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A holistic approach to early childhood education

– An exploratory study of a holistic approach
to early childhood education in India

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the idea and method of holistic education and if traces of these can be found in four preschool teachers' statements about their practices in two private preschools located in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. Working holistically is something which UNESCO (Marope & Kaga, 2015) recommends when it comes to early childhood care and education. In a developing country like India primary education is important to growth and development. It is one of the main sustainable development goals and early childhood education is considered a means to reach this goal. This study aims to provide some insight into what a holistic approach to early childhood education can entail.

In this study I have explored literature to gain a theoretical knowledge of the idea and working methods of holistic education through a literature review. I then conducted a qualitative interview study where I traced the ideas and methods found in the literature in four preschool teachers' statements about their practices to gain an understanding of what ideas and methods found in a preschool setting can be considered to lead to holistic outcomes. The results show that the idea and methods of holistic education, as I understand it through the literature review, were evident in the teachers' statements to various extent, and that that inclusion, balance and connections lead to holistic education. Even though the teachers do not explicitly work with holistic education as Miller (2007, 2010) describes it, this study found that the practices of the teachers, as described by them, promote similar ideas and the same methods could be found. This study can provide a concrete understanding of what a holistic approach to early childhood education can and should involve.

Keywords: Holistic education, holistic approach, holistic, preschool, preschool teacher, early childhood care and education, early childhood, India, social constructivism, literature review, qualitative interviews

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1. Introduction and background

1.1. Introduction to the study

The aim of this study is to explore the idea and working method of holistic education and explore if traces of these can be found in four preschool teachers' statements about their practices in two private preschools located in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends working holistically when it comes to early childhood care and education (Marope & Kaga, 2015). In a developing country like India primary education is important to growth and development. It is one of the main sustainable development goals and early childhood education is considered a means to reach this goal. Since Sweden also follows the recommendations of UNESCO it is thus interesting to me, as a future preschool teacher with an intercultural profile, to gain an understanding of what a holistic approach to early childhood education can and should entail.

1.2. Background

For almost three and a half years now I have studied to become a preschool teacher in Sweden. My specific programme has an intercultural profile to it. This intercultural profile has meant that I have developed a greater understanding and appreciation of differences in cultures, languages and ