 1993, p. xviii).

Given Palmer's clarification of what critical thinking should mean, it is clear that there is a deeper intent implied within the phrase *critical thinking*, but, in order to avoid any confusion with my utilization of the term *critical thinking*, I will utilize the words

*critical consciousness*. By substituting these terms, I hope to remove some preconceived notions regarding what it should mean to be *thinking critically*. I will use Freire's work and understanding on critical consciousness in lieu of the current notion of critical thinking. By this I mean that, as Freire has stated:

There is no such thing as absolute ignorance or absolute wisdom. But men do not perceive those data in pure form. As they apprehend a phenomenon or a problem, they also apprehends its causal links. The more accurately men grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be... Further critical consciousness always submits the causality to analysis; what is true today may not be so tomorrow... Critical consciousness is integrated with reality; naïve consciousness superimposes itself on reality; and fanatical consciousness, whose pathological naïveté leads to the irrational, adapts to reality (Freire P., 2013, pp. 41-42).

Freire believed that his vision for critical consciousness would take place in a "loving, humble, hopeful, trusting, (and) critical" (Freire P., 2013, p. 42) environment that fostered dialogue as well as empathy between the participants (students and teacher). It is this type of thinking (contemplating) to which I am referring to within this paper. More specifically, critical contemplation is the mental analysis of any new idea or experience that generates within the individual a linking of other ideas or experiences to generate a form of understanding that goes beyond that which has been immediately presented. In addition, it is coupled with an understanding, and comfort, that the knowledge is still subject to change. It is through the empathetic type of dialoguing as described by Freire in which we may best reach our students.

Stephen Brookfield (2012) describes critical thinking in the terms in which I view critical consciousness; as a multi-step process such that first the individual is presented with a triggering event (a thought, an experience, information, etc...) which creates a mental state of contemplation, an appraisal of the event that includes reflection, self-questioning, and or explorations of such. From this process an individual integrates the information into new modes of thinking and doing (Brookfield, 2012) which fosters our goal of the holistic approach.

What critical thinking means is that a person is applying various analytical tools, such as the *who, who, when, where, why* and *how* questions to new information presented to them (hooks, 2010). By thinking consciously we are not just filing away a statement in our memory bank. Instead, cognitive links are created between the new information, our existing knowledge, and our experience with our world (Moon, 2008) that then becomes a way in which to contemplate our knowledge more holistically. When considering the use of critical consciousness as a tool in the educational healing process, it is the amalgamation of various fields that becomes important in order to link the participant's active engagement of subjects to their existential concerns. Through the addition of relevant life topics and skills to navigate such subjects, we may better prepare our students for critical consciousness to be added to their daily lives.

Critical consciousness is closely related to transformative learning. Its basic assumption is that once something is learned, at a deeper level, we are forever changed by that knowledge. We cannot go back to our state of not knowing. Transformative

learning is often associated with more cognitively challenging concepts that bring about a cognitive dissonance, or an internal dilemma, which requires mental resolution (Cranton, 1994), such as those concerned with personal prejudices and biases. While such topics can be personally transforming, it is the argument here that even seemingly trivial types of information, when critically reflected upon, can have healing attributes. Stevenson (2011) argues that the true purpose of critical thinking is very akin to Freire's views, such that instead of its utilization as a tool for mechanization or specialization, critical consciousness is a tool for engagement. Stevenson explains that it is through the continual process of critical thinking that we transform the knowledge we learn. With critical consciousness skills we learn to situate our lives in conjunction with the educational material in order to better understand our potential for active engagement. Stevenson states that "if human beings are necessarily incomplete and capable of processes of transformation then the same can be said of the social order" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 61). He believes that by joining critical thinking with education we may turn our visionary futures into reality.

Shapiro and Purpel (1995) stated that critical thinking / consciousness, as well as critical pedagogy, would "empower students in relationship to their world" and "peel back the layers of misinformation, false understanding, and distorted notions of how we know or make sense of our world" (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 108). Critical consciousness and critical pedagogy, then in the sense meant here, is as a form of thinking and instructing that changes an individual. In order for education to have

empowering and restorative (healing) properties, the learning structure cannot be one that merely dictates education in a top down manner. Removing autonomy and personal agency with regard to learning has been shown to have dire implications on the self and the self in action with the world. Seligman and Maier's (1967) famous study on learned helplessness found that dogs which were not given an alternative to receiving shocks (their training was dictated with no room for independent choice) never learned, or tried, to escape future shocks even when given the opportunity to learn so during future tests (Seligman & Maier, 1967). This research has subsequently led to further applications of learned helplessness with regard to human subjects. These related results in humans have shown that when the rights to think independently, make choices, or have alternative options are taken away (or never given in the first place) serious consequences such as depression, anxiety, apathetic world views, social withdrawal, and even an earlier death (in cases of nursing home patients) resulted (Hock, 2002). Also, related research indicates that future behavior and attitude patterns are directly linked to previous experiences of meaning. For instance, if an individual has not been taught that they have the ability to affect change then they are significantly less likely to do so. This result has been found even in infancy (Finkelstein & Ramey, 1977). Because of such evidence showing links between such maladaptive behavior and personal agency, we may begin to see more clearly the necessity for non-dictatorial education to transition to an environment in which students and teachers are given opportunities to critically consider the educational materials in conjunction with their lives and future.

A healing, holistic, form of education therefore includes critical consciousness so that we may become empowered to act on, and differentiate between, what may be humanly harmful or beneficial, and ethical or immoral. This type of education includes “communication (written and oral expression, discussion and listening)... critical consciousness... [and] social skills (cooperation, conflict resolution, forming positive relationships)” (Lunch, Modgil, & Modgil, 1992, p. 23). Through the inclusion of such abilities to critically decipher our educational materials as well as their applications, we foster individual autonomy that supports our internal convictions to follow paths of moral right and justice. By doing so, we reduce the unhealthy feelings of impotence and learned-helplessness that come from current educational practices that do not teach us how to apply our knowledge to ourselves and our world in an engaged fashion. When we reduce these unhealthy feelings, we become not only healthier, but also more holistic through the inclusion of our ability to act upon our knowledge.

The full involvement of the educator and student is essential. However, to achieve this status of full involvement one must first be able to know how to engage one’s thought processes. The banking form of education (where student are to merely absorb information) is still most commonly practiced in our education system and has been criticized by Freire as dehumanizing and one in which there exists the assumption that there is

a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator. In this view, the person is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he or

she is rather the possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside (Freire P. , 2000, p. 75).

Alternative forms of education exist that stand in opposition to the dehumanizing and uninvolved *banking educational system*. It is this type of alternative form of education for which we must create and adopt with the utilization of critical consciousness skills. Our educational process needs a model that permits for individual and community values, as well as a model that brings together our educational materials with interpersonal healing and community development. This new model would join the world outside our classroom and our critically thinking skills so that we cultivate the ability to engage and affect change within our lives. Critical consciousness is an arousing of the participants towards their own learning. Freire saw critical consciousness as a dance between doing and reflecting on doing, a movement that is constantly in flux that joins our actions with our thought. Critical consciousness in his opinion would be the process of engaging ones’ self and contemplating that engagement (Freire P. , 2001). Critical consciousness is to be employed with open-mindedness and creativity, such that no option as generated by our own or others’ imagination is impossible. Just as our future movements and manners of thinking are built upon our past experiences, so too is critical consciousness. Freire perceived critical consciousness as a skill that is continued and built upon by each successive life event and lesson learned. Because we do not stop doing or thinking in this world, critical consciousness should be a practice that is continued throughout our lives in order to enrich the meaning of all that we encounter. Critical

consciousness is a life-long engagement between knowledge and our worldly experiences.

Critical consciousness knowledge is based upon an “unquestionable relationship with the concrete reality in which it is engendered, and on which it acts” (Freire P. , 2007, p. 111). Dewey understood this connection between the concrete knowledge and that to which it is applied, to be knowledge that once one can think critically not only is better able to serve themselves, but that too of the greater democratic good. He also believed that critical thinking (as he did not use the term critical consciousness per se) begins upon birth (Dewey, 2008). Critical consciousness thinking to Dewey is therefore a skill that can and should be learned as well as encouraged through all developmental stages in various manners according to age appropriate techniques.

Continuing with Dewey’s line of thought about critical thinking, we see that absolutism, with regard to educational material as is our current practice, is an impediment to not only the individuals, but to the greater good (Kadlec, 2007). Because of the evolutionary nature of our world and minds, if we assume an absolute, static judgment or *knowledge*, we are depriving ourselves of greater potential alternatives. Because critical consciousness is transitory nature and built upon knowledge and experiences, the teaching of critical consciousness becomes a key factor in creating healing within educational settings. In order to promote healing towards a holistic self through education, critical consciousness is a necessary element because it teaches us that

perspectives may change and so too may our lives. Learning how to critically think may lead to personal and societal change through reflection and action.

The question then remains how we as educators impart this ability to students. Bell hooks in *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (2010), creates a picture of the critical thinking / consciousness teaching components such that engagement with the students and the process becomes central to teaching how to think critically. She carefully describes her experiments, both failed and successful, in teaching. Hooks believes that to critically engage a student they cannot be viewed merely as receivers of information; the students must be seen as individual human beings who bring with them their own special knowledge and perspectives. The students then are to be encouraged to apply, as well as share, their point of view to the subject matter. What this sharing of opinions implies in the classroom is that the educator must be prepared for whichever direction the students may take the subject (hooks, 2010). This ambiguity of direction, and how to handle wherever it may lead, is often what prevents critical consciousness in the classroom according to hooks. Educators themselves are not prepared or taught how to deal with uncomfortable classroom discussions that may touch upon subjects like race, gender, class or even reach more personal levels of taboo such as religious or ethical stances. All of these have the potential to create heated discussions, bring tears, or create conflict. However, if the educator has had the experience of being taught in a manner of critical consciousness and he/she has fostered within the classroom a safe space to approach (at a

minimum) such topics that are truly relevant to the student's lives, then the subject matter(s) at hand become all the more personal and worthy of critical contemplation.

As critical consciousness is an engaged process that includes the subjective experiences of our lives, critical consciousness becomes a tool that assists in creating a deeper connection between our education, ourselves, and our society, and thus becomes more holistic. Critical consciousness therefore becomes a cyclical pattern of learning, such that when we engage our learning with our lives we in turn bring our experiences back to the learning material at hand (Miller J. P., The holistic curriculum, 2007).

Through this process of engaging our minds with our actions we are utilizing restorative practices to align our knowledge with our deeds. When we act and think rightly, we create a more loving culture and foster love within ourselves as well as others (hooks, 2001). Through critical consciousness we create a more well-rounded, holistic, educational process that teaches us to think, engage, heal and be healed.

### **Existential Education**

By including mindfulness, critical consciousness, and aspects of conflict resolution within the educational curriculum there is the common thread of each being useful tools and modes of being that are applicable to the conditions in which we necessarily must live within the world. When taking the students' external lives into consideration within education and assisting them with their individual development, we are referring to aspects of existential education. Existential education rejects objective truths as well as binary right and wrongs in exchange for assisting students to create their

own meaning and understanding of their world. Teaching in this method would therefore place the instructor as a guide along the student's journey in life. They would assist students with creating their own awareness and understanding of the various paths, but yet refrain dictating which route (or manner of thought) was best. Existential education focuses on including the every day world in education as well as considering "individuals' cognitive and affective needs, stressing students' individuality" (Kaplan & Owings, 2011, p. 184).

Because existential education takes our lives into consideration, it becomes more centered on our subjectivity, which is also a goal of holistic education. Holistic education means considering all factors as a whole and existential education brings in our subjective experiences to make our studies more complete. Life topics are some of the existential aspects of education that we have failed to impart to our students who find themselves day in and day out segregated from the outside world by their education. Our schools are not educating students for engagement with the world nor for engagement with their own life paths; they are teaching test taking and supposed knowledge standards. As Sartre has stated, the current "attentive pupil who wishes to be attentive, his eyes riveted on the teacher, his ears open wide, so exhausts himself in playing the attentive role that he ends up by no longer hearing anything" (Sartre, 1992, p. 103). It is this lack of engagement between both the student and the educator that I argue can be overcome by creating active participants in the classroom through the inclusion of more meaningful and relevant educational practices.

Existential education can be defined as one in which “the teacher’s role is to help students define their own essence by exposing them to various paths they may take in life” while “teaching under the existential umbrella, teachers need to understand their personal lives and the meaning they have constructed from their personal experiences” (Kaplan & Owings, 2011, p. 186). What the addition of existential education would mean to the students is that education would become more subjective and inclusive of their own personal potentials, therefore creating education to become more personally relevant and holistic. According to Maxine Greene

doing, acting, choosing – these are the watchwords of existential thinking and existential education. The world remains open; the world remains strange; and history is possibility. The teacher, then, may conceive himself to be a metaphysician, an ironist, an artist; but, from the first and last, must conceive himself as a living man (Greene, Ayers, & Miller, 1998, p. 185).

Life, the act of living, and the act of being within the world and with others becomes all the more complicated because of our educational system’s binary views of being in school or being out of school. In the case of being *in school* the assumption is made that we are necessarily learning something, while when we are *out of school* the assumption is that we are not learning anything useful for the classroom, nor should we bring the *out of school* in to school. Current educational practices insist that either you learn some *facts* in order to pass tests or you are out in the world and no longer being educated in the *true* sense. This shortsighted separation fails to nurture our understanding of interconnectedness between the two and leads us away from being holistic. By simply

placing our physical bodies in an institution of learning we are not removing ourselves from the rest of the world. The reverse is actually true, such that when we bring our physical and mental beings into the classroom we are bringing the knowledge of the rest of our world with us. It is the final piece of interconnectedness between learning and being that brings us into the world and creates a healthy wellbeing within us.

It should be acknowledged that Dewey discussed his perspective on the challenges of existential education when he stated that

(T)here is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.... What is the place and meaning of subject-matter and of organization *within* experience? How does subject-mater function? (Dewey, 1998, p. 7).

Here, Dewey is calling upon the reader to realize that there is a relationship between education and experience, but, the question of how to incorporate it into our classrooms should be a primary concern. He expounds upon the problems of traditional educational systems that often negate our external lives (experiences), but also critiques what he calls new or progressive education for their lack of realization that some experiences are “mis-educative (and have) the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of future experience” (Dewey, 1998, p. 13). Dewey suggested as an answer to this dilemma when he stated that there is a line between complete freedom of “immediate execution of impulses and desires... (and) upon *intelligent activity*” (Dewey, 1998, p. 81) . He believed that intelligent activity is carried out with the assistance of educators who teach “careful observation for a wide range of information” (Dewey, 1998, p. 81) by including the lived

existence within the classroom discussion. Teachers do this by assisting students in regulating their impulsive actions through what I have referred to as teaching critical consciousness. Without acknowledging and developing our capabilities to function both in and out of school we distance ourselves from our lives and create a divide within us that leave us in an unhealthy and fragmented state. Once this division is manifested we may begin to sense an imbalance within us and work towards finding solutions to the problem such as those that Dewey recommended. At some level our minds recognize that an unhealthy segregation exists between what is being preached in our schools and what we practice in our lives. In addition to student's zoning out in the classroom as Sartre stated, this creates mental tension, distress, and even apathy in our schools. As Parker Palmer (1998) discusses in *The Courage to Teach*, there comes a point when our hearts no longer match our daily lives and we become emotionally tired, disinterested, and emotionally empty. Palmer states:

The condition to be overcome by living divided no more has a specific etiology. We inhabit institutional settings, including school and work and civic society, because they harbor opportunities that we value. But, the claims those institutions make on us are sometimes at odds with our hearts... it becomes pathological when the heart becomes a wholly owned subsidy of the organization, when we internalize organizational logic and allow it to overwhelm the logic of our own lives (Palmer P. , 1998, p. 167).

This commentary is analogous to how we learn the tricks to pass tests in schools, and that competition with our peers is the only way to win. However, in the real world this kind of competitive functioning creates hostilities and inequities which inevitably

sometimes leaves us on the losing end. Our educational practices teach us that there are winners and losers and we cannot all be winners. As Ayers comments,

the evidence of the abandonment is widespread and multi-layered. The accelerating obsession with a single and simple-minded centralized test that can do little more than ran students – at younger and younger ages – along a continuum of winners and losers, cuts at the heart of a democratic education, assaults any notion of a deep and rich curriculum, and undermines teaching.... (While) classrooms become sterile and one-dimensional places robbed of teachable moments (Ayers, 2004, p. 145).

When this mentality of competition that we learn in our formative years is acted upon in settings such as the work place or our family lives, collaboration and shared development are only catch phrases and no longer a reality. When we assume that some must lose, the fear becomes that the loser may be us and choices may be made that can affect the wellbeing of ourselves or others. This becomes a win-lose or a lose-lose situation in which we fail to consider that a win-win option may be possible. When only a select few win, our hearts become hardened and the patterns of inequity and competition become that much easier to repeat. This kind of competition moves us away from the recognition of the holistic goal of being more inclusive in order to succeed and live healthier lives. Therefore, with the recognitions of these implications it becomes all the more important to address our lived concerns within the classroom.

Cornel West (2004) also criticizes our current educational system to be debilitating to our hearts, he writes that students'

emaciated souls contain a rage that often cries out at the world... they also begin to see that their education has been distorted and sugarcoated and has sidestepped

so many uncomfortable truths. This often leads to an ardent disappointment, and even anger, about the failures of our society to consistently uphold the democratic and humanitarian values that can be born in youths in this phase of their life (West, 2004, p. 177).

Just as Palmer and West view this disconnect to be soul crushing, so too does our discussion take the same stance - our educational system is far from normal in the healthy and balanced sense for our current as well as future well-being.

For some, this inclusion of terms as used by Greene, Palmer or West, such as our *heart* or *soul*, as well as the *existential* world in our education, is perceived as the missing existential *spiritual* link that completes a fully integrated (holistic) self. This spiritual link is one that many of us shy away from and fail to cultivate in our schools due to its strong connotation with religion. In Moffett's *The Universal Schoolhouse* (1994) he holds a special place for the *spiritual* within education, such that the term should not be feared or misconstrued with an acceptance of any religion. Moffett clarifies his stance when he states that:

To be spiritual is to perceive our oneness with everybody and everything and to act on this perception. It is to be whole within oneself and with the world. Morality ensues. From this feeling of unity proceed all positive things, just as from *whole* proceed all the words for these things – *wholesome, hale, healthy, and holy*. A society can become sacred through secular means. Spiritualizing education does not require any religious indoctrination or moralistic preaching. All it takes is the setting of certain relationships among people and between people and the rest of nature (Moffett, 1994, p. xix).

It is within his definition that we can grasp how the *spiritual* need not be religious and how it is another link in creating a holistic and healing form of education through the inclusion of ourselves and our world within our learning.

Moffett (1994) believed that by including the spiritual and holistic thinking, with regard to educational practices, we can better facilitate learning, problem solving and societies' function by allowing students to receive an education by and through the participation in our societal life and not just in the closed off classroom. In Moffett's existential educational ideal, the student would learn by incorporating course lessons with hands-on real life experiences. He envisioned students receiving a learning agenda and working with peers and community members in order to experience first-hand how the knowledge is applicable to our existential being. Picture, for example, a young student who is trying to learn how to read by reading a story to an elderly individual. The elderly individual can not only help the student decipher words and their meaning, but also gains the benefit of remaining an integral functioning part in society by perhaps one of their few capacities left to them, as well as in the receiving of companionship. This means that not only are those being educated receiving valuable knowledge and skills, but those assisting with the learning process reap benefits as well. These benefits include increased exposure to youths, relationship building, and assistance with chores or work. It creates more of a collective consciousness that creates an interdependence among our older and younger generations. This serves the younger individuals too by permitting for real world

examples, real world interactions, and proving them with a connection with the community that would otherwise not exist.

Moffett's existential educational ideas are close to being synonymous to *Service-learning*, which is another educational tool that connects the existential world into education. However, Moffett's concept of education expands beyond current traditional models of service-learning as he envisions the future of education as one in which school buildings will be replaced by learning through experience. Service-learning also differs slightly from Moffett's ideas such that service-learning often implies an intentional significant service to be performed by the student and for shorter durations. Some service-learning programs emphasize service or learning, learning over service, or apply equal weight to both. So, there are notably different approaches to the one general term. However, service-learning does typically include one or more of the following learning aspects regardless of its emphasis: critical reflection, the inclusion of the participant's input, and partnerships/mentoring. These aspects of service-learning are closer to our goal of holistic education. The term *service-learning* typically rejects its comparison with *community service* due to the perceived connotation of the later being a form of punishment or the imposition of values of one group upon another (e.g. some forms of missionary work) (Furco & Billig, 2001). Some critics of service-learning argue that the concept itself merely forces institutional values on students by the required performance of service-learning (Bankston, 2011), while others take the critiques further by stating

the rationales for service-learning are intellectually shallow and betray intent to indoctrinate students in a political view that derogates paid labor. Ultimately,

service-learning erodes the principles of liberal education by attempting to substitute emotions for reason (Egger, 2008, p. Abstract).

Although Moffett's vision for our future state of education includes doing away with school buildings as we know them, his ideas regarding education occurring through our experiences and interactions as well as including our *spiritual* side, still exemplify a potential future for educational methods to become more holistic by and through the addition of factors that make us distinctively human. By considering our humanistic drive to follow our *heart* and not to become disembodied as well as disengaged passive receptacles of information, or even angry and disappointed as West (2004) has experienced, we can see the necessity for the inclusion of Palmer's (1998) vision of the *spiritual* and Moffett's inclusion of learning through contact with our world.

By addressing the existential factor within our education we may begin to bring our lives into our education and our knowledge into our world with a better sense of clarity and purpose. When we incorporate our *spiritual* needs with our learning we are making progress toward recognizing the individual as a whole as well as society as a function of the individuals. When our lives are linked with the education we receive and experience, education becomes more about us, our subjective selves, and develops into being a more holistic teaching philosophy.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have considered some of the critical flaws within our current educational system. Through additional consideration of these flaws, we may begin to

educate ourselves and others on the need for change as well as how some of the topics covered within this chapter can serve as correctional measures towards creating a more holistic, inclusive and subjective, form of education. These critical flaws include the lack of teaching effective interactions with others and assisting us to be an impetus for change. When we reflect on the shortcomings of our educational system, we learn that our schools are failing to develop healthy future generations capable of leading our world in the direction of curative and restorative goals. We can perceive how, by our failing to teach mindfulness, communicative, and critical consciousness skills, we are left with self-centered and overly materialistic humans. Without being taught how to critically reflect on our subject matter and our lives, we are left with passive acceptance of *knowledge* and our existence. Through the recognition that our schools are failing to address key components of how to live more interconnected, we may view more clearly the direction in which our educational systems should be modified. By envisioning what it is that we would like to see for the world and for human existence, we can note that our current means of education are not capable of delivering on our desired outcomes. Therefore, we must by necessity begin to question not only the addition of fundamental heuristic skills such as critical consciousness and mindfulness, at all levels of our education, but also our definition of what, where, and how meaningful education can take place.

By learning to be mindful and to think critically, we learn not only to reflect upon ourselves, our thoughts, and actions, but also upon those of others and to act upon our knowledge. We add a piece to the holistic puzzle when we learn to act and think with

intent as well as the ability to reflect. By adding mindfulness and critical consciousness we holistically integrate knowledge with its uses. When communication techniques, including conflict resolution, are added to the curriculum our education becomes more holistic as it then begins to reflect our necessity of facing discordant moments in our lives; be it through the challenge of approaching new ideas or more effective ways in which to communicate with others. No one functions in world that is without conflict and communication. Merging these pieces within education creates a more holistic curriculum that addresses the fact that learning incorporates how we approach others. Finally, by supplementing education with experiences outside of the classroom we may gain an understanding of how our knowledge may be put to use in our society as well as how our society may complement and bolster our educational material. Through the addition of key ingredients such as mindfulness, critical consciousness, communication techniques and existential matters the picture of holistic education becomes more complete.

In order to further our concept of holistic education, it is necessary to move beyond theory and to illustrate, by example, what some of these holistic approaches would look like in real life. Therefore, in chapter 3, I will explore and describe an educational program through the use of interviews of actual program participants who experienced aspects of my view for a more holistic education. The program that will be investigated had some aspects of critical consciousness, conflict resolution, mindfulness, and the inclusion of its participants' lives with their education (existential involvement). I

will detail what affects this particular program has had on some of the participants in both the short and long-term dimensions of their lives. Through this illustrative case study of examples, I hope to show more clearly how some of my vision for a more holistic education currently looks in practice outside of the public school system and then in my final chapter I plan to depict how my ideas can be enacted into our public schools on a daily basis in a more general manner and how more specifically, a shorter-term program can be created.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **ASPECTS OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN PRACTICE**

#### **Introduction**

In chapter two, I discussed ways in which our educational system has been failing to foster connections between our subject matter in schools and our lives. We have reviewed some aspects of what a more holistic education would include; such as mindfulness, conflict resolution, critical consciousness and existential educational theories. Each of these concepts is a tool that may serve to bridge the gap between how we live and what we learn within our curriculum. Through chapter two's review of ideas, I hope the benefits of creating an educational system that is more attune to our personal and societal needs has become more evident as the ultimate goal within this dissertation. In attempting to respond to the question that is central to this dissertation, what is the meaning of holistic education, chapter three will focus on the first-hand experiences of young adults who attended a weeklong program offered by the non-profit organization called the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ).

The young adults interviewed for this chapter each attended a program called *AnyTown*. This program incorporates some aspects of what I refer to as holistic education. Although the AnyTown program is not found within standard curriculum, the methods they utilize to impart their messages and the tools they teach their participants

include examples of ways in which lessons may be infused with holistic intent. The AnyTown program attempts to bring issues in the lives of their participants into the realm of open and educational discussions. The program utilizes tools such as those found in communication studies and mindfulness techniques (e.g. listening without judgment) as well as encourages critical analysis of the topics at hand (e.g. participant's reflection on their own biases). I will start this chapter with some background history and description of NCCJ as well as its AnyTown program in particular. Succeeding sections introduce the basic methods to this research and information regarding the interviewees. Further sections demonstrate how some aspects of holistic education are utilized during the AnyTown program and how through their experience the program participants may act as leaders in their communities who demonstrate more holistic modes of being. Finally, I ask respondents whether they could imagine a more holistic type of education occurring in public schools and how they could envision it in practice.

### **The Background of NCCJ**

In 1927 the *National Conference of Christians and Jews* (NCCJ) was founded to address growing anti-catholic movements that became a concern during political campaigns of the era. The fear by some in the United States was that if a person of the Catholic faith held a political office then the church and Pope would dictate his political course of actions. This public sentiment was so strongly shared that Jane Addams<sup>1</sup>, as well as a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Charles Evans Hughes, and other activists, created the *National Conference of Christians and Jews* to help dispel myths regarding diverse

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<sup>1</sup> the first female to win the *Nobel Peace Prize* and an American Pragmatist

beliefs and to bring individuals of varied backgrounds together in order to open dialogue. The venture grew over the years to incorporate topics that ranged from gender, race, disabilities, class and sexual orientation (Finkelman, 2009).

The *National Conference of Christians and Jews* had a further reaching effect on our society than many realize. During World War II NCCJ was actively involved with sanctioned US military training for troops. Their training attempted to depict religious intolerance within the armed forces as a threat to the American way of life, which was defined at the time as including democracy and religious freedom (Wendy, 2008). The NCCJ distributed pamphlets, held lectures, and deployed *religious tolerance trios*<sup>2</sup>. The religious tolerance trios were groups comprised of three individuals from different faiths, that were trained to assist troops overcome challenging religious differences to build group cohesion (Wall, 1997).

In the 1990's the name of this non-profit changed to become the *National Conference for Community and Justice* in order to become more representative of their larger goals and beliefs. NCCJ's organization's mission is

to fight bias, bigotry, and racism in America. NCCJ's work is to transform communities through institutional change and by empowering leaders so that all people will have access to the nation's opportunities, and be included in its promise (NCCJ).

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<sup>2</sup> Tolerance Trios was appropriated in opposition from Booker T. Washington's statement in support of racial segregations in which he stated that "in all thing religious, we Catholics, Jews, and Protestants can be as separate as the fingers of man's outstretched hand; in all things civic and American, we can be as united as a man's clenched fist" Wall, W. L. (1997). Our enemies within: Nazism, national unity, and America's wartime discourse on tolerance. In R. Fiebig-von Hase, & U. Lehmkuhl (Eds.), *Enemy images in American history* (pp. 209-230). Providence, RI: Berghahn Books Pg. 217.

The NCCJ has numerous programs for both adults and young adults ranging from one-day events to weeklong sessions. They work within a type of model that includes advocacy, conflict resolution, and education. In order to better serve each diverse community in which they reside, the various branches in numerous cities are considered independent, although each branch is to remain true to the mission statement of promoting respect and understanding (Finkelman, 2009).

An interesting aspect of this relative autonomy of each *National Conference for Community and Justice* branch is that it is representative of a peace making process approach, also a conflict resolution process, referred to as an *inductive approach*. What this means is that instead of a higher-level authority dictating to its subordinates what they deem best for any given situation, the actual parties most directly involved with the situation are involved in the process of determining what they believe the issues at hand may be and what they believe the greatest needs and concerns may be from their own perspective. From this, a more personalized plan and process direction can be created. An inductive approach allows for the specialization and tailoring of techniques to be more aligned with the actual needs and desires of a target specific group. It does not however, assume that any nature of truth exists outside of actual parties themselves. This is in comparison to deductive methods in which parties outside of the situation make predetermined decisions as to the nature of the situation as well as the best remedy for the process (Cousens, Kumar, & Wermester, 2001).

When this technique is viewed from an educational standpoint we may imagine the benefits that a certain degree of autonomy and power within each classroom would permit both the educator and student. If, for example, teachers were given the space to restructure their classrooms to focus more on mindfulness techniques than actual spelling for a week, perhaps the results would show an improvement in spelling scores despite the shift in teaching methods.

Not only does the NCCJ permit for a more inductive structure of its chapters, it also utilizes this technique during many of its programs. Many of NCCJ's programs utilize communication in an attempt to dispel myths about differences between certain types of groups. Individuals interested in participating in any of NCCJ's programs experience conversations between seemingly divergent groups (e.g. groups with cultural or religious differences) with guidance on listening and being open to the other's experience. They are informed that although the general topics may be predetermined, the responses and experience is not dictated. Those who have experienced NCCJ's practices have reported that while those leading the programs teach skills and model behaviors, they also facilitate the groups in discovering their own answers and solutions to the problem(s) at hand. It is the participants themselves that generate the dialogue with facilitation from experienced leaders. This is similar to the Montessori approach mentioned in our second chapter, such that the learner directs their educational experience further down a path that they would like to follow instead of the teacher leading the learning process (Pound, 2011). This basic process utilized in both

Montessori schools and NCCJ is a cross between both the elicitive and prescriptive models of conflict resolution. As Lederach (1995) describes, in a prescriptive model, the trainer brings with them the expertise and those learning are to model the expert, whereas with an elicitive model, learning is more of a process created within the group or individual and the *expert* is more of a facilitator that follows the learner down their own chosen path of curiosity.

Similarly, NCCJ's process across their programs and beliefs have been summarized as:

NCCJ believes that all people belong to a host of identity groups such as race, religion, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. All of these identities influence how each of us experiences the world and the world experiences us. Throughout this dynamic process, our opinions or our individual views of the world are created. Together, these variables contribute to the building of various cultures when people share similar life experiences. The challenge of cross-cultural dialogue is how people of different backgrounds can listen and learn about someone else's life experience and worldview without invalidating that person's reality. Effective multicultural community collaboration will not occur until trust is developed. Trust is developed only when people begin to identify and share their own bias and prejudice with those about whom they hold the bias and prejudice. This process must be conducted in an environment of safety and be facilitated by trained and experienced staff (Winborne & Smith, 2001, p. 168).

What this dialogue means for NCCJ participants, is that sensitive topics will be addressed, but under the guidance of a facilitator who has experience with moderating challenging conversations. NCCJ's hope is that a change of attitudes and beliefs may occur for the program's participants when they have been exposed to the *Other*. Or, that at least they may experience some demystifying of the unknown, either during the event

or at some later date. Although this goal may sound reasonable and may make sense to us, this form of learning it not without its critique. As Todd (2003) points out, getting to know the *Other*, is often the goal within social justice education, but in her opinion, is not necessarily the most beneficial direction for education, nor is it necessarily possible. For instance, learning about the *Other* may demystify them to us and create feelings of ethical responsibility within us towards them, but we live in a world where there are many *Others* and we should be leery of the assumption that by learning a little that we have fully experienced or know the *Other*. What is suggested in lieu of this stance, is that instead of learning *about* the *Other* we learn *from* the other (Todd, 2003). This means, that instead of making our goal within education to be the complete knowing of the unknown, that we should find peace within the recognition of *otherness* on a more generalized level. We can attempt to gain an understanding through sympathizing, but the false assumption should not be made that our limited experience, such as a week long camp, necessarily will eradicate any boundaries between different groups. With Todd's critiques in mind, it should be noted that NCCJ does follow the social justice's educational belief that getting to know someone through interpersonal dialogue will break down cultural boundaries. NCCJ claims their dialogues are

purposeful conversation on a common subject between two or more people of differing views, undertaken so that each can learn from the other and each can change and grow. Designed to minimize the conflicts and communication breakdowns traceable to differences in style and mode of communication... from these new relationships comes a commitment to fight against such behavior in one's self, one's live, and one's community (Winborne & Smith, 2001, p. 167)

and

not: debate, lecture or argument. Dialogue for the sake of more conversation is not the goal of NCCJ. Rather, NCCJ views dialogue as a necessary first step in the purposeful movement toward collaborations and coalitions across cultural, racial, and religious barriers... the result of this purposeful movement toward collaboration is the gathering of resources, ideas, and energy from a range of communities to act upon issues of common concern (Winborne & Smith, 2001, p. 168).

Based upon NCCJ's mission statement regarding their belief of purpose for dialogue, it should be noted that they are indeed acting upon the premise that *knowing the other*, on at least some level, is the basis for more ethical action and collaboration. While Todd's critiques should be noted and taken into consideration, given the shorter durations of NCC's programs as well as their specific goals (e.g. reduce bigotry and increase cooperation), it is most likely fair to say that operating under a social justice's perspective fits NCCJ's model.

### **Local NCCJ Chapter and its AnyTown Program**

While NCCJ operates in numerous programs in various cities across the United States, the particular program from which our interviewees were selected was called AnyTown and the particular branch observed for this purpose was located within the South-East region of the country. This particular chapter is located in a county with a population slightly larger than 480,000. Fifty-seven percent of this population is comprised of individuals identifying as white, thirty-two and a half identifying as African American, therefore leaving ten and half percent falling under Latin American, Asian and

*other* categories. Eighty-six percent of people have a high school diploma in this county while thirty-two percent have an educational level of bachelor's degree or higher (Bureau, 2012).

Although the educational level in this county is slightly higher than average for the United States, this particular region has been referred to as *the Bible Belt* due to the emphasis placed on religion as compared to other locations. Statistically, individuals living in the *Bible Belt* vote along Republican party lines and consider themselves more conservative in their beliefs (e.g. against same-sex marriage) as well as have affiliations with evangelical Christian movements (Webster, 2011). Sixty-nine percent of this population affiliates with a religious group with the breakdowns as follows: the United Methodist Church (23%), Catholic Church (11%), Southern Baptist Convention (27%), or Presbyterian Church (8%), while the remaining 31% fall under the *other* category when classifying themselves in a religious group (Jones, 2002).

Within this particular county in which the NCCJ office resides, there are still notable disparities between African Americans and Caucasian groups. The west side of the city is notably identified as white while the east side of the city is predominately African American. The east side offers few grocery or retail stores in comparison to other areas in the city (Patterson, 2011). From analysis of data on local high schools, it is evident that some educational facilities are also representative of a racial divide (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Based upon this data, the assumption may be made that

racial, religious, and values are strong candidates as topics for the local NCCJ office to consider.

While this regional chapter of NCCJ offers various programs, including workplace and community interpersonal relations training, interfaith assistance, anti-bullying campaigns and various youth programs. As mentioned in our introduction, this chapter will focus on the program named AnyTown and the individuals interviewed for this discussion have all participated in this particular program. AnyTown is a week-long camp program for rising juniors and seniors in High School. Participants for AnyTown are often recruited by peers or faculty members who are aware of or who have participated in the program. The interested students must fill out an application that requires them to identify their race as well as religious affiliation. This aspect of the application ensures diversity during the AnyTown experience and each applicant is also required to have a community member endorse them for participation (Gay, 2003). First time participants are referred to as *delegates* and after serving as a delegate the students may return as *counselors* or *advisors* during subsequent years.

The daytime and evenings at the AnyTown camp are comprised of activities that NCCJ believes assist the delegates in better understanding themselves and others while building upon foundations of inclusivity, respect for diversity, and leadership skills. According to our interviewees these activities are often emotionally touching on some level and expose the delegates to new ideas and individuals that they may not have encountered otherwise. Each new day centers its activity around a different theme such as

gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Delegates are separated into groups each day based upon an identity affiliation or intentionally mixed with diverse groups. During these times of group interactions (be it in-group or out-group) experiences are created for the exploration and understanding of similarities and differences. According to our counselors, no experience was carried out without intent, regardless whether the delegates were cognitively aware of it or not (Jaffe, 2010).

A reason for these grouping from a sociological standpoint, is that in-groups and out-groups can be very important in the defining of who we are and who we are not, as well as who our friends are and who are friends are not (Kornblum, 2010). It is NCCJ's opinion that by placing the participants in various groups each day that they will learn that there were more similarities between themselves and others than they may have initially surmised and boundaries of in-groups and out-groups may become less distinct. Lines between seemingly disparate groups are often arbitrary, sometimes harmful, and even based on false perceptions. In-groups are those we perceive as peers and similar to us, these groups may be based on socio-economic status, race, and even physical proximity (i.e. live in the same neighborhood), while out-groups are those individuals we perceive as dissimilar and outside of our inner circle such as those who look different from us, speak differently, or live in another location. What we are doing by forming these groups is segregating ourselves from others based upon categories that may or may not be factual. We mentally use those in our in-groups, or those we wish were apart of this group, as reference groups. These reference groups are the people that we revere and

emulate. The individuals that comprise our reference groups are the opinion leaders, those who we take our action cues from, be it those we know or even who's opinions we read in a magazine. What becomes detrimental to us and our society is when these in and out groups are not based upon wise choices, but rather those of ignorance. Ignorance here is utilized in the sense that a second hand opinion, (one that has been created by another's opinion) we may hold, may or may not be based in fact or may have been formed without first hand experiences (Kornblum, 2010).

As discussed in chapter 2, when we fail to critically comprehend and question what we hear, see, or read we may make poor types of choices. When we believe statements that are fully inclusive or exclusive (e.g. all Asians are intelligent or all blonds are dumb), we are choosing our in and out groups based upon ignorance and stereotypes. Its fair to say that most of us have a core group of chosen in-group friends, hopefully based upon concepts such as loyalty, honesty, and morals, but it is also fair to say that we may shun others and not experience them due to prejudices and stereotypes. Because of our creation of out-groups and in-groups we often fail to encounter the *other* in our daily lives without going out of our way and breaking with our normal behavior (Kornblum, 2010).

What AnyTown attempts to undermine are these false perceptions of in-groups and out-groups in order to create better understanding and cohesion between once seemingly different groups of individuals. The AnyTown program does this by acting as the reference group. This means that the individuals who lead the AnyTown weeklong

session are serving as role models and opinion leaders. They do this by exhibiting the behaviors and attitudes that they wish to convey to the participants in a friendly, welcoming, and non-pressuring manner. This can be viewed as analogous as the role of the teacher in the classroom.

According to our interviewees, another way in which the AnyTown leaders do this is by removing aspects from the program that may serve as cues towards current in or out-group status such as what one may own. For example, one rule during the AnyTown experience is that possessions, other than camping necessities are not permitted. Material belongings, status symbols, are not permitted, and therefore a layer of potential in-group / out-group visual keys is stripped. This allows for individuals to be judged more upon their character rather than their belongings.

Based upon the conversations with our interviewees, there are times when discussions and interactions create unease or psychological discord in the delegates during their AnyTown experience. When this occurs it is the job of the counselors, advisors and other staff of NCCJ's AnyTown program to be prepared by having a both experienced and trained previous delegates on hand to openly share their experience as well as psychological counselors for other needs. Due to the open conversational nature of the program, delegates may share experiences or thoughts that may trouble them or others. No one is forced into sharing anything that they do not wish to discuss, but the atmosphere is one that is considered a *safe* environment that is conducive and

encouraging to delve into personal issues that staff and professionals are prepared to handle and respond to with support (Kaplan H. R., 2004).

Kaplan (2004) reported his experiences witnessing week-long AnyTown sessions and noted some of the initial reluctances or uncertainty that delegates came to the program with and the eventual close-knit group that the participants developed into after their stay. He reported on girls sharing their experiences of sexual harassment, even abuse, while some delegates felt safe to share their sexual orientation, even for the first time to anyone. Confessions such as these were met during Kaplan's experience with phrases such as “It's all right. You're with friends here”, “It's okay if you cry, for all of us to cry. This is a safe place. You need to talk about these things so we can help [you] heal and move on” (Kaplan H. R., 2004, p. 61). Kaplan reported that the greatest success from programs like these, AnyTown in particular, is the initial awareness, dialogue, and relationship building the teens experience coupled with their positive impact on communities when the lessons that they learned stay with them to carry over into their daily lives. Although Kaplan acknowledges this effect, he also clearly states that

the AnyTown experience has its greatest impact when it is reinforced in school. When children receive support and encouragement from administrators and teachers, it provides enormous impetus for improving race and ethnic relations and other social problems. When staff is not supportive, the lessons of AnyTown may fade (Kaplan H. R., 2004, p. 2).

This engagement and continued support is one of the key lessons we as educators and members of our society should try to remember as we serve as role models and future generation shapers.

While some go so far as to describe the AnyTown program as a *utopian society* setting (Terry, Rudenstine, & Onek, 1995), this chapter's discussion prefers to view AnyTown as a program that demonstrates and imparts to its delegates (and even to returning counselors as well as advisors) intrapersonal and community change that is not only healing for all involved, but also realistic even within our flawed world. By stating that AnyTown's methods are realistic, it is meant that AnyTown's use of current sensitive topics within our society in combination with open and respectful discussion lends evidence that our students and others can successfully share in dialogue and come to a mutual understanding regarding contentious subjects. What AnyTown demonstrates is that with proper and careful guidance we may become less adverse or even afraid of challenging our beliefs or even finding mutual commonalities with others in which to build relationships for societal progress and greater good.

### **Approach: AnyTown Interviewees**

I will discuss the methodological approach I used for this chapter in greater depth in the appendix of this dissertation. However, for the purpose of basic understanding of the research group, I will briefly describe here the participants and other fundamental aspects utilized within this study.

Five AnyTown counselors were interviewed to better understand their personal recollections of their experiences and perceptions before, during, and after their encounters with AnyTown. All those interviewed had been campers during their high school years and had chosen to return as counselors for one or more subsequent years. Each interviewee was 18 years of age or older and was invited to participate by the staff of NCCJ. All counselors were given equal opportunity to participate in the interviews and a select few chose this option. None of the counselors were paid for the interview or for their service as a counselor in the AnyTown program as participation in both were strictly voluntary. Each year in this given county there are two AnyTown sessions and those interviewed participated in at least one of the two sessions within a one year time period.

All participants were asked to read and sign a consent form. They were each briefed on the purpose of the research, the benefits as well as potential harms such an interview may pose to them, as well as assured of the complete confidentiality of their identities. Each participant was also briefed on their rights such that they could end their participation in the interview at any point in time, without fear of any repercussions and that they were under no obligation to answer any or all questions. Each interviewee consented and acknowledged their understandings both verbally and in writing. While the actual AnyTown experience occurred at a camp ground in a mountainous region approximately three hours away from the local NCCJ chapter, the interviews themselves were conducted in one of two locations: a private closed door room at the local chapter of

NCCJ or outside of a local college restaurant. Interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour and a half.

Each participant was asked similar questions and chose their own pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Their pseudonyms will be used herewith. There were 3 females and 2 males interviewed for this study. Some participants interviewed had already completed at least their first year of college while others were still pending their freshmen year. Each of the five self-identified as belonging to one of four following ethnic categories: White / Anglo-Saxon American (1), Hispanic American(1), African American (2) or Middle-Eastern American (1). Data was collected with the use of a digital voice recorder as well as hand written notes in the researchers own shorthand. All data was transcribed into computerized text documents and reviewed for similarities or dissimilarities and relevant comments or responses with regard to the intent of this study. This research was primarily interested in comments related to three main categories of interest: 1. aspects of the program that were representative of a more holistic type of education 2. how the program assists our society through the development of leadership skills and 3. the future potential take-away learning from programs like AnyTown.

The two males interviewed were Trey, a tall African American who identified as Baptist in faith and Michael, a bright-eyed, Caucasian male. The females were Jane, a confident African American, Clarissa, an out-going lighter skinned individual of middle eastern decent, and Juliana, an inquisitive individual who self-identified as Hispanic. All interviewees struck me as highly articulate, especially given their young age, seemingly

intelligent, motivated, and attentive. Each appeared to have a strong drive to help others, but particularly with regard to social change. Each individual had nothing but high praise to say of the NCCJ program in general and each had returned to the AnyTown experience as a counselor for at least one year. Both Trey and Clarissa were seasoned veterans with the program as they had been delegates and then served as counselors twice. Although some had already experienced multiple years of the program, each had valuable insight to add with regard to their contributions towards our better understanding of how programs such as these could be beneficial for both the individual as well as the community with regard to our quest into holistic education.

Before we proceed however, two overwhelming critiques of this data collection and interviews should be noted. First, our sample size was small (5) due to a lack of responses from our sample population and second, for those who did participate, their comments were all positive with regard to their experience with AnyTown program. Although it is possible that the AnyTown program was just that wonderful for all our interviewees, without any negative aspects to be reported, the likelihood of any program not having room for improvement, is not common. Given this consideration, some possible explanations for all positive reviews could be that the interviewees were concerned with their comments becoming known, despite assurances otherwise, or perhaps they were attempting to please me, as a researcher, with answers that they believed I wished to hear. Another possible explanation for their positive remarks could be that our sample size was too small and had additional participants responded a more

accurate depiction of the program would have come to light. Regardless of the motives of our respondents, their answers still lend us insight into the basic practices of NCCJ's AnTown program. Their responses can still serve as a reference point for developing some concepts for the implementation of a more holistic education.

**Examples of Aspects for a More Holistic Education: As Demonstrated by  
AnyTown's Approach to Prejudices**

McGrath (2007) defines the term *bias* as “a tendency, inclination, or outlook: a subjective point of view” while *prejudice* “is a negative bias or disliking of people because they belong to a particular group one dislikes”, when one acts on our prejudice(s) it is considered *discrimination* (McGrath, 2007, p. 50). Some commentators, like Mills and Polanowski, argue that due to every individual’s subjective nature prejudice is not necessarily a negative word in connotation or denotation, but should be looked upon as a judgment of taste until the varying degrees of prejudice exceed or manifest themselves in unhealthy manner (Mills & Polanowski, 1984). However, for the sake of this discussion, we will utilize the more common understanding of *prejudice* to mean an internally held negative bias or even a form of discrimination.

Social norms often dictate how and when prejudices are expressed, while group norms can set standards for what level of prejudice is tolerated (Whitley & Kite, 2010). It is this negative meaning of *prejudice* (a bias or discrimination) that The National Conference for Community and Justice attempt to address through their programs. It can be said that NCCJ attempts to demonstrate and even teach critical consciousness skills to

their participants in order to address issues surrounding prejudices. This addressing of prejudice head on is one of the factors that distinguishes NCCJ from standard summer camp programs. Participants in the AnyTown program deal with the topic of prejudices for a week straight during their stay. Therefore, one of the first questions posed to the interviewees revolved around how they experience(d) prejudice in their lives and how the NCCJ assisted them with becoming critically reflective of prejudices during the program. This question attempted to delve into the ability of the participants to critically contemplate their past experiences with prejudices and how NCCJ may have, or had not, assisted them with their ability to critically reflect on this topic.

As discussed in chapter two, critical consciousness is utilized in this discussion to mean the reflection on our thought process. It involves

retrospection and introspection – looking backwards and inwards to consider how our experiences and the outward social structures shape our consciousness. All of which points to the power of the ‘critical’ moment of reflection, because it is in that moment that we shift our understanding of whatever it is we are considering.... A central issue to consider relative to a dialectical conception of consciousness, then, is the politics that guide both our critical reflections and our actions, because these politics help dictate what new potentials for acting manifests in our consciousness (Wayne, 2012, p. 25).

Although there were differences between those individuals interviewed for this research, one commonality expressed was that all subjects recalled being on the receiving end of discrimination in one form or another in their lives. Some subjects also described battling with the recognition of their own prejudices. This recognition implied that to

some extent, our interviewees were capable of being both *retrospective* and *introspective* into the topic of prejudice.

Juliana shared that she recognized in her

high school you go by social norms and you kind of stick with (it) and you do what they do, you go where they go and you talk like they talk. (But), at AnyTown, you just feel like you are by yourself and you have to just start over.

Her comments illustrate that at some level and at some point, she was capable of processing the differences between her high school experience and the structure of her AnyTown experience. She had become aware that social norms were dictated within her school experience, but, in situations outside of dictated social norms she found room for the potential reinvention of some social norms.

One different way in which to demonstrate critical consciousness according to Morrison (2007) is through aesthetic teachings such as physical actions or through illustrative performances (e.g. movies, theatre, reenactments) such as those found in *The Free School* tradition. This embodied example of critical consciousness behavior, according to Morrison, creates an additional level of example through action (Morrison K. A., 2007). As some prejudices center around class status, it is often the physical symbol of this category that is first attributed to a person. For instance, an individual may consciously or subconsciously attribute certain assumptions towards groups of people who do, or do not, appear to have a certain financial status based upon what they possess (e.g. large home, new car).

One way in which the NCCJ AnyTown program attempted to address class status differentials in a method similar to Morrison's perspective, as well as to remove potential distractions during the week, was that as Jane stated

you can't have your phone or ipad (with you at the camp), but people dress more for a camp, so its not really the trying to impress them through the clothing, very few people do, very few. But, you really get to know that person for them and accept them for what they are because it's almost like they are not really trying to show off or impress people, by about midweek... people really get to see you in a different light. (They are not defined) by the clothes they wore, cars, whatever material possessions they had, because, no one can see that on the mountain.

Jane clarified that because of the lack of distractions (e.g. phone, laptop) "you are more able to focus in that community, be in that connection that you feel with the delegates, your counselor, and your advisors".

Another tool that encouraged positive group interactions and critical reflection were the actions of the counselors and staff themselves. Clarissa clarified that while attending NCCJ's AnyTown camp an intentional effort was made by the counselors to demonstrate attitudes that go against racism and biases. Clarissa said that as a counselor they had to work against such biases by

showing it. The counselors are always a very close-knit group, even when not working with the delegates. We are of every ethnicity, religion, and we're always laughing together and just happy and when they see that, they see that we're real people.

Unfortunately, from our respondents' statements, societal and group norms are ever present outside of the AnyTown program and the average person fails to employ critical consciousness skills, mindfulness techniques, and basic interaction with others that is more beneficial to society. Their experiences outside of the camp demonstrated that the language they regularly encountered was peppered with prejudicial and discriminatory speech. For example, Trey reflected upon being on the receiving end of a discriminatory perception when he entered into a new school. He was able to critically reflect that he felt he was perceived only as a tall African American male that played basketball. He recalled what made him believe this was that

when you are first new to a school, well, they see you, they saw me, a tall black male, well he probably may be ok at school, but he's really good at sports (right)? (and the) first two questions I ever get asked are how tall are you and do you play basketball.

What was happening to Trey in his high school was that the other students were failing to question (critically reflect upon) their assumptions. What the individuals who made Trey feel this way may not have realized, was that Trey loved math and would eventually go on to pursue an engineering science major in college. Despite this, the immediate assumptions of his perceived skills were prejudiced, consciously or subconsciously. Trey recalled that many people assumed he was only athletically and not scholastically inclined. His experiences reflect that within his high school educational settings that the accepted societal and group norms included and allowed for biases and

even prejudices. Meaning, students within his school were not being educated on ways in which to approach others with critical intent and mindfulness.

Trey stated that his enthusiasm for NCCJ was in part based on his recognition of these on-going race issues and that NCCJ was attempting to bring the questioning of the biases to the forefront of the participant's minds. According to Trey, he believed that NCCJ

stands for defying bias, bigotry, and racism. And, (although) I think we're a little bit passed (that), I think we're still in an age where this is still a little bit of racism, bigotry, and just stuff like that. And, NCCJ is just working step by step to try to (fight it).

Trey's opinions are reflective of what Giroux has stated about critical thinking. As Trey alluded to, and according to Giroux, we need to critically reflect our current and past status in relation to any given topic before we drive any action such that:

critical thinking becomes a mode of reasoning that... represent the realization that "I am able"... not only does this indicate that they must act with others to intervene the shaping of history, it also means that they must "escape" from their own history... This is a crucial point, and one that links praxis and historical consciousness. For we must turn to history in order to understand the traditions that have shaped our individual biographies and intersubjective relationships with other human beings. This critical attentiveness to one's own history represents an important element in examining the socially constructed sources underlying one's formative process (Giroux, 2011, p. 41).

Jane, a female African American, also was challenged by the necessity to critically contemplate her past experiences during her youth. Jane stated that she had made friends with a predominately white group when she was growing up and while she

may not have thought much of it at the time, her group association was not overlooked by her brother. Jane's brother would say to her

'You're such a little white girl'. Just because of how I would speak... I was never taught to see color, I didn't care, so it was my brother that did that and in school (they noticed it) too.

Although she states that she was not taught to see color, I believe her interpretation was not correct. We may not be overtly taught racism, but its subtleties are certainly within the realm of our notice when we reflect more deeply upon our experiences. When asked if her brother learned these racial categories from home or where she believes he may have picked up such opinions, Jane commented that her brother thought that

only white people can talk like this or dress like this and I guess black people are supposed to be the opposite or Latinos or Asians (and) I would guess (the beliefs came) from the school environment unfortunately, yeah our society is really messed up.

Although she did not report noticing much prejudice directed specifically towards her other than from her own younger brother, she recalled that she

took a lot of advanced classes in high school and what I would always notice is that in those classes that the number of minorities were really low and I think it may have to do with the teacher not being as inviting with ummm those kinds of people and underestimating their academic ability based upon their race. From the get go, from the beginning of the school year they expect them not to succeed. Thankfully, I was able to shock them a little bit.

Jane's statements do show that she was taught racism, albeit not as noticeably as she may have had considered. Her statement is an interesting commentary on what many of us may eventually come to find or realize when guided to reflect more deeply. Simply by her utilizing phrases such as "those kinds of people" and referring to them as "them", Jane has continued to perpetuate the *otherness* of ethnic groups. However, by including herself in those groups ("I was able to..."), we may surmise that perhaps she still feels, or felt, as the other, outside of what she may consider as mainstream, despite her comment that she did not "see color". If pressed further, perhaps we may begin to see how we may personally feed into perpetuating cycles of prejudices such as those experienced by Jane. Without critical consciousness, that is precisely what happens; we fail to see our own history and actions playing into patterns such as racism that should be broken.

Related to this deeper critical thinking, when asked if Jane thought that perhaps the lack of minorities in her advanced classes had anything to do with students internalizing the prejudices of teachers, Jane responded and said that "I just maybe feel as if they don't need to prove themselves if they already feel that teacher already has that (prejudiced mindset)". She went even further to say that

that's why we have so many issues of just kids being so insecure. I don't think the teachers realize that they have a big part in this and we do look up to them because they are teaching us things that we don't know yet and need to know how to succeed in life and I, just now that I think about it, its just really, really sad.... I don't really think teachers realize their impact sometimes.

Jane's admission of witnessing biases and prejudices through her school, although on a more subtle level than perhaps Jane realized, is a good example of precisely why critical consciousness and mindfulness on the part of the teachers is also such an important aspect in creating a more holistic educational system. If perhaps an instructor was more conscious of their own behavior and attitudes, then perhaps the students would be better able to critically reflect on harmful situations such as these and break the cycle of harm.

Similarly to Jane's experience in school, Clarissa, the participant of middle-eastern decent, too experienced prejudices due to her outward appearances, but reported more awareness of them than Jane during her daily life. She responded to a question regarding her experiences with prejudice by stating that

the most personal thing for me was constantly fighting stereotypes (ethnicity) that have been ingrained in me. So when you are a kid and people are constantly saying you are this (middle eastern), you build up a wall and you throw it back, but working with NCCJ, every time I work with them it pushes stereotypes further and further back in my head.

Her statement reveals that although some progress may be made with just a weeklong session, that it has been the repeated exposure to skills such as critical consciousness that has benefitted Clarissa the most. This notion is consistent with Lawrence's (2014) opinion that critical consciousness lessons should be infused within the curriculum and practiced by the instructor in order to become more effectual for the students to learn the tool themselves (Lawrence, 2014). Clarissa responded further to say that she attended

a predominately African American elementary and middle school, but my high school was more diverse. Being the minority was always like hard, because you weren't as easily accepted if you weren't the majority.

Clarissa had a distinctive look about her that does call attention to her family's middle-eastern heritage. She mentioned casually that her family has roots in Palestine and she recalled that a teacher had once informed her that: "your country, you know it is not a real country". Even though she considered this teacher and her to be "cool and cordial and buds", there was a line crossed by this individual by the manner in which he phrased his comment. Again, this teacher could have utilized a different type of dialogue to express his meaning or perhaps should have been more mindful of the consequences of his words as they obviously left an impact on Clarissa as she still recalled this dialogue years later. Critical contemplation would have served this professor well.

Just as Trey, Jane, and Clarissa experienced biases due to their skin color and assumed ethic backgrounds, Juliana experienced prejudices and stereotypes due to her Hispanic heritage and lack of critical thinking as well as mindfulness on the part of others. She specifically recalled her first experience with the AnyTown program and stated that "I was the only Hispanic at that whole session". She went on to explain how some of the more difficult communication is handled:

we have a night called race night and we discussed every race and what we had to do was discuss everyone's race and everyone was broken down into groups and everyone discusses everyone's race... I've always been so shy about it and just in general I was not the kind of person to speak for myself... I had to say I'm not like that, just kind of prove people wrong about some things, of course there was some truth.

What Juliana did not specify in this response was that part of AnyTown's process includes the participants sharing what some of the commonly held beliefs are about specific groups of people that they have encountered in their daily lives. This process, although direct and perhaps open to criticism, is part of allowing for the room of the participants to feel as if they can safely explore ideas and direct the flow of discussion. It is also done under the supervision of counselors who ask the campers to listen without comment at first and to reflect on what they want to say as well as how they would like to come across. In a sense, this is part of the critical reflection process, such that there are benefits to group discussions that openly share ideas and contemplate meaning (Lawrence, 2014).

Although Juliana obviously struggled with facing stereotypes, she was also conscious of the historical and societal contexts in which some stereotypes originated. As discussed earlier, Giroux mentioned this reflection is necessary in order to enact critical thinking skills. What Juliana alluded to in her statement about there being *some truth* in stereotypes reflected her ability to critically contemplate the basis and meaning into the topic that was being discussed during the group sessions. In stereotypical statements and biases, stereotypes can range from generalizations that psychologists have found to be useful (e.g. knowing certain street gangs as violent and avoiding their locations) to stereotypes that are outright falsities intended to debase specific groups of individuals (e.g. women are less capable than men). As Brief (2008) states

stereotypes come in handy when we meet a new person, and we do not have adequate situational cues about whether that person is friend or foe...

stereotypes tell us whether to approach or avoid the other person. They are our first impressions of others about whom we know little else (Brief, 2008, p. 19).

Based upon the idea of not all stereotypes necessarily serve as negative mental reference points, Juliana was better willing to acknowledge the possibility of *some truths* to comments she heard and be more willing to listen to others opinions. However, when it came to direct personal prejudice and even irrational comments she stated that she was and has now become outspoken in correcting others. For example, Juliana specifically recalled an incident in which someone had stated that “everyone (Hispanics) has pit bulls” and her response was “that is not true, I’ve had fish my whole life”. The initial prejudice of this person against Hispanics did border on the ridiculous and was representative of what is called an *overall stereotype* in which an entire group of individuals are believed to fit nicely into a preconceived category (Brief, 2008). However, what would have originally been a discussion Juliana would have avoided, she felt more confident to correct this person’s assumption because of her experience with NCCJ. What Juliana said that she had become successful in doing since her NCCJ experience, was dispelling the inaccurate myths and creating a truer picture for others to see of what it means to her to be Hispanic. Juliana even felt that she liked the way NCCJ split up groups for sensitive discussions. She stated that by the end of the week the group separations ended up illustrating how arbitrary they really were when it came to identifying who you really did have something in common with and what group you thought you fit into. She said that

its cool too how they divide us up by religion and then other topics. You get divided up into every other (possible type) group. You're going to get to meet every person there. You're going to have a conversation with every single person there, which is really neat.

Juliana's ability to critically reflect on the arbitrary nature of in-group and out-group separation, was just one of the tools taken away from the AnyTown experience by those interviewed.

From a different perspective, although Michael reported that he did not feel he was on the receiving end of prejudices as the other interviewees did, he made the interesting observation that the reason he did not feel he faced such prejudices or biases openly was probably due to his race and gender. Michael stated that

I'm sort of in the privileged group of society, white male, nothing major, I'm not the biggest kid, so that would be one thing (a type of prejudice and that) my parents raised me to be open to everybody. But, you don't really know what it means until you encounter that. You don't know how you will react to that.

His comments illustrate that he understood, at least in part through his ability to critically question, that his lack of experience with regard to prejudices towards him was most likely due to his “privileged group” status. This statement, in my opinion, was reflective of a critical contemplative perspective that even supposed mature adults in privileged groups (e.g. white, male) still do not acknowledge. The critical processing of this information by Michael may have stemmed from his experience with NCCJ or from elsewhere, but regardless, was a beneficial insight on his part.

Reflecting on the rest of his statement, what Michael clarified that he meant by the rest of his comment, “you don’t really know what it means until you encounter that”, was that sexuality and religion do not necessarily present themselves with overt clues like race. With race, we can often see and know up front what grouping we may mentally assign to an individual. With overt cues we may be prepared to be open or sensitive to our classification more readily with critical consciousness skills. However, with something like religion or sexuality, there are not necessarily any overt cues that prepare us for critically questioning our thoughts before any interaction with the other. Michael mentioned that it was not necessarily an easy thing for him to experience or learn about others sexuality or religious views. He said that this was because if someone did not wish their preference to be known, the opportunity did not exist for him to learn what those classification were like. As Michael stated, with “LGBT (lesbian gay bi-sexual and transgendered) people you don’t really know, its not really something you can see. So before that I was not really exposed”. Meaning, with sexuality or religion or other less obvious sources of prejudices, Michael was aware that it would take him getting to know the people first before learning of deeper individual details. This type of critical reflection is where the discussion groups created by the AnyTown program can be perceived as helpful in generating discussions. As mentioned, no one was forced to share any of their identities with regard to categories such as sexuality or religious affiliation, but by doing so, individuals like Michael would be exposed to others he may not have been without the willingness of others to share. This part of NCCJ is interesting to

consider given that this is where, at least in part, existential concerns are brought to the forefront. This aspect of creating a learning experience through the willingness of others to be open, necessitated the participants to feel safe in sharing. Parmar states that

A critical thinking approach to education is crucial. It allows students to receive culturally relevant, meaningful content, as well as to participate in student-centered activities. The absence of critical thinking results in schools that tend to confirm or value certain cultures and disavow, devalue, and marginalize others... For students to achieve this kind of success, the teacher must transform the curriculum and help students map their relation to the social worlds around them, comprehend the connection between personal and social problems, and realize the complex ways in which they are connected to people both like themselves and radically different from...discussed in a safe learning environment in which different perspectives are valued, respected and understood. In such a critical thinking classroom, all opinions, thoughts, and ideas from all students are welcomed and respected (Parmar, 2004, p. 176).

What Parmar's comments teach us is that a safe and respectful environment is necessary for critical thinking within group settings, but even more important for the discussion of sensitive topics with mindful intent. Unfortunately, there are some individuals who feel these types of discussions or even openness are best left out of the classroom. When discussions regarding prejudices are left outside of the classroom, we leave these issues in the hands of those who may not have been taught to critically contemplate such issues and may inadvertently (or worse, intentionally) perpetuate these biases in our society. For example, within Trey's own family, whom, by the tone of his voice he obviously respects, group norm prejudices exist about race. Although he described his mother as someone he could talk to and is "easy going (and that) ya'll might go into a conversation about it (race)", but unfortunately he was aware that he

"couldn't bring anybody of another race in my house to date... It was just like one of my mom's rules. She said she brought me up to date and marry a strong black woman".

Although Trey said that NCCJ "made me a lot more open to... other peoples' stories to like how they become them and how they became themselves" he also explained that

its made me become more open just with different people. Like, lets say atheists and Buddhism and Judaism and things like that. But, it's hard sometimes to just like be as open. Because, my Mom, she's not crack down, (like) this is the bible, and this is what it says, but she's a strong Christian, so it's like even though I might be open, she's not as open.

While Trey did not give the impression that he was going to break any of his mother's rules, he stated he was more open to encountering new people and ideas regardless of race or sexuality due to his exposure to such during his AnyTown experience.

Similarly, leaving such discussions to occur between peers also permits for prejudices to perpetuate, inaccurate information to disseminate, and less chances for the individuals to safely explore such topics in a critical and mindful manner. For example, another challenge Trey stated that he has faced was that he was also a talented singer and despite his enthusiasm for his current school and glee program Trey is still told by his peers that the glee club is for homosexuals. As he told me, his peers would continue to discourage him from joining the glee clubs and tell him that "there's gays in there and they're going to try to come at you". However, Trey stated that it was not relevant to him

whether or not his fellow glee members were gay or straight. Trey stated that “(for) me personally, I have no problem if you’re gay, whatever, I just don’t want you to come at me with that ‘cuz just like, we have boundaries”. Trey was alluding towards his opinion that he was indifferent towards the sexuality of his fellow glee club members up until the point in which he would feel uncomfortable if a gay male attempted make any advances towards him. As Trey’s experience with other’s stereotyping of glee club members shows us, opinions of peers can leave an impression upon our thoughts. Trey obviously thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the glee club, but still had hesitancy and suspicions regarding the other glee club members. Fortunately, Trey did not give up his participation in an activity that he enjoyed because of what others may have said. Although he professed being more open because of his experiences with the AnyTown program, his comments demonstrated that perhaps more open discussions and critical contemplation regarding sexuality may be of benefit to him.

Further examples of critical contemplation, mindful awareness, and existential matters within our interviews, was the interviewees’ attempts to alter patterns of speech in their own lives and that of others. They were very focused on the misuse of words that could imply a bias or prejudice. Through the NCCJ AnyTown program Michael, Jane, Clarissa, Trey, and Juliana have begun to learn to critically think about the ambiguous use of language and how to be mindful of what terms they are using in correlation to what their intended meanings really are.

As Freire states, man by necessity is in the word and must engage with it, find their relation to the world, and interact with it. He states that we do so by and through our use of language (Freire P. , 2007). Because of this necessary interaction with others, we will experience conflict at various levels and will need to know how to properly approach differences. An example how we may help others critically contemplate their own use of language and being mindful of their language choices was when Juliana recalled that she recognized her father sometimes utilized stereotypes to make assumptions of people whom he had only seen or met briefly. Juliana stated that she tries to teach her father what she learned through Anytown by trying

to pick something out and say ‘Dad, you know they may not be the way you think they are, you just saw him for the first time’, and he (her father) understands, knows I’m right, but its so difficult to get him to give me that.

Michael also illustrated the point of becoming conscious of the meaning and use language in his daily life because of what he was experienced. He said that

now when I’m around friends and they say something offensive or something they know is (offensive)..., lets say ‘oh that’s so gay’, I know it’s a joke, but it kind of get under my skin a little... I’ll be like you realize you are equating this with gayness and how it really doesn’t translate.

Similarly, Clarissa reported that after her AnyTown experience she now reacts towards biases in her life:

right when I hear it, its become almost second nature, because before I would say ‘that’s retarded’, ‘that’s gay’, everything, and that’s before I learned the context of the words and that was what I was saying.

Clarissa recalled how she is no longer shy in politely correcting others during her communication with others. She stated that she has been to

social gatherings where you hear left and right... you hear everything, 'N' everything, 'retard', 'gay', everything, dropped left and right and I have to sit there and think that I don't want to be a buzz kill, but I do want to inform and let them know that they sound so ignorant... so (now she approaches them and says) 'lets just talk for a minute' (in order to correct others).

She will ask others:

'do you know what you are saying, do you know what you are connecting the word retard to?' (and that) sometimes I say 'do you know what you are saying, you sound ignorant'... Usually I'll say 'you are saying the word retard, what are you trying to really say?' and they will say 'stupid', so I'll say 'you're associating retard with stupid or gay', etc... and so forth.

While this initial response may sound combative, she clarified that

I find when I'm talking calmly people listen better, when I do, cuz I don't know how I'd react if someone was screaming at me, telling me I'm wrong. I'd probably get defensive.

What Clarissa has described is a simple approach to communication as well as conflict, such that the mode is a direct approach with a mindful concern being placed upon the language used and the mode of communication (Hanh T. N., 2001). Jane too has employed this direct, but yet mindful technique and said that she tries

to approach them obviously in a very mature way, because I don't want to attack them because of their feelings, because that may be all they grew up knowing, which may not be their fault, so I definitely want to (talk to them and not verbally

attack)... you learn that over time, I know its frustrating, but you have to hold that in and think for the sake of them.

What these examples show us, is that there are opportunities throughout our lives where we may employ skills such as critical consciousness, mindfulness, and conflict resolution to benefit our society, if only we have the tools available to us. When we fail to learn critical thinking skills and fail to encounter others from our perceived out-groups, we may unintentionally or unknowingly perpetuate division in our society and even prejudices. This includes the use offensive speech that may influences others; such as the stereotyping of glee club members. If we are in the position of authority, such as when we are teaching, the consequences of not learning how to critically contemplate and then allowing room to educate our students on this tool, may have numerous consequences throughout our students' lives.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, active listening skills can be a key component in reducing conflict and enhancing learning. Active listening is being mindful of the moment, suspending our judgments, thinking on what we are hearing, and being receptive to other's comments as well as encouraging dialogue. Dialogue can be encouraged by non-verbal means (e.g. head nodding, eye contact, open body language), verbal cues such as when you state something like "please explain a bit more", "please continue", or summarizing verbally what was just said back to the person who was speaking (e.g. "I believe what I heard you say was....")(Conte, Brunson, & Masar, 2002). These types of skills are learned behaviors and are enhanced with practice. NCCJ also

was reported to have utilized these types of listening and communication skills during their weeklong program. Clarissa specifically recalled that there were moments she felt as if she had really been heard by others and that she in return, had heard what they said. Clarissa stated that in the NCCJ AnyTown program

you have to be yourself, you have to open to hearing things that you may not want to hear and know that it may not change, people are going to think what they want to think, but that you know or at least they heard what you had to say.

When asked to clarify on what specifically was part of the AnyTown's program structure that she believed enabled active listening, Clarissa was only able to answer that that AnyTown "definitely" felt like a form of education, but different. When a similar question was posted to Jane, Jane said that the listing skills were "a matter of patience and you know, just wanting to know something about someone else who's different than you". Jane agreed and said the process was "absolutely" one including a mindset of open curiosity and suspension of judgment. She said that

They (NCCJ) want you to put your preconceived notions of a group of people aside and listen to pretty much what we have to say and I would say 90% of the time its get through to these kids and they realize what they've done before and you know it takes the time to listen to someone else.

Juliana also commented on the listening aspect of NCCJ's AnyTown when questioned about this, by saying that

everyone goes in with a really open mind, and if they don't, by the middle of the week everyone starts opening up. Everyone was very interested in what I

had to say and that felt very good because in high school not everyone cares anything about you.

While each of the interviewees are continuing to find their way with regard to prejudice in their lives, each interviewee felt that they could make a personal difference by being critically conscious, and mindful of avoiding biased and even defamatory language. While the interviewees or even the AnyTown program itself may not have been aware that some of their approaches to combating stereotypes was through their use of critical thinking techniques, as well as mindful speech, they were at a minimum aware that certain choices of language and assumptions were hurtful. AnyTown's publically stated purpose is to provide the campers with leadership skills that assist in reducing conflict, increase exposure to individuals or groups that may be different from them, and to enhance communication as well as understanding between various divisions within our society (Gay, 2003). They report to achieve their goals by showing NCCJ participants ways in which to be non-confrontational in their questioning of others, more curious and open to others, as well as not afraid to speak out. By and through their methods the program claims that a new, more open-minded and healthier, set of leaders are created to help shape our future. They state that by speaking out against biased and prejudicial language they assist in changing accepted norms and challenge the perception of biases. While all of their claims may be true, their actual methods remain vague with regard to classification although it appears, at least in part, that critical consciousness techniques,

mindfulness, conflict resolution, and existential concerns are employed during the AnyTown program.

**AnyTown's Leadership Training: Carrying on the Lessons in Our Lives:**

**Helping to Heal Ourselves and Our Connections**

NCCJ's laudable, although lofty, goals include the desire to educate and transform their program participants so that they realize the desire and need for change in our lives and society. The program hopes that the participants learn ways in which to act upon this desire for change and that the participants become the impetus and future leaders for change. More specifically, NCCJ's goals that they attempt to impart are the need to fight *biases, bigotry, and racism* (NCCJ) in order to create a more harmonious and cohesive society. NCCJ states that they believe in the ability for individuals, regardless of age, to be able to change their perspectives and behavior patterns towards diverse populations with the assistance of others, such as themselves, setting an example and assisting others down the path of change. It is this type of leader that the AnyTown program reports to help develop through their training and the experiences during the programs that they provide.

Devine and Plant (2012) explain that those who believe in the static nature of the individual are referred to entity theory holders, while those who believe in the malleability and evolution of person are called incremental self-theorists. Because of NCCJ's goals, the organization as a whole can be viewed as subscribers to the incremental self-theorist group. Individuals, such as members of NCCJ, who believe that

others can change have been found to be more likely to actively engage with others, to find a common solutions between various individuals, and try to negotiate or find a fair outcome. While the risk exists to enter into conflict when speaking out, those who engage in this interactive behavior have been shown to hold the incremental self-theory as more true in comparison to the entity theory (Devine & Plant, 2012). This description of incremental self-theorists is precisely the type of person that NCCJ believes in and wishes to foster their participants in transforming to become.

Juliana's experience with NCCJ highlighted that the AnyTown program emphasized this type of effect on at least the individuals interviewed. Juliana explained that she believes NCCJ helped her to realize that she and others can change as:

we all grew up with certain ways of thinking. I was never the kind to discriminate people, I tolerated certain races, and wouldn't visualize myself with certain people. I would not branch out and I would try to be in my comfort zone. After (my) AnyTown it was so different, because, I just wanted to meet anyone I saw. It was like 'oh, I could make friends, let me try this out'. You could feel this change inside of you.

By reading Juliana's remarks it may be deduced that has learned, at least to some extent, that she has changed and grown from who she used to be. Although it may be said that each of us changes, Juliana personally credited the lessons she learned through the AnyTown program as part of her transformational process.

When asked his opinion on whether the AnyTown program felt as if it was preparing him to be a leader in any way, Michael too stated that NCCJ was a

leadership program that's helped me be more open... I always believe that when you don't have an outlet you sort of keep it inside and feel sort of like the minority in society. Its kind of hard to find organizations that promote that, but when you do, it feels a lot better.

Jane also commented on her role as a counselor during her time at the NCCJ AnyTown camp by saying that

as a counselor you really are just supposed to be a role model. These kids actually look up to you, its funny because they are not that younger than you, but I think they see you doing active listening to someone and wanting to know more and I think they look up to that and then they do it themselves, it's a natural process really.

Jane said "It comes so easy and I get this really good feeling that when I was a counselor and a delegate that when they leave the community and realize that they want that community back, they miss the connection with people".

Leadership once insinuated that someone or some group was literally in charge and lead others by force or directive, and was a hierarchical, top-down, process. Alternative views and opinion of what leadership means continue to emerge. Leadership can be alternatively thought of as a more of a collaborative process as well as less dictatorial. Acting as a leader does not necessarily mean that we overtly seek the position, but merely by demonstrating moral and right traits we encourage others to do the same and draw them to us because of the positive energy we create. Therefore leading by example may sometimes be as simple as living right. As Thich Nhat Hanh states:

simply having the title of leader is not enough. Titles do not give true power. When you practice mindfulness well and you radiate joy, stability, and peace,

you acquire a much deeper authority. When you speak, people listen to you, not because they have to but because you are fresh, serene, and wise. A kind leader is one who exercises only this kind of authority... She inspires people by her way of living, and people listen to her because of her authenticity  
(Hanh T. N., The art of power, 2007, p. 34).

Both Hanh and the social change model argue that values (individual and societal) and shared growth can assist in a new vision of leadership. This new vision of leadership views large-scale change to be a function of the inclusion of others and value based actions (Komives & Wagner, 2009). Komives and Wagner(2009) describe within this category of value based actions the concept of citizenship that works towards actions that are beneficial to others, collaboration with diverse parties towards a common beneficial goal, civility, and being self-aware.

Based upon NCCJ's AnyTown respondents, this alternative approach to leadership is being employed, at least in part, both in the week-long camps and by the program participants after they venture back into their daily lives. Although I argue that a week long program is not long enough to impart the skills I believe are necessary for a more holistic learning experience, I believe that based upon the objectives of NCCJ that they are at least a step in the right direction and worthy of consideration. The method that NCCJ employs to foster leadership skills is what they call "the four I's". Their promotional literature reads

NCCJ guides INDIVIDUALS through an interactive process of INTROSPECTION. With a clearer understanding of self, individuals are better prepared for genuine INTERACTION with others. This process prepares participants to be champions of INCLUSION, a vision that ensures that our world is a better place for all of us and not just some of us (NCCJ).

What this method insinuates is that through the process each participant experiences the end goal is that the skills and lessons learned during NCCJ AnyTown should carry over and endure as life-long habits in which the participants act as ambassadors and change agents.

Similarly to the comments made by our interviewees that demonstrates their critical consciousness towards topics surrounding prejudices, our interviewees actions show how they have taken what they've learned and carried it out into their lives. Jane described how through introspection and interaction she has begun to view things differently and her actions indicate that she may be serving as a leader that NCCJ had intended. Jane explained that

one of the biggest issues we really targeted would be racism and before I would just get really frustrated and sad because of such racist comments that I just couldn't wrap my head around (it), (such as) 'you're really saying that someone is inferior just because their skin is darker or lighter than yours' and that concept never made any sense to me and I would just get angry and not even want to talk to them about it , but now due to her experience with NCCJ's principles she is willing to work with them because those are the people that need to know.... they just need that interaction with other people, because I think one of the main reasons of racism is if you only hang out with your people then you don't know anything else because that's all you are exposed to and being exposed to such differences, religion, cultures, that's part of the AnyTown experience that really allows them to have a change of mind.

This mindset is also what Jane stated that she now tries to impart to others.

Trey said that he now feels as he is "representing the programs and the NCCJ so I think its my part (to step in). Like when people say '*oh, that's gay*' for '*oh, that's stupid*', its like I feel me, personally, I have a problem with (that kinds of word use)". During this

part of the conversation Trey was referring to the change he noticed in himself and how it influenced others. He knew that

growing up I was always like an outgoing person, so called popular person, but when, I never really (hung out) with homosexuals, because they like hang out with their friends, and its just like I was cool with everybody. I was cool with some of them, but not like I could have been. After my senior year, I was cool with everybody and everybody knew me. I was one of the respected people because I had goals and like, I had something going for myself, so I started to interact with them (homosexuals) and they (his peers) stated to interact with them too.

The intergroup contact theory (Chin, 2004) argues for just the type of experiences that both Jane and Trey reported in order to increase exposure to people who may be different and to create reference models for future positive interactions between various groups. As Trey stated, “you’re building a family and the friends they didn’t have at he school, you have them right there and you can talk about or start a conversation with so called popular people and normal people”, which increases the connections between various individuals and leaves room for cross-group leaders. Just as Jane stated she believed that exposure to different groups in conjunction with an affirmative experience helps others break down racial, religious, or cultural barriers, so too does Trey’s perceptions that serving as a role model for others encourages the same behavior to be repeated. Trey elaborated on this aspect of exposure and encouragement by saying that

it puts me a little bit further with some other types of groups like I probably wouldn’t have had so much in common with. Because, a lot of my friends we play sports or we have basic things like sports or music in common. Stuff like

that, that have a common interest, but some of my AnyTown friends, family, we were just different, races, ethnicities, common interests, but we still just clicked like this.

According to the intergroup contact theory the key factors in reducing prejudices are both the repeated exposure and positive experience (Chin, 2004).

Clarissa's stated that her positive experience with AnyTown and NCCJ is what drives her to action in her daily life to act as a roll model and activist for NCCJ. She recalled her enthusiasm for the AnyTown program that she

stand(s) by this program, I stand by NCCJ, like so much, I never stuck with anything in my life like I had with the program by NCCJ. Its just been a great experience from the start, I'm growing as a person, although I still have room to grow, all of us do, and AnyTown is such a great program. I preach about it as if I'm some sort of AnyTown minister.... I can't close my brain off to it (what she learned). Its second nature now because of the program, gradual teaching, but they aren't enforcing any of it on me. I've taken what I've wanted to and project what I want to.

Just as Clarissa may not have realized the passion in her voice and positive feelings they evoke in others when speaking of NCCJ and the Anytown experience, neither did Juliana realize what difference her presence made as a counselor until someone shared their perception with her. Juliana recalled that

there was this one girl who was very very quiet during the week, and the first group (discussion) is based upon religion, and I think it was Hinduism, but she was the only one (Hindu) and very very quiet, and you could tell she was struggling, and she reminded me of myself, and so I would always just try to talk to her and (say) you know its fine, these people are not going to be mad at you, its just very very open, its ok to be open about your religion, and by the end of the week it was just like a different person. She was talking to me about her family, her friends, what she wanted to be when she grew up. It was just so nice and the

thing that really clicked for me at the end of the week, (is when) she came up to me. They were getting on a bus to leave and she said 'I just wanted to say goodbye' and she told me I was her role model. And, I just could not... like OH, don't do this to me, because I've never, besides my little cousins and stuff, I've never had that kind of experience. Because I've always wanted to be like someone else and now there's other people who look up to me and I'm affecting them in some way, and I impacted them for life in just a teeny way, and that just means a lot.

Although Juliana appeared to have been overwhelmed by what she was told, she said that it did not put any pressure on her and she actually liked the feeling of being a role model. It was special to her because as she said "she just looked up at me for myself and I didn't have to do anything". Again, according to Thich Nhat Hanh "we're not going to save the world by ourselves. So we have to lead other people into doing the right thing. And the only way to lead is by example. That's the only way" (Hanh T. N., 2007, p. 216).

Before we may lead by example and serve as role models for others, we must first be capable of genuinely practicing what we preach. This does not mean we need to be perfect, but that we need to be mindful of how we act, what we say, and what the end goals are that we are striving towards that benefit society. We need to find a path that is transformational and healing for ourselves and others in order to do this.

What the NCCJ AnyTown program appears to have offered, at least in part, through their goals of introspection and inclusion is a process in which the healing of damages we have experienced, such as racism and other prejudices, can be ameliorated by reflecting on ourselves, our actions, and the experience of others in order to create future leaders.

Juliana referred to the AnyTown process and experience's impact as "huge, because when you think about it, it changes your every day life. It changes the way you think even". Frankl (1984) would argue that it is often our own manner of thinking that hinders us on our process to heal and transform. For example, Juliana reported that AnyTown

certainly has (helped) with my confidence a lot. I felt like I wasn't.... I don't know how to put it, (but) like maybe I wasn't interesting enough to people. But, now, like I have so much to bring to everyone. Everyone's different and they have a lot to bring (to any relationship).

This positive feeling created within Juliana helped her go from feeling that "there was something stopping me" to "now I feel like I can just go and do anything".

In Frankl's writings on logotherapy, this form of psychological healing is described as having the role of enhancing our *line of sight* so that we become aware of greater views of possible existential meanings (Frankl, 1984) just as Juliana now perceives she and others have a lot to offer. It is through this type of cognitive awareness that Frankl believed healing and transformation would occur.

When considering Frankl's view of healing and transforming through different perspectives it is particularly interesting to note the comments of the NCCJ AnyTown participants and how they resonate the same sentiments. Jane specifically commented on the healing and transformative aspect of her AnyTown experiences when she said that

just a knowing of yourself and other people accept you because of that environment, that is healing and therapeutic to know that you are genuinely accepted by others. People of this age, that's all they want, that's just the

honesty in it. They want to be accepted by their peers and people older than them. Especially like a counselor, it really does help them and they are close to us. Its therapeutic in the fact that you can finally be secure in you and that you can provide that security to others.

She found some healing of herself through learning more about who she is, that others were accepting of her true self, and that she was able to assist others through similar processes she experienced.

Clarissa commented on the healing and said that

Even just walking into this building itself, walking into where the stage is and the piano, I was speaking to Annabel and I said 'I feel back home'. It's a very comfortable environment. When you're on the mountain, there's steps that day by day it's a gradual type process where you learn more about yourself and others. There's options, options, (and) methods, speaking what's on your mind, like (at) campfire, at night. It's a debrief, (you) say what you want, because people will have epiphanies at the same fires or during the days. They'll pull the counselors aside. I got pulled aside by a delegate and they said 'no one knows this but me, but....' They felt so comfortable by me that they share and its just (therapeutic).

She agreed that just sharing her life stories and finding even small commonalities with others that seemingly had nothing in common with her was healing. She said that she feels

like the work I've done with NCCJ is the most prideful thing I can say (I've done) where I've actually been a leader because you experience (it). You take it in and it really does change you. Not like a brainwashing thing. Its not a cult, they allow you to decide what you want to decide. Like some people will go up on the mountain and its not until about two weeks later when they are like oh-my-goodness, this experience just changed my life.

Michael reported a similar perspective when he stated that the therapeutic effect of NCCJ AnyTown had to do with the way in which

the way they run the programs. They split the list up for what they are going to talk about and then they bring the group together and read all of the list all at the same time. So, you are sitting in a room, listening to lists you wrote about other people. So, it's sort of like not that you personally feel attached or that I wrote that, but the way the program is sort of set up, it's meant to cause an emotional outpour of ideas and stories... and then they ask you how does that make you feel, why do you think they think that, are you that way, you're clearly not that way, so why would they say that about you?

Jane loved that emotional and learning aspect of AnyTown and said she keeps feeling as if

I just have to go back... I was extremely connected (and that) it brought the reality into a bigger picture, it just kind of magnified it and made it seem there was so much work to be done, so many lives to be changed and people to be encouraged.

Trey also knew he was no longer the same person before or after his AnyTown experience. He said he

love(d) being a part of NCCJ. When I went to AnyTown I had the greatest experience in my life. I loved all of the people, the staff, the counselor, and I knew I wanted to be a part of that somehow, like some day (and that he desired) to help change other peoples lives the way NCCJ changed mine and just guide them through that process.

Just as some of the other interviewees stated, Trey reiterated that "you are still trying to learn more" and that even such a brief experience as a week long camp can

carry over “pretty much (for) a lifetime”. Trey told a story that he said he never would have been open to had he not experienced AnyTown. He said he

met this dude, who was a delegate. He went through many struggles. Getting kicked out of his house, having become suicidal, trying to kill himself so many times, and having to start sleeping in his school and different things like that... just because of his sexuality. His mom kicked him out of his house and tried to beat him because of his sexuality. And like, me and him, I had heard about him before I was a counselor, but just being around him and stuff like that, I didn't know he went through stuff like that... its real tough.

To Trey, this ability to be willing, even if slightly, to be open to hearing a story such as this, with sympathy, marked a distinction to him between his past and present mindset. He claims that his experience with NCCJ created this increased openness within him. Similarly, Juliana recalled a delegate who

stayed with himself the whole time, he acted very quiet and kind of reserved, but I went up to him one night, as they have hangout time, I was just so surprised by the amount of similarities we had. We seemed like complete strangers, but when we started talking we shared a lot of interests and that's kind of the essence of AnyTown... we have reunions and he came back to one, so I think there had to have been some impact in him for him to come back. I love seeing people who come back, there are some who were not very involved but they come back (to reunions) and something happened to them. I think maybe he was just processing it in his own time and way, some people just act different.

All the interviewees reported these similar type stories of experiencing transformation themselves or watching others transform, even if the change was gradual. The interaction, guidance and introspection are pivotal aspects to programs such as

AnyTown and a part of a process that allowed these participants to transform their lives and that of others in order to move closer to NCCJ's mission

to fight bias, bigotry, and racism in America. NCCJ's work is to transform communities through institutional change and by empowering leaders so that all people will have access to the nation's opportunities, and be included in its promise (NCCJ).

### **Future Potential**

Although our respondents for interviews were not as many as would have been beneficial for our knowledge, their relatively brief responses still highlight some of the benefits we may hope to see through the creation of an educational system that is more holistic in nature. In order to better understand how a more holistic type of education such that I imagine could function in reality, I felt it necessary to give the interviewees an opportunity to share their first hand perspectives. Therefore, towards the end of each interview, the question was posed as to whether the interviewees could envision the transformational aspects of the NCCJ AnyTown program being applied in a public school setting. They were asked how they thought it would or would not function and what aspects of the program, if any, should be emphasized. Again, this line of questioning is more akin to an elicitive model approach, than the prescriptive model, that allows for the actual participants to have a say in their direction of learning.

Given our cultural reluctance to change and our lack of willingness to delve into the unknown, moving away from the tried, even if it is not so true, is not such an easy task to imagine our educational culture changing. Therefore, it is understandable how

someone may believe that change in our educational system, such as the inclusions of NCCJ AnyTown practices, may seem a very far reach given our current state of the educational system. Even if the concept of change is positive and desirable, change in and of itself is difficult. What we know and expect from our educational systems are ingrained in us through our experiences and through our social expectations and therefore moving towards another version of our educational system may not be on our top priority list. Psychological discomfort can be experienced when we even begin to think of change, let alone enacting change or changing a system. However, this reluctance or fear to change can be overcome. When the desired end state goals are envisioned and if we combined with evidence of success, even if on smaller levels such as with the success of NCCJ, the attitude of the public opinion towards change may swing towards becoming more receptive (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Therefore, the initial step to take in order to begin enacting change within our educational system is to provide evidence and support for programs that have been successful and to make this knowledge of alternatives better known in our society. Those interviewed for this chapter all desired change from what they had experienced in their primary and secondary educational experiences.

Trey said that some of the differences between his high school experience and what he really wanted from a school was made possible when he chose a college that was “a smaller school” because it

feels more like a family. We don’t have those auditorium classrooms, like there are 200 people, or like 500, I think if I was in some of those classes, one, I wouldn’t be able to focus as much, and two, its, I feel like, I would be questioning myself to even ask a questions. Like someone might think I’m slower

than other people or stuff like that. It is like you understand it, another person might be thinking a different thing, but in a smaller classroom like I have at the college I go to<sup>3</sup>, its like you have a one on one conversation with your professor after class, going to his office after hours and he actually knows your name. I'd rather be a name than a number, like, oh, you're sitting in row 4, seat 23 or something like that. I think it has helped me open up to new ideas and to learn them.

This critique of class size is certainly not something new in academia, but it brings up the question as to when educational systems will begin to humanize the individual, as did the NCCJ AnyTown program, and forego the cost-saving technique of mass class education in which students do become numbers, test scores, and unknown faces in a room. Juliana also stated that her favorite college course was a “very small class” in comparison to high school with the “big classes” in which “it’s a lot harder to open up with that many people. The pressure is on you, so this class is kind of small and we get to know all the people’s names”. Juliana related this class to her AnyTown experience as it

really made me analyze myself and look at myself, it was really like an evaluation. I’ve been this way, I was never really being extreme about things, but it makes you look at yourself in different ways and others different ways.

She said that the introspection from AnyTown was also experienced in her favorite class and came from the leadership of her instructor as sometime he would

have different slides up and the way my professor teaches is that he doesn’t, its not structured at all, we just kind of discuss things, he always says ‘Juliana how does this make you feel’ (referring to the slides)... and he says ‘what does it mean to you, does it make you think of anything about yourself’.

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<sup>3</sup> The proper name of this school has been removed to protect confidentiality.

It was this personable, as well as reflective, nature that Juliana and Trey enjoyed most through AnyTown and found as what they liked and sought out in their college experience.

Michael, on the other hand, was at first not certain where or how AnyTown could fit into a public education despite his love of NCCJ. He said he thought that the program would not fit in as

it has to be an outside school setting because how the school system works is that you're supposed to be dedicated, take a test, and you take a test and forget it. So, it has to be on your own, sort of you take the initiative to do this.

However, when he reflected on how sad it would be if someone really needed the experience, but did not take the initiative for various reasons, he said that

it would have to start out early in school and it would take a really long time. I don't see it in the near future, maybe when I'm 50 I can see the transformation taking place. You'd have to start at the elementary level and wait for those kids to get to high school and then see if its changed and if it hasn't then try something again. You'd have to trial and error because when you are no longer in school you are a lot different than you are in high school.

Michael also envisioned students taking time away from classes and having "a week of no education" that would focus on getting to know people different from yourself in order to "just encounter them". Michael's comments reflect relevant points on the inclusion of some aspects that programs such as NCCJ AnyTown provides. The long-term timing, as suggested by Michael, would allow for tweaking and measuring successes or failures of the new curriculum. While, the potential for distraction from required

materials is certainly valid concern, this should not distract us from broadening our views on education or attempting to implement more holistic and healing aspects to the standard curriculum.

Clarissa believed that AnyTown and what NCCJ stands for should and could be incorporated into the classroom. She felt that it was appropriate for “any age” and that she felt as if

its as much a part of an essential education as math and science. Especially in America. If you grow up in America, it’s the melting pot, you’re exposed to everything. Just because you may be isolated and your family thinks a certain way, even if you aren’t exposed to it yet, it at least plants a seed as you get older. It may not make you change your mind on certain things, you may still think all gay people are going to hell or whatever your issue is, but I mean (it should be included in education). At least, especially with race, maybe not sexual orientation as you don’t know until you mature, but when you are 5, you don’t know who you are.

Clarissa said that she believed what the safe place was at AnyTown was the “inclusive environment”. She stated that “first of all you have to be comfortable and trust them”. This inclusiveness, comfort and trust is what she felt as if could be imparted to children.

Clarissa said that

just respect what other people say, you have a right to your opinion, but you’re going to be on this mountain for a week, just get comfortable and enjoy... and personally I build trust, just by, you have to speak to the delegates, show them you’re a kid as well, well a former delegate. (I) don’t like to use the word kid, because it shows they’re below a power position, so building trust just by being yourself, exhibiting, just being a good role-model, (and a good) being.

Jane's opinions mirrored Clarissa's as Jane alluded to allowing for the safe space to be a part of education. She said that she believed it would be a good fit for teachers too

especially (when considering you) cannot have that set in stone expectation of a student based on their gender, their social status, class, economics, race. I feel that would really help for teachers and for someone you look up to and to have a high expectation of you no matter what, that would be great. I think more children would be a little more challenged and I think teachers wouldn't say you're not going to amount to anything and students don't amount to anything because of them. I don't think that would be an issue (anymore). I really think that if they're much more like counselors and advisors that look at delegates and appreciate them as a person and want to help them as much as possible through the process, I think that if teachers had that same attitude then the schools systems would be highly improved.

While we may have believed that it would be the public school curriculum teaching some similar aspects of NCCJ AnyTown to the student, we should pause and reflect that as Michael stated "when you are no longer in school you are a lot different than you are in high school" and think on Jane's final statement that "I think that if teachers had that same attitude then the schools systems would be highly improved".

### **Conclusion**

What we have found through our interviews are voices of young adults who not only enjoyed, but also appear to have appreciated and grew through their experience with the NCCJ's AnyTown program. Clarissa, Michael, Trey, Jane and Juliana each reported on how their lives have been altered at least a little by learning ways in which to approach differences between themselves and others. With the assistance of guided leadership each have become more capable and willing to express their beliefs without

fear of reprisal and to explore how their beliefs have an impact on their daily lives. Our interviewees have begun to learn new ways in which to approach certain topics and to integrate their learning experience within their daily lives. This kind of reflection and action that our interviewees have reported is where education becomes more holistic by incorporating modes of being that include thinking and reacting to our life experiences. Practices such as mindful awareness, critical consciousness skills, and effective modes of communication are necessary to be employed in order to create learning experiences that speak to the full aspect of humanity. By being well rounded, or more holistic, we are implying that our mind, body, and spirit are attended to and attuned to each other. The result and goal of a more holistic education is the balanced attunement of ourselves to both our internal and external states. When our educational programs contain assistance with recognizing and dealing with issues that are prevalent in our daily lives, our education becomes more holistic through the addition of concerns that are not traditionally considered part of the curriculum, but yet essential aspects of our existence; such as how NCCJ addresses prejudice. These additional skills and dispositions of our leaders reach us on a personal level, which is the level at which we experience and apply our knowledge.

Personal involvement with issues surrounding prejudice provided a powerful example of the interviewees' positive experience that touches on the integration of holistic education techniques such as mindfulness, critical consciousness, communication skills, and conflict resolution. Some of the most widespread prejudices encountered by

our interviewees were around race, sexuality and religious beliefs. The interviewees expressed how they had changed and have been dealing with some of their own prejudices after their experience with NCCJ. Through guided learning processes such as the group discussions, the AnyTown participants were taught how to listen to others' perspectives without creating barriers to engage in dialogue (e.g. sitting with resistance), how to consider the ramifications of their beliefs and actions (e.g. mindfulness and critical consciousness), and how to respond effectively when faced with difficult situations (incorporating learning within their existential lives).

Because of Clarissa, Michael, Trey, Jane and Juliana's experiences with the NCCJ's AnyTown program and their involvement with this form of curriculum, they each reported that it has assisted them to further understand some of these issues they face and will face in their lives. For instance, both Michael and Juliana reported becoming uncomfortable with words like *gay* or *retarded* once they learned to be more mindful and think more critically on word choices as well as word associations. NCCJ's influence on Trey has, in part, been assisting him to learn to follow his passion (i.e. glee club) regardless of stereotypes and to allow for others to have room to be themselves without feeling threatened. As each interviewee also expressed their increased willingness to speak out against prejudices and to assist others in being more open-minded, we can at least see the starting glimmer of change occurring through a more holistic type of educational program. Although none of these steps are easy ones, they

have seemingly become easier for those in this study because of their affiliation and learning experience with AnyTown.

Within our standard curriculum topics such as race, sexuality, and religion are considered too taboo for our classrooms. Therefore are never properly addressed in our lives unless students find assistance through outside programs or through their families or peers. Sadly, many of our own prejudices stem from our own families or friends. Without learning how to address prejudices, they may continue or escalate to the detriment of ourselves and others. Unfortunately, outside programs like NCCJ are not prevalent or readily available for all students and our families and peers may be as ill equipped (or worse) to address prejudices in a healthy manner. Part of our reality is indeed intertwined with questions such as those of race, religion and sexuality and without the proper guidance on addressing these topics we leave a very important aspect of our existence unspoken for. This gap leaves us lacking in educational experiences that speak to our full holistic being which includes our lived existence. Regardless of whether tolerance itself is taught in our schools, the basis for teaching such difficult topics can at least be begun through teaching skills such as mindfulness, critical contemplation, and communication as well as conflict resolution techniques.

Issues that once may have been overlooked, unattended, or avoided are now central themes of concern for organizations such as NCCJ who see the need for educating our students in ways that school systems are failing to address. The relatively few programs that exist like NCCJ are there due to the discrepancy between what we are

taught, or not taught, in our schools, versus the reality we confront in our lives. If this gap did not exist, there would be no call for programs like AnyTown. Until programs such as AnyTown filter into our classrooms on a daily basis, our education systems will continue to be ill equipped to prepare our successive generations for the changes demanded by society. Schools will continue to fail to be holistic despite the evidence that indicates we need education that speaks more fully to our lives. While discussions on race, religion, and sexuality are obviously on the more difficult end of the spectrum for integrating educational experience with our lives, our interviewees' experiences illustrate that these more problematic types of topics can be effectively addressed. Less sensitive existential matters should be more easily integrated in our education to create holistic learning experiences.

Even though our interviewees presented compelling examples of the more holistic aspects and benefits of the AnyTown program, this research has clear limitations. Some limitations as mentioned, include that only a small portion of AnyTown representatives were interviewed and long-term changes were not measured. While our interviewees all reported enthusiastically on their AnyTown experience, our study is limited to these positive remarks by the selected participants and of course may not represent the experience of all AnyTown attendees. Although all our interviewees were deeply impressed by the educational methods of NCCJ's AnyTown, critiques for improvement or comments on unsuccessful approaches and experiences would serve as helpful benchmarks for future modifications of programs and educational systems. Despite these

limitations, I will propose in my final chapter a general outline of my vision for a more holistic curriculum as well as a specific example of a potential shorter-term program that draws upon the interviewees' comments and the research found in our previous chapters. The proposed general curriculum will be one that synthesizes my concern with mindfulness, communication / conflict resolution, critical thought and the need for education to address our existential concern for meaning. While, the shorter-term program will also focus on teaching these skills, it will serve as a more realistic beginning for a means to adding a more holistic approach to our educational systems.

If the purpose of our standard education is to impart a basis of knowledge to our students in order to prepare them for their future functioning within the world, then it is apparent that the curriculum now prevalent in our classrooms is very far from achieving this goal. In order to function in the world we must change our educational structure to join textbook knowledge with real life applications of such knowledge and to create future leaders. This combination of existential concerns, traditional learning materials, and functional skills (e.g. mindfulness, critical consciousness, communication techniques) is the path in which we should follow in order to create a more holistic form of education.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN PRACTICE**

#### **Introduction**

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed my beliefs, my personal experiences, experiences of others, and scholarly theories that illustrate the need to shift our current concepts of education. I have shared my vision for a new, more holistic, educational system and what I believe should be included in the curriculum. I believe topics such as mindfulness, critical consciousness, and enhanced communication skills are necessary to create a holistic education. As mentioned, my goal has been to see a move in our educational system from one in which we prepare our students for careers and competitiveness to one that incorporates understanding and concern for ourselves, our society, and our world. This change would better prepare our students for a more ethical, humane, and interconnected future. I believe through the addition of holistic education aspects to our curriculum we may reach these goals.

In the first chapter I described my personal experience with our public educational system and my reasons for why I believe holistic education is needed. I believe my personal history with public education mirrors the average person's experience. In my opinion, what I learned in our schools, as well as what is still being taught, is not sufficient for developing well-rounded individuals. Our current type of educational

experience does not prepare us to interact with others and our world in a beneficial capacity. I feel that crucial skills to navigate our existence have been neglected in our educational system while competitiveness and pedestrian knowledge have been overemphasized. Because of this shortcoming within our educational system, we are failing to prepare our society for engagement with life. I encourage our educators and decision makers to move towards a holistic model for education. The Holistic education model would ensure that our lives are incorporated as part of the educational process. Holistic education achieves bridging this gap by assisting us to overcome the distance between our selves and existential matters while it serves to connect our lives with what we learn.

In chapter two I addressed the central concerns of what types of curriculum our educational system would include in order to become holistic by examining scholarly theories and explanations of holistic practices. I have explored the need for change in our educational system and have attempted to show that there is an existential vacuum in the majority of our lives. This vacuum stems from our lack of knowledge regarding ourselves and our interconnectedness to others and our world. The topics from our second chapter demonstrate that we may transform abstract and distant lessons to ones that link individual and societal wellbeing to our education. This may be accomplished through means that incorporate holistic practices that would better prepare individuals for leading an engaged life. These means examined in our second chapter have included topics such as critical consciousness, mindfulness, and communication techniques.

Chapter three focused on the interviews of five young adults who experienced a summer camp that modeled holistic educational practices that included mindfulness, critical consciousness and improved communication techniques. The third chapter drew on my interviews with these five young adults who credited the AnyTown program with assisting them in altering some of their life paths and perceptions. This program was credited by the interviewees for including a more humanistic approach towards learning and experiencing others, as well as assisting them with developing a more critically reflective attitude towards their own opinions and actions.

Each participant from the interviews in chapter three attended a weeklong alternative learning session during their teenage years and then returned to the same program as young adults to serve as counselors. The interviewees were from varied backgrounds in an attempt to provide multiple perspectives on the same program. During each interview I posed questions that attempted to explore their personal experiences with facing people or ideas that were foreign to them. They were asked questions regarding their own previous and current viewpoints regarding race, religion, and sexuality. Each interviewee was also questioned as to their personal opinion on the functionality of alternative teaching methods, such as the program they experienced, and its applicability to be implemented on a grander scale. Their examples have served as eyewitness accounts as to what and how a holistic education could look like and what a holistic education could foster within our students if placed into practice on a daily basis in standard educational settings.

We have learned through our interviewees that when given the opportunity and means, students are fully capable of learning as well as leading by example. NCCJ's AnyTown reached the individual through educational interactions that included critical reflection on new experiences as well as mindfulness of their thoughts and behaviors. The program's goal was to address the participants' abilities to function among the diversity of others. If our five interviewees' opinions are at least somewhat reflective of other campers' experiences, then I believe that the AnyTown program has been successful with their objectives.

I believe two of our interviewees, Michael and Jane, were correct when they said that the impetus for change must come from the leaders in education. These change agents should include the school boards, the principals, the deans, and the teachers. If we wish to see a more whole, inclusive, and positive environment we must begin by realizing that we are not connecting on a personal basis with our youths and our world. We would need to re-center our focus and end goals for our educational system to improve. We need to begin to be the good leaders and the change agents by practicing what we preach. Given the importance of our educators' tasks, I do not believe is not too much to ask our shapers and builders of our future generations to serve as positive role models towards a more holistic educational system.

While our interviewees' cognitive processes may still be ongoing with regard to becoming as aware as each of them desire, there is no doubt in my mind that each will continue to grow and make a conscious effort to do what they feel is right and just in their

lives. Just as Clarissa and Michael mentioned that the NCCJ AnyTown program planted seeds of new ways of thinking, we may view our interviews and program description from the third chapter as just one means to planting these seeds in us. NCCJ's AnyTown program is just one of many examples of alternative forms of education that highlights how individuals may transform with meaningful interactions into more self-actualized members of society. As our interviewees were able to integrate their personal experiences with new ways in which to regard others and their own futures; we should consider becoming more self-actualized through the values of holistic practices and work to find additional ways in which to include them in our standard education.

Our educational system should strive to create learning models that build cohesiveness between varied individuals. It should address educating individuals based upon combining lived experiences with personal growth and action. These influential aspects of learning should include the tools that enable us to cross the boundaries that currently divide. Mindfulness programs demonstrate that even the youngest students can develop critical consciousness patterns and that all ages can learn skills that enable them to bridge the gaps of diversity.

It is our responsibility to learn from these varieties of alternative programs and from those who have experienced these types of developmental curriculum. We need to learn from these programs and curriculums in order to guide ourselves and individuals through introspection, inclusion, and interaction in order to ensure that our world is a more compassionate one. By viewing our future schools as a means towards eliminating

the closed systematic approach to education, we can begin to imagine healthier and more successful individuals and societies. We must begin to visualize this concept, imagine how it can function, and through visualization bring about the change we need in education.

The goal of holistic education is to link ourselves and our environment with learning. Holistic education is a way in which we may find meaning in ourselves and our knowledge. Our focus for holistic education should become the development of whole, integrated, and purposeful students. By purposeful, I am referring not only to what we may foster within them, but what they foster within themselves towards their own creation of meaning and understanding. Holistic education is morally concerned with assisting individuals in becoming healthy, well-adjusted, and well-rounded in all aspects of the human condition. Therefore, what we, as educational leaders, must foster within our students are traits and abilities that lead our future into a more positive, peaceful, just, and cooperative world. What the students cultivate within themselves are direct reflections of what lessons we exhibit and teach. Instructors must therefore lead by example with critical intent towards these goals.

### **A Vision for a More Holistic Education**

In this final chapter, I will briefly link the theories and practices we have reviewed into a general outline for an application of a holistic curriculum to our educational system. My vision of a more holistic education in this last chapter will address the teacher and the student as irreducible to merely message sender and message

receiver. It will suggest how we may go about integrating our ideas, concepts, and theories surrounding a more holistic education within our classrooms. I will also give an outline for a potential short-term program that incorporates aspects of holistic education

Even from the very beginning of their studies, students enter the classroom and bring with them their experiences with the world. Their minds have been permeated by lessons learned from their parents, their society, and from media sources. If our goal as educators is to provide students with the necessary capabilities for their future, we cannot continue to proceed with ignoring the obvious; the world is comprised of students who need to integrate their lives and learning. The necessity for this integration reflects Jiddu Krishnamurti belief that “the highest function of education is to bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole” (Krishnamurti, 1981, p. 24). It is this need for integration that necessitates holistic education.

As stated earlier in this dissertation, what holistic education would add to our current curriculum is the assistance of the instructors to aid students in recognizing themselves and their world in a subjective, but yet instructive manner. It would assist students with inserting themselves into their studies as well as their curriculum into their lives (Chandra, 2006). With the addition of tools to assist our students to critically think, act mindfully, and develop interpersonal skills, we would better prepare our students to become autonomous individuals: this is the ultimate goal of my vision for a holistic education and a holistic curriculum.

My view of a holistic education would eradicate the binary *yes / no* and *right / wrong* answers. It would integrate the experience of the learner with the material. My vision of holistic education would be more subjective and less objective than our standard method of instruction. It would foster creative thinking and encourage

interacting within the materials and data of a discipline in such a way as to come to a deeper understanding of the basic ideas that drive the theories of the discipline, that create new concepts both within and transferred to other disciplines and make relevant to one's own life the concepts of that discipline (Davis-Seaver, 2000, p. 2).

Holistic education in this sense is not necessarily making students overtly aware of any lesson's intent, or encouraging students to obtain complete freedom from all forms of curriculum, but rather, its purpose is to allow students to find, create, and modify the meanings of what they learn and who they are.

We can find meaning and transform through connecting with our human existence even in an educational setting. To include our personal selves within education we may begin as easily as adding basic lessons that involve our lives in our day-to-day classroom activities and increase the difficulty level of the lessons as the students age. Students should be encouraged to share examples from their lives as it relates to any classroom lesson. Topics that include values and ethics should be discussed. Students should be encouraged to be aware of their own freedom in determining their opinions and critical consciousness, communication, and self-reflective skills should be taught in conjunction with classroom lessons. Our educational systems should encourage students to see their

interconnectedness with others, their curriculum, and their world. By including holistic principles within education it would also assist with recognizing and supporting the individual and their interpersonal discovery that each student goes through.

When the acknowledgment of our lives as relevant through our educational system comes to fruition, a greater sense of meaning may be developed to heal the chasm between what we live and what we learn. By fostering this awareness of the divide between our education and our lives we realize that various tools, such as skills for interacting with others (e.g. communication skills, conflict resolution, and critical consciousness), are necessary in order to process the information that we need to learn.

Through the ability to critically reflect on our knowledge, actions, and actions of others, we may learn to navigate the complicated waters of making meaning, creating a sense of purpose, and being more intertwined with the full condition of life that encircles us. This reflection and action are the tools of understanding our existential consciousness and create meaning towards a more holistic engagement with our lives.

The inhabitants of our current world are multiplying exponentially and therefore our planet is becoming not only more populated, but also more burdened by our demands. Skills that assist us to act together in a manner that creates cooperation rather than competition enhance our futures. Our diminishing resources would be shared and built upon rather than hoarded and depleted. By developing our skills to interact with each other in a more mutually beneficial and respectful manner we may create a future in which the needs of others are considered and more ethical decisions are made based upon our

recognition of the interconnectedness of everything we encounter and do. When we no longer see a difference of opinion as a threat to our identity and when we learn to really listen to others, we may grow to be the good that this world needs. And, as Viktor Frankl reminds us

the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system... it denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself (Frankl, 1984, p. 133).

No form of education can ever teach everyone every necessary bit of knowledge and how the knowledge intertwines with our lives. Therefore, holistic education should be viewed as a more lenient term that allows for the personal space of decision and direction to be applied based upon the situation of each distinct classroom dynamic. Each situation is different and each learning experience needs the room to permit for variations in methods of instruction as compared to our current rigid format in schools. By allowing for *room*, I am not only referring to the physical classroom size, but also for mental capacity to change opinions, methods, and perceptions as necessary. When we open the world to be a ground for learning we create the idea that what goes on in our daily lives is relevant. Each of us would like to feel important and that each of our individual lived experience is significant. Holistic education would bridge this gap between the objective and distant knowledge with the personal, relevant, and meaningful existence by creating a curative culture of education.

## **A Whole Education System**

Our educational system and the educators themselves hold perceived and actual power over students that can drastically shape who we are, what we believe, and how we live. Indirectly we learn many things from our schools and teachers such as whether we are perceived us as worthy of their time and if we are viewed as intelligent or as intellectual failures. Subsequently, we also learn how to conform our identities to match these types of expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 2002). Our identity is the lens through which we perceive the world, including how we see ourselves. Our identity is created in multiple processes, however, the influence of others is a primary means for self-definition (Maalouf, 2003). Our education contains numerous hidden pieces of “societal code” that is filtered to us by our educators and that we integrate into our identity.

Teaching styles have been reduced to training the intellect, and not the type of intellect that critically questions. The current intellect that merely recites names and numbers for a grade, has left us empty, and sadly, spiritually stripped. By placing emphasis on educating students within the realm of pure *knowledge*, there is an implicit assumption that the knowledge cannot or should not be challenged. It is, after all, a recitation of facts that is being taught. This mode of thinking and method of instruction leaves the students and the educators without adequate capability to function in a world requiring moral character and critical engagement.

We need to realize that our educators are teaching their students just as they themselves have been taught and just as they believe to be the *best* manner in which to educate others. Parker Palmer stated that: “teacher-bashing has become a popular sport (because we are) panic-stricken by the demands of our day, we need scapegoats for the problems we cannot solve and the sins we cannot bear” (Palmer P. , 2007, p. 3). When considering this statement, our own culpability for the shortcomings in our educational methods should be taken into account.

Because of how important educators are in our lives, directly and indirectly, their nature as a complete person should be of significant concern to us, particularly when we are discussing an over-haul of our educational system. Therefore what and how we teach our education students should not be limited to lecture materials, but rather to be centered on life lessons. Teachers should demonstrate and take personal interest in their own habits and abilities as well as those of their students. The reason for such knowledge would be to better grasp the uniqueness of each individual in order to build upon their potential as well as to help counter negative aspects of each student. I am in agreement with J. Krishnamurti when he stated that “a direct and vital relationship between teacher and student is almost impossible when the teacher is weighed down by large and unmanageable number” (Krishnamurti, 1981, p. 91). This perspective necessitates a drastic restructuring of our classroom size and providing more individualized attention to students. Without this change our students will continue to remain identity-less bodies

that pass through our education system and the connection between their lives and education will remain unexplored.

While the prospect of change within our educational systems appears daunting, the promise can be made that it will be well worth our efforts and our own reeducation, to ensure that changes do take place. Proposed changes should include a new pedagogy for would-be teachers at all institutional levels that integrates forms of holistic education. While it is probable that an individual without any formal education may successfully impart this type knowledge to others, what I am suggesting is that this situation is not the norm. When we consider that the world we live in is constantly in flux and that we ourselves are evolving, then we should recognize the necessity for additional education tools that enable us to function more effectively given this continual change. We need to instruct our educators on how to function in the classrooms and with the ambiguity of including our existential needs.

The education and the wellbeing of the educator need first to be addressed and modified before holistic education is implemented and carried out on a grander scale. Holistic education can only be effective if we first learn these modes of integration ourselves and then put them into practice for all grade levels. Individuals who wish to proceed into the educational field should be provided with mentors to assist them in becoming better equipped for their roles. Transformation always begins on a personal level. Therefore, transformation for education should begin with the teacher. If holistic measures are to be imparted to students it should start in the teachers' education.

Unfortunately, this means fighting a system in which high demand and low pay leads to insufficiently prepared teachers. Instead, the system should be refined to place importance on the role of the educator in society and yield a culture of higher quality educators. It is amazing the amount of money, time, and energy we put into the physical appearance of our dwellings, cars, and bodies (typically to make us appear to be something we are not). Yet, we invest little in values or insuring a better future for our children. We use catch phrases like “our goals are to make the next generation better than the present” but our consumer habits and educational trends speak in strong opposition to our words.

Although Freud (1989) blamed parents for the mis-education of students, he believed that educational systems also fell drastically short in preparing individuals for the real world. He said that education’s

other sin is that it does not prepare them... sending the young out into life with such a false psychological orientation, education is behaving as though one were to equip people starting on a Polar expedition with summer clothing and maps of the Italian Lakes (Freud, 2005, p. 138).

There are greater psychological implications of education’s actions than many curriculum developers consider. We need to recognize that our personal abilities to create meaning in our lives should have more to do with how we are educated, how we are taught to think, and how we are taught to apply that knowledge. Our combined educational experiences determine the manner in which we successfully or unsuccessfully create this existential meaning that we crave. The missing connections

within education leave us to exist within a vacuum of regulated materials. This vacuity leaves us mentally as not whole, not well, and incapable, without much personal work *after-education*, to fill the existential space. Given that such implications hinge on our educational systems we should push for a holistic form of education in our schools for all grade levels, but should first begin with changes to the education of our educators.

What we must do is enlighten ourselves, our curriculum, and the general publics' connotation of education. Our understanding of education needs to change in order to create it to be more holistic. We need to add additional aspects to our education system that enable us (both educator and student) to become less dualistic in nature, more open to otherness, and more open to the possibilities of connecting our educational existence with our lived existence to counter the current existential crisis. Therefore, all the additions to our curriculum as posed below should also first apply to our educators and the system that governs our curriculum.

### **Integrating Concepts: Critical Consciousness in Curriculum**

Critical consciousness is the ability to contemplate ideas in action as well as the possibilities or future associations for those ideas. It is the tool we need in order to make informed, conscious, and reflective decisions with regard to the information we receive. Without critical consciousness, we absorb various materials, take them on face value, and neglect assigning our own interpretations to them. Whether the interpretations are merely our opinions or our thoughts on applicability or usefulness of the knowledge, critical consciousness is a key tool for integration our education with our lived existence.

Critical consciousness skills should be added to even the youngest of students' educational experience. Through the use of open-ended questions, albeit more simplistic ones at first, as well as inventive exercises, like arts and crafts without step-by-step instructions, we could foster student's creativity towards problem solving. Story time could delve deeper into a narrative discussion. Personal narratives can serve as an example of allowing the space for students to involve themselves with the learning material. By allowing for students to become curious and connected to the material through narratives they develop a deeper interest and a better understanding of what is presented to them. It would also permit for creative thinking and self-directed learning.

Once critical consciousness skills become commonplace earlier in life they can be built upon to become more complex challenges throughout the educational experience. The utilization of *if-then* scenarios, particularly those that are more philosophical in nature, become practical examples when our existential needs are understood in conjunction with what has been presented to us (Davis-Seaver, 2000). For instance, mathematic calculations need not remain as numbers on a page. Mathematical formulas for early teens can be transformed into lessons like the calculation of a home's structure (e.g. distance, area, angles) and what the implication would be if those calculations were changed.

Classes also need not remain segmented into specific bodies of knowledge. For example, science lessons can overlap with our physical education. If students discuss the function of something such as femur bones in biology, they can also learn how they are

connected to the hamstrings that enables their own personal movement. Students could also learn the implications of what damage to any of those areas would mean to the act of ambulation. Progressing with this example further, the rights of physically disabled persons could be discussed to incorporate course material from humanities courses. Using these examples, we can better comprehend how critical consciousness skills can be applied to any class and classroom material. When critical consciousness is applied across the boundaries of traditionally segmented classes it enhances the understanding of the information we are tasked with learning.

Critical consciousness skills are also enhanced when we become involved with the material and learn how to demonstrate our knowledge to others. Students can be asked to take turns in leading discussions or solving problems. When we ask students to place answers on a black board, they should be encouraged to discuss how they arrived at their answers. This type of exercise not only builds understanding of their knowledge, but confidence and self-esteem. It lends to contemplation of the material and interaction with others. Without critical consciousness in the classroom, education will continue without significance for students.

### **Mindfulness in Curriculum**

Presently, teachers and students are asked to perform tasks (e.g. teach, take tests) for which they are held accountable for regardless of their psychological readiness to perform such tasks. It appears almost ridiculous to permit individuals to proceed through life without being taught how to become aware of their mind, body, and world. What we

bring with us into the classroom creates an atmosphere in which we work. Mindfulness in the classroom begins with the physical as well as mental presence of the teacher. In order to include mindfulness in the curriculum the instructor must first be actively engaged with mindful practices. Educators should be proficient in reading their relationship and presence with those in the room. By recognizing that mindfulness is achieved with intent and necessitates attention as well as attunement the teacher may begin each day and class by modeling this kind of behavior (Schoeberlein, 2009). We should be mindful of our emotions and physical state that we are projecting. We must know what the desired end result is for the knowledge and manner of teaching that we are undertaking. And, we must be able to impart the practice of mindfulness to our students. By practicing mindfulness within ourselves first we tap into our own personal connectedness. By being mindful we are enhancing our abilities to understand the necessary existential matters we face. When we are mindful we are more capable of seeing the interwoven fabric of our lives between what we learn, how we live, and what we are passing on as education to others.

For younger ages, instructors may begin with teaching mindfulness through simple tasks such as deep breaths and guided instructions to discuss and focus on a specific topic. If distractions occur, a teacher may call a time out or ring a bell in order to re-center the class again methods to draw the students' attention back towards the subject at hand (Hanh T. N., Planting seeds: Practicing mindfulness with children, 2011). These

types of tasks are simple enough for elementary age students to perform and are the building blocks for developing mindfulness as routine rather than a challenging task.

As mindfulness is paying exquisite attention and being in the moment, the inclusion of reflective exercises that asks students to contemplate their feelings or emotions should be included gradually for advancing the curriculum. Even exercises that function opposite to mindfulness can be learning lessons for students. For example, an exercise may be created to demonstrate the outcomes of not being mindful. By asking children to multitask (e.g. read a story while listening to music and trying to draw), attention is given to the consequences of broken concentration. This allows for the students to experience the results first hand. Exercises such as these can be paired with lessons afterwards that ask the children to reflect on their thoughts during the task and after the task. The students can also be asked to compare the mindful exercises they have had with those that were not mindful (Schoeberlein, 2009). Mindful exercises can be as simple as presenting students with objects or stories that are intended to evoke *knee-jerk* responses. Then, by allowing room for discussion, these *knee-jerk* type situations can be utilized as examples to demonstrate how changes of opinions may occur when more information is presented. As young students in particular are more ruled by emotion (Hanh T. N., Planting seeds: Practicing mindfulness with children, 2011), when we assist them to understand what they may be feeling and why, we may guide them towards deeper reflection with the mindful exercises.

As students progressively develop in their mindfulness skills they should also progress in skills that assist them in relating to their own selves. When students become accustom to re-centering and practicing basic mindfulness techniques, the practices become ritualized, but with the awareness of the mind/body connection instead of thoughtless repetitive motions (Miller J. P., The holistic curriculum, 2007). As the students develop, so too may their applications of mindfulness. What once may have been simple deep breaths can evolve into mental inventories of how one's mind and physical body may be feeling at any given moment. Then, mindfulness can evolve into evaluating whether any particular aspect of one's mind or body requires attention in order proceed with present tasks. Additional lessons may also be added that enhance sensitivity to others as well as consideration for all other aspects of our existence (e.g. climate, animals, distant cultures).

Mindfulness teaches self-awareness and contemplative practices in addition to critical consciousness. Mindfulness is what assists us in focusing our thoughts, cultivating our attentions, in order to align our knowledge with intent. It is an additional tool we need to add to the resources of both the instructors and the students in order to transform our educational system into a more holistic community.

### **Communication in Curriculum**

When we are in the classroom, discussion of topics is limited, the conversation is one sided and the instructor lectures to the classroom. In order to begin to teach communication skills educators must begin to communicate with their students and to

allow them to communicate with others. Our traditional lecture model of instruction should be modified to be more interactive. The more holistic approach to modify our communication within education would include engaging students in conversation and with the material.

At younger grade levels this type of communication and interaction may be as simple as “circle time” in which students and teachers sit in a circle and discuss a story or other activity. Larger classes may be divided into smaller groups for more in depth discussion. The teacher should take the time to interact with each group. Beginning guidelines such as allowing for each student to speak (taking turns) and encouraging language that is supportive rather than dismissive or judgmental provide the students with expectations to follow during the exercise. For older students, language use such as paraphrasing what was just heard lends a sense to others that what they have said was acknowledged. This type of interpersonal communication that recognizes the other should be taught and encouraged. Phrases as simple as “yes”, particularly when used in conjunction with head nodding or slightly leaning towards the speaker, supports continual dialogue as well as serves to impress upon others that you are paying attention. These behaviors also aid in verbally and physically expressing that what was said had been comprehended, or at least was being followed mindfully. If what was being said was not understood, then teaching tools such as simple inquisitive questions, like “would you please explain that more to me”, develops skills that enhance comprehension as well as

dialogue. Practices such as this encourages “eye contact, turn-taking, listening skills and individual thinking” (Nash, Lowe, & Palmer, 2011, p. xvii).

### **Conflict Resolution in Curriculum**

Conflict, even at small levels, is inevitable, and in particular the chances of conflict are increased with the additional inter-personal interaction. In order to address this, the existence of disagreements or conflicts should be acknowledged as a natural and valid part of our lives. Even at a young age children recognize situations that feel unfair to them. Unfortunately in situations like these, teachers sometimes act as judge and jury for the situation. When events like these arise and the teacher is left to correct or discipline, outcomes such as resentment (e.g. if the teacher does not know the full set of events and makes an improper decision) and discouraging empowerment (e.g. students learn helplessness to act) occur. Rather than allowing for teachers to be the sole responsible party, it is beneficial to teach students how to address conflict for themselves. To teach students proactively at younger ages, we can include regular exercises to encourage right thinking, right action, and how to react when a situation deviates from being harmonious.

Additionally, beginning levels of conflict education can be imparted through teaching methods such as “I” communication, encouraging “win-win” behavior, and working through conflict scenarios as a group (Adams, 1994). “I” communication teaches and encourages students to reflect on what they are thinking and feeling rather than by assigning blame with “you” centered statements. By teaching students to reflect

(again this utilizes additional skills such as critical consciousness and mindfulness) on their own emotions and intent in order to communicate, it should be impressed upon them that statements that utilize the word “I” are more personal, more expressive, and less accusatory. Through demonstrating to students how statements such as “I feel”, “I think”, and “that made me feel” differ from speaking or hearing statements that are worded as “you did/didn’t”, “you should/shouldn’t”, or “you are / you are not”, students become more aware of how they speak and respond to others (Adams, 1994). “I” statements encourage personal responsibility towards how we feel and react as well as help to avoid further conflict through refraining from directly assigning blame.

*Win-win* behavior can be modeled through exercises that demonstrate outcomes in which students both win, both lose, or in which only one wins. When situations such as these are discussed and worked through in groups, students learn to brainstorm towards cooperative solutions. They learn that creative solutions can be generated to encourage alternatives and healthier group norms are reinforced through the problem solving. This also assists in allowing all students learn what are and are not acceptable practices. In earlier years of education, an example such as what to do when two students who both wish to draw with the same crayon can be utilized as a group point of discussion. By brain-storming in a group setting to demonstrate how both can win by share using it (e.g. taking turns) as compared to one child running away with it (win-lose) or the teacher taking it from both (lose-lose), students learn more effective and fair modes of interactions. At an older age, game theories typically found in political science courses,

such as the *prisoner's dilemma*, can be taught to demonstrate win-win scenarios on a different scale.

By working through scenarios in groups, such as discussing bullying, students can express what is not appropriate behavior, how it may make them, or others feel, and work through examples of how to address the problems when they arise. Again, as students age, more complex scenarios (e.g. peer pressure or illegal acts) may be approached through group discussion. Higher-level critical consciousness is employed to contemplate various factors including moral values and ethics on both a more personal level and on levels that reach into the local community and even globally.

As an added benefit, this type of communication necessitates and promotes mindfulness in conjunction critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, mindfulness, and communication are linked together when we consider that exercises such as circle time necessitate contemplation of topics, interpersonal interaction, as well as awareness (mindfulness) of what the individual and others in the group are saying. Once students are exposed to a more interactive teaching method on a regular basis, the students' abilities to interact with others increase and become more commonplace. These types of exercises are the beginnings for interpersonal education.

### **Sample Semester Long Educational Program for Teen Aged Students**

By using our third chapter's interviews as inspiration as well as the general information outlined earlier, I will now describe a sample educational program for teen aged students that incorporates these aspects of a more holistic education. In order to do

this, I will use the concept of an average high school elective class that meets for approximately 84 minutes once a week for a semester (18 weeks). Elective courses are fairly common in the high school grades and can be taken in lieu of a study period, free period, or other non-core type course. Although I believe elementary education would be the optimal age to begin basic lessons in a more holistic form of education, I feel that the lessons would be better integrated within the average classroom day. Therefore, this example is tailored for a high school aged group and would be better suited for the creation of an elective type course.

While creating this class as an elective generates the initial critique that potentially only students who have an inclination towards this type of thinking may choose to participate, I would argue that these students could then in turn act as role models for others. Students also typically tell their friends about classes they enjoyed and I feel that such a course as holistic learning would be of interest to more students once the concept was explained through word of mouth.

### **Objective and General Structure**

The main objectives for the course would be to teach the basics of topics that have been covered in this dissertation that lend themselves to creating a more holistic education. However, in order to create a structure that is better understood in laymen's terms to this example of an elective course, we would correlate and name each topic as a relationship. The topics would therefore be presented on the syllabus in less ambiguous terms than we have used so far in this dissertation. For example, instead of calling the

weeks lessons “mindfulness, critical contemplation, communication / conflict reduction, and existential matters”, the topic headings would include the relationship of the classroom and students, students and student, students and curriculum, and students and community. The purpose of this renaming would be to present seemingly non-scholastic ideas in a manner that relates each to a function of education.

In class learning materials would include subject matter experts (e.g. mindfulness practitioners, mediators), movies / videos, role-playing, handouts, personal questionnaires / evaluations, group discussions, readings and quiet contemplative time. Homework assignments would be minimal and recommended readings would be made available. Brief student / teacher check-ins would be conducted throughout the semester to assess whether there were any issues of concern regarding the learning materials. An open door policy for contacting the teacher outside of class (e.g. office hours, email, phone) would be enacted for any issues students may have that they wish to discuss in private.

The class size would be limited to thirty or less (preferably twenty or less) students to encourage interpersonal interaction. When in the classroom, students would sit in smaller groups of desks or in a larger group circle also to encourage student interaction and to reduce any perceived front or back row student as well as teacher dominance (i.e. lecturing from the front). Lessons would be built upon the previous exercises and incorporated into each successive learning. There would be no grade for this course other than a simple “pass”, “fail”, or “incomplete” only because our current school system requires one or the other. As the course would be an elective, an required

progress reports would be based upon student participation instead of tests. This lack of grading and test taking would assist in reducing grade anxiety as well as reduce real or perceived competition. However, as this sample elective course is meant to fit into most current school class structures, there still exists a necessity for evaluation. Participation evaluations would include working with others, on collaborative projections or through acknowledgement of support for others, and follow through on general assignments.

Two main assignments will comprise half of the course. The first assignment would be a two week long self-directed independent research project into any topic of the student's interest that they felt would be related to the general class concept, beneficial for themselves and others in the class to learn, and to be presented during the following two weeks (middle of the semester). The students will be encouraged to check in with the instructor via email, telephone or in person. The classroom time will be left open for the students to research their topics, but the instructor will be present in the designated room to assist with any questions. Suggestions and examples for independent research include, but are not limited to: spending time with a group that the student would typically not associate with and reflect on that experience (e.g. attend a catholic mass if atheist), attend yoga classes, or do more in-depth research into a topic touched upon in class by reading an entire book on the topic, completing a written assignment, preparing visual presentation, or something similar (e.g. reading Hahn's full book *Anger* and write a short paper reflecting on the book). All projects, topics, and methods by each student will require preapproval from the instructor. This assignment would have the intent of

allowing students to experience self-directed learning with guidance (related to Montessori-type teachings) and teach students critical contemplation skills (e.g. determining what concepts may be related to the course and how to approach new ideas). The assignment also has the intent of demonstrating to students the value of exploring ideas, particularly new concepts, in depth to gain better insight into not only the topic in question, but also to their own personal relationship with the topics. In particular, students will be asked to approach their research topic / project with open mindedness, respect, and genuine curiosity. They are to reflect on and report back as to why they chose their topic, what they learned about the topic, what they may have learned about themselves, and what they feel would be beneficial for other to learn about their topic.

The last assignment would be for the students to take one of the lessons learned from the class into practice into their world outside of school for three weeks and report back on their experience on the fourth and fifth weeks (final two of the last three school weeks). This again would assist students with self-directed learning experiences and critical contemplation. It would also help the students better understand how what they learn can be practiced outside of the classroom. This assignment also will hopefully demonstrate to the students that there are other venues for learning outside of the classroom and that their learning experiences outside of the classroom can be brought back into the class as a learning experience for all to share. All projects, topics, and methods by each student will require preapproval from the instructor. Just as with the first assignment, class time will be left open for independent work, but the instructor will

also be available during this time for students as needed. Students are encouraged to find local individuals or community groups that they could work or volunteer with for a minimum of three weeks. This assignment is similar to the first in that the students are to reflect on and report back as to why they chose their topic, what they learned about the topic, what they may have learned about themselves, and what they feel would be beneficial for other to learn about their topic. However, this assignment differs as the majority of this assignment surrounds the requirement to interact with others. Some examples of projects are: volunteering at a local nursing home and engaging with the resident(s) (active listening), practicing mindfulness & or conflict resolution skills with intent at home for the entire duration, volunteer with a local organization identified as one that builds and or assists part of the community (e.g. service learning opportunities, food / health programs, mentor / buddy programs, internship with an outreach group). Students are expected to gain a different perspective of what and where learning is in our lives. They are also expected to be able to share with the other students their experiences that they had outside of the classroom in order to learn that what they may experience in their lives can be brought back to the classroom in a manner that is deemed scholastic enough to be included in their curriculum.

Learning materials, actual course structure, and assignments would be subject to modification as well as assessment throughout the semester based upon the individual classroom dynamics. Instructors will have had received prior basic experience and training in all of the topics to be presented. Teachers are also to understand the necessity

for fluidity in the classroom with regard to the presented detailed structure below and allow for the room any modifications that may be needed.

### **Course Syllabus by Week**

**Week 1** – Course introduction. Syllabus review, clarification of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Basic classroom meet and greet, getting to know you exercise (e.g. meet 3 people in this class who have \_\_\_\_\_, who like \_\_\_\_\_, who have \_\_\_\_\_). Readings: Hahn – Mindfulness (Weekly goal: course outline and humanizing / creating connections to our classmates. Weekly method: group interaction)

**Week 2** – The Classroom and Student Relationship: Subject matter expert in mindfulness. Basic background information and benefits of mindfulness information. Mind / Body awareness practices. (breath, presence, intent). Weekly take home assignment: Practice skills learned in class. Readings: hooks – Love (Weekly goal: Mindfulness. Learning to be aware of our presence and our bodies / minds. Weekly method: outside class source expert)

**Week 3** – The Classroom and Student Relationship: Group discussion of last week's exercise. Discussion of classroom dynamics (e.g. seating structure purpose) and discussion of ways in which to be mindful when in the classroom. Learning to suspend judgment, learning to listen, and learning to be open to new concepts. Weekly take home assignment: Practice skills learned in class. Reading: Hahn – Anger and Maalouf (Weekly goal: Mindfulness, critical contemplation, and communication with others. Learning about our interactions with others. Weekly method: lecture and discussion)

**Week 4 – The Student and Student Relationship: Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Relationships** – Group discussion of last week’s exercise. Discussion of general class requests with regard to be mindful of other’s presence and differences. Learning about the *other* and ourselves (identity). Brainstorming of ideas on how to be active listeners and how to share one’s ideas with mindful intent. Assignment: Generate list of current self-defining identities and investigate at least one of those identities alternative. Reading: Lederach (Weekly goal: Mindfulness, critical contemplation, communication with others, and self-reflection. Learning about our interactions with others and the basis for our own identity. Weekly method: lecture, discussion, and individual work)

**Week 5 – The Student and Student Relationship: Communications and Conflict.** Group discussion of last week’s exercise (no specific identities required to be shared). Questioning assumptions, origins, and suspending judgment. Conflict types, self-evaluation of conflict type questionnaires. Weekly assignment: Contemplate what, if anything has been learned that was not anticipated or different than we previously believed. Reading: Miller, Friere, and hooks (Weekly goal: Learning about and critically reflecting on our conflict patterns. Weekly method: lecture, discussion, and individual questionnaire)

**Week 6 – The Student and Curriculum Relationship: Critical Consciousness –** Discussion of the week’s assignment. Discussion of conflict resolution practices. Role-playing – approaching others with mindfulness, self-awareness, intent, and basic interaction skills. Discussion of next three week’s assignment. (Weekly goal: Basic

conflict resolution in practice. Weekly method: discussion and roll playing group work)

**Week 7** – Outside the classroom work: Related area of interest independent study

**Week 8** – Outside the classroom work: Related area of interest independent study

**Week 9** – Presentations: Report outs on independent studies

**Week 10** – Presentations: Report outs on independent studies

**Week 11** – The Student and Curriculum Relationship: Critical Consciousness

continued – reflections on independent studies. Prisoner’s Dilemma game. Discussion of test taking, grading, competition, and resources. Assignment: Identify resources in the community that encourage community and resources that discourage community.

Contemplate how the one(s) that discourage community may be changed to encourage community instead. Reading: Moffett (Weekly goal: Demonstrate benefits to collaboration and identifying community learning opportunities. Weekly method: discussion, group work, review of local community groups via video and web pages)

**Week 12** – The Student and Community Relationship: Discussion of last week’s assignment. Discussion of learning through the community: Lessons we can learn and lessons we can share with others. How we act can model behavior for others. Review of upcoming assignment. (Weekly goal: Existential concerns. Identify what lessons we learn in school can be modeled in the community and what community lessons could be modeled in our schools. Weekly method: discussion)

**Week 13** – Outside the classroom work: lessons taken out into the community

**Week 14** – Outside the classroom work: lessons taken out into the community

**Week 15** – Outside the classroom work: lessons taken out into the community

**Week 16** – Presentations: Report outs on community experiments

**Week 17** – Presentations: Report outs on community experiments

**Week 18** – Last class: General class discussion of lessons learned, suggestions for improvements and aspects that were great.

General readings: (to be read in class or brief segments after school)

Freire: Education for critical consciousness (Freire P. , 2007).

Hooks: Teaching critical thinking (hooks, 2010) and All about love (hooks, 2001)

Lederach: Preparing for peace (Lederach, 1996).

Maalouf: In the name of identity (Maalouf, 2003).

Miller: In the throe of wonder (Miller J. A., 1992).

Moffett: The universal schoolhouse (Moffett, 1994) (Moffett, 1994).

Thich Nhat Hanh: Anger (Hanh T. N., 2001) and The miracle of mindfulness

(Hanh T. N., 1999).

## **Summary**

Again, the above out-lined curriculum is one that I believe would fit within our current educational system until such time as a more thorough change in the system takes place. Courses such as this elective would serve the purpose of opening student's minds to the possibilities of creating a more holistic form of education. It would give them a basic introduction to these types of topics and hopefully encourage them to continue down the path of education with more critical consciousness, but also serve as leaders for

others in this area. Additional similar advanced elective courses could also be offered that went more in depth into these types of topics that fall within the realm of a more holistic form of education. The hope is that not only would the students begin to have a better sense of what they crave in their education, but that they would also begin to see how they can carry their educational experiences out into their lives as well as bring their life experiences into the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

As I have indicated, I believe our current educational system approaches the world outside as a distant and abstract concept. Our educational existence focuses inward and what matters in the end are the grades we receive and how much money we can make as a result of our educational success. Great stock is set by these materialistic values. Our society teaches us quick fixes, duct tape on the broken pieces, and is lacking in proactive approaches to assist us in elemental aspects of development. As adults we often resort to yelling and other behaviors that are reminiscent of childhood behaviors. It should come as no surprise that the maladaptive type behaviors we are repeating are indeed from our childhood. We repeat the patterns that we have learned through our formative years. Therefore, it is all the more important that education begins to center on the individual and linking the individuals to the world at large. We need to teach them that they have freedom of meaning creation and to teach them the tools that will assist them with becoming individuals who exercise these abilities.

Through the addition of practices such as mindfulness, critical consciousness, conflict resolution, and existential concerns to our curriculum, we will make steps towards creating an educational system that is more holistic in its treatment of its very special and important clients: our students and our future creators. We must repair and restore our educational practices to be more reflective of precisely who and what we wish for our future.

None of us exist in a vacuum and neither should our education. We are sentient beings that are interconnected to and interdependent with the rest of our world. Interaction with others is therefore a necessity and the understanding of our selves and our world is imperative. Learning how to critically think and question is crucial given the challenges we will face in our lifetime. Practicing mindfulness out of habit, rather than in rare instances, or with effort, should be the norm to ensure we live and act with thoughtful intent. Incorporating our existence with our knowledge, skills, and abilities enhances our understanding of our lives. And, learning how to interact with others as well as to work through differences not only generates a more cohesive atmosphere, but also creates the room for greater potential through collaboration, understanding, and respect.

Regardless of all the themes we add to our curriculum, we may never fully eradicate all of society's ills through education. However, we can ameliorate some ills and perhaps prevent some in the process. The question that we can pose to educators of successive generations is *what outcome do we wish to achieve for and with our students*. My answer to this question is that I do not wish to continue to see a future that is based

upon binary questions and answers, one that competes rather than collaborates, and one in which individuals are disconnected from themselves and their societies. I believe that a holistic mode of being necessitates values, ethics, and morals that are consistent with my ultimate future vision for our educational system. By reflecting on what kind of future we wish to create, I hope the answers generated by others center on a holistic vision that is in favor of the recognition of our vast interconnectedness with ourselves, others, and our planet.

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## APPENDIX A

### METHODOLOGY SECTION

#### Method

##### Introduction

Irving Seidman stated “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013 pg. 9). Semi-structured, or open-ended, qualitative interviews serve to delve into the opinions and experiences of individuals who have witnessed or lived through a specific event according to Jerry Willis (2007). In the case of this research, the overarching goal was to delve deeper into the understanding of holistic educational and to exemplify its methods in practice. Because of this need to better understand how individuals experience and perceive alternative forms of holistic education, qualitative research interviews were utilized in order to support the holistic education theories and suggestions featured throughout this dissertation.

Jerry Willis (2007) stated that there are various types of qualitative research methods (e.g. interviews, shadowing, and ethnographies) with subgroups of each type (e.g. focus group is classified under interviews), and each research method has their own particular strength. Therefore, an initial analysis of the goal for this research was identified as the need to enhance our understanding of how an educational system that is more holistic, and therefore more connected to our lives, may function not just through theory but also in practice. The utilization of first hand accounts was chosen due to the

nature of qualitative interviews as described by Seidman (2013) to be *an interest in understanding the lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience.*

Although qualitative research is comprised of information that, for the most part, cannot be standardized into neat quantitative categories (e.g. yes or no responses), it provided the benefit of allowing for subjective and open-ended responses that varied and permitted for a greater understanding of the interviewees' thoughts and perceptions on a our subject matter (Weiss, 1994). After the specific topic for investigation had been chosen, Sharan Merriam (2009) stated that the researcher should next identify specific key questions surrounding the research topic that he or she wishes to better understand. In the case of this research, the more in depth question that was deemed central to this inquiry included how individuals changed in behavior or attitude as a result of experiencing a program that included instruction methods found in the theories surrounding holistic education<sup>4</sup>.

As Merriam (2009) mentioned with regard to qualitative research, it is common that the interviewees' responses often vary from the anticipated answers. This provided an additional benefit such that the research gained insight into aspects of holistic education that had not initially been considered, such as the ability for participants in holistic education practices to serve as leaders and role models in unanticipated ways outside of the learning environment (e.g. speaking out against hate speech at a party). It is for this reason that the qualitative interview research method was beneficial with the

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix C for a list of initial questions that were posed to the interviewees.

identification of additional details that otherwise may have been overlooked with more quantitative research such as questionnaires.

Following the clarification of research goals and questions, Michael Patton (2002) stated that the source of participants should be identified. In the case of this research, the research participant source was from the AnyTown program as offered by *The National Conference for Community and Justice*. This organization and program was chosen due to the action words listed in their mission statement of *educating, empowering, and liberating* their participants so that they may become *effective, responsible leaders and community builders*<sup>5</sup>. Standard ethical guidelines were followed for the qualitative research interviews as specified by the supervising institution's regulations. Guidelines for this research were outlined by the Institutional Review Board, as part of the Office for Human Research Protections department, in order to secure and ensure necessary standards were met in order to protect the research participants. Procedures and specifics of this research are as detailed in the following sections.

### Participants

Five participants were interviewed for the purpose of research chapter 3. Each of these individuals interviewed were over the age of 18 and estimated to be no older than 22. Given the maximum age estimation, the average age was calculated to be 20, with the majority of participants being between the age of 18 and 20. Actual ages were not required to be stated by the participants. The only requirement was that participants acknowledged and agreed that their ages were at least that of 18 years of age or older at

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nccj.org/programs-anytown>

the time of the interviews. All those interviewed were currently attending or getting ready to attend an undergraduate college. Two of the interviewees were male and three were female. One male identified as Caucasian, one male identified as African American, and the three females identified as one of the following ethnicities: African American, Middle-Eastern American or Hispanic American. 40% of the interviewees were African American, 20% were Caucasian, 20% were Eastern American and 20% were Hispanic American. 60% of those interviewed were female and 40% were male. Sexual orientation, religious, class status and other classifiable categories were not requested to be revealed by the interviewees. Any such participant who divulged this information did so on their own accord without prompting.

Each participant in the sample group had initially attended the AnyTown Program as a camper (delegate) during their high school years and were either about to attend the program as a camp counselor, had already served as a camp counselor or had already served and were serving again as a camp counselor.

#### Procedure / Design

The local office of The National Conference for Community and Justice were approached at the beginning of this study for approval to interview individuals who had participated in their AnyTown program. The local director was provided with written letters of reference from the faculty supervising this study, examples of previous interview research experience, and information indicating as well as outlining the Institutional Review Boards policies, procedures, and requirements. In person meetings

as well as on-line communications were carried out in order to review the above-mentioned process.

The development and communications director of NCCJ was assigned the task of identifying willing participants in this study. All camp counselors during the year of 2011 were offered the opportunity to be interviewed. However, of those who indicated their interest in participating, only five responded to the actual interview request. No gender, race, sexual orientation, religious or socioeconomic preference was requested by the interviewer. The only requirement for participation in the interviews was that each interviewee had to have been a camp delegate at one point in time, had or was going to serve as a camp counselor, and was over the age of 18. The sample group utilized for this research falls under the category of a sample of convenience, meaning, participation was open to a large group of individuals and those who responded in the affirmative were interviewed. No individual who wished to be interviewed was turned away.

The development and communications director of NCCJ provided basic information regarding the intent of this research project to the camp counselors of 2011 and then provided contact information for the parties interested in participating to the researcher. Phone numbers and or email addresses were the contact information provided to the researcher for those interested in participating in the interviews. Upon first contact with each interested party, the researcher outlined the basic information of the research at hand, the approximate length of time the interviews would last, reassured the individuals of complete confidentiality, the possibility of any harm within the study (limited), that

their participation was entirely voluntary, that they could stop at any time, and that there would be no compensation for their time. Five final interviewees responded in the affirmative to granting an interview and appeared in person for the interview. Interviews took place between July 2011 and March 2012 under the auspices of the Institutional Review Board of the North Carolina of Greensboro as well as the chair of this dissertation's committee.

Interviewees were each met at their requested date, time of day, and location. Four of the interviews were conducted at the local NCCJ office in a private room and one interview was conducted outside of a local campus restaurant.

Upon meeting the interviewees in person, they were each briefed again on the purpose of the study (their AnyTown experience in which they may have experienced or witness transformation), the estimated length of time the interviews would take (1 hour), reassurance that the individual would have complete confidentiality, the possibility of any harm within the study (sensitive topics may be approached), that their participation was entirely voluntary, that they could stop at any time, and that there would be no compensation for their time. The interviewees were each given a copy of a consent form<sup>6</sup> that they then read and signed in front of the interviewer. Each interviewee was also given a copy of the consent form for their records as well as the researcher and supervisory board's contact information should there have been any questions, comments, or a wish to withdraw from the study.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B for a copy of the complete consent form

The interviewees were notified that their conversation would be recorded by means of a digital voice recorder, that the conversation would be deleted from digital voice records once transcribed, the transcriptions would be kept electronically under password protection, and that pseudonyms of their choosing would be utilized for identification purposes within the content of this dissertation. The interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour and a half. Upon completion of each interview the participants were again reminded of their voluntary participation and then thanked for their time.

#### Measures / Materials

Each participant was asked a scripted series of open-ended questions<sup>7</sup> that they were informed they could answer or pass. Each interviewee chose to answer all the questions asked as well as questions that were posed in addition to the scripted questions in order to lend clarity to the initial points.

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed into word document format. Handwritten notes in the interviewer's own shorthand were also taken during interviews to note any physical characteristic or mannerism of the interviewees which may have had relevance. These notes were also transcribed into word document format.

Transcribed interviews were reviewed and coded as to their fit into one of five categories of research interest for the completion of chapter 3: 1. Covert and overt biases and prejudices 2. Learning experiences 3. Leading by example / services as a reference group 4. Transformation and healing and 5. Future potential of NCCJ's program being

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C for a copy of questions asked of the interviewees

applicable to general educational studies. Coded sections of the transcript were then utilized in the form of quotations, under the pseudonyms of each participant, as appropriate per section of chapter 3.

#### Limitations / Future Suggestions

The limitations of this study include the small amount of respondents (5) to the request for interviews and the lack of other representational demographics such as a Caucasian female, Latin American male, and Middle Eastern American male as well as other representational groups. Other short-comings of this study include the lack of categorical identifies such as religious or sexual orientation and any long-term effect that NCCJ may have had on the participants. While this study did capture any change the participants may have experienced before and after their involvement with NCCJ (a minimum of two years) the study lacks any longer-range measurements. This study also did not utilize any form of qualitative analysis that may prove beneficial in indicating whether there was any data of statistical significance.

Suggestions for future research include the utilization of questionnaires for qualitative data as well as information for classification purposes. A long-term follow up with participants may assist with research that would indicate whether any results from participation in the NCCJ program were lasting and if the respondents continued to report positive life changes as a direct relation to their experience.

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

#### **CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM**

Project Title: **Educational Healing: Observing attitude change surrounding prejudices and biases in conjunction with directed educational measures**

Project Director: Dr. H. Svi Shapiro / Colleen P. McNickle

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What is the study about?**

The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of individuals' attitude and belief changes when engaged with critical consciousness on such topics as bridging difference gaps. The objective is to ascertain what, if any, cognitive and paradigm changes occurred in the participants after their experience with the NCCJ program that led them to return to serve as adult counselors.

#### **Why are you asking me?**

I am asking you to participate in this study as they have been identified as a peer counselor in the weeklong NCCJ AnyTown program that the researcher would like to know more about. All participants in this program are eligible to participate in this study due to the program's objective of developing critical consciousness skills.

#### **What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in the standard programs as provided and pre-planned by the NCCJ AnyTown program. If agreed upon, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher in a private setting that will last less than two hours. You will also be asked to allow written and audio notes to be taken, none of which will contain any identifying information.

#### **Is there any audio/video recording?**

There will be audio recording conducted during this research with your permission only. Audio recording will not include your name and will be utilized by the researcher only to verify the accuracy of my written note taking.

#### **What are the dangers to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Emotional risk is a potential, although incredibly low, in this study due to the sensitive nature of the topics to be covered during facilitated discussions by the NCCJ AnyTown

program to promote critical questioning, critical consciousness, and cognitive dissonance. Some of these facilitated discussions include participant's confronting and questioning their own current beliefs and assumptions. Risks in general are low and benefits include participant's ability to serve as peer leaders in the communities and schools to assist in community and relationship building.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482 Questions about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. H. Svi Shapiro, who may be contacted by phone at (336) 334-3466 and via email [hsshapiro@uncg.edu](mailto:hsshapiro@uncg.edu) OR Colleen P. McNickle who may be contacted at (333) 707-4226 and via email at [cpmcnick@uncg.edu](mailto:cpmcnick@uncg.edu)

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study, however, potential benefits for the participants in the NCCJ AnyTown program research may include, but is not limited to, recognition of positive personal development and growth.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

The society at large may benefit from not only more self-aware student populations which can potentially decrease conflict, but also the society at large can potentially benefit from the model of NCCJ AnyTown by incorporating lessons learned into standard educational practices to decrease conflict, increase sensitivity, and perpetuate progressive critical consciousness.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

Consent forms will be stored under lock and key at researcher's home in a fire proof secure locked safe separate from the research location. Any handwritten notes or recordings will be initially on the person (researcher) at all times during research either in hand or in a zippered and locked briefcase on the researcher's person when not in use. Researcher abbreviations will be utilized for privacy during note taking. Handwritten observational notes will also be stored in the zippered and locked secure location that only the researcher has access to during the time between interviews, during travel, and prior to transcription completions. Audio recording will be on a digital recorder, names will not be used, and the recorder will be kept in a separate secure location from the consent forms. The recorder will be stored in the zippered and locked secure location that only the researcher has access to during the time between interviews, during travel, and prior to transcription completions. Post research, the handwritten & audio notes will be transcribed to electronic data and stored on a computer that is password protected to which only the researcher has access. All handwritten notes will be destroyed upon transcription by means of a paid professional data protection service known as "Shred It". The same service and procedure will be utilized for the consent forms after they are

determined to be able to be destroyed after three years. Audio recordings will be deleted from the recorder after transcribed and any recording data will be ensured to be wiped clean.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you initially choose to participate in this study and decide at any later point in time that participation is no longer desired that you may withdraw from participation without consequences of any kind. You may also choose to not participate in this research study at all.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Colleen P. McNickle.

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

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

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for

\_\_\_\_\_ (pseudonym)

1. Would you please briefly explain to me your motivation to become an NCCJ AnyTown counselor?
2. Have you participated in other leadership programs? What are some key ways in which they differ or seem similar to the NCCJ Program?
3. What have you personally found the importance of the NCCJ program to be in general?
4. Did you grow up with prejudices in your school or family? If you are comfortable talking about this, would you explain this to me please?
5. Has the NCCJ AnyTown program (both your experience as a counselor and as a student) altered you & your life experiences? Please describe any of these changes with a specific example if possible, particularly if any of the values learned at NCCJ was utilized in your life and/or community.
6. Do you feel that what you learned the NCCJ program has had a therapeutic or healing effect in your life? If so, how? Examples: Feel less angry, less scared, more likely to approach others perceived as different in an open and friendly manner, more connected to others or community, more comfortable considering alternative perspectives.
7. Have any of the previously mentioned changes helped you approach the way in which you learn or experience new ideas or concepts in general? How so?
8. Is there anything you would like to share with me that you think is important that I forgot to ask?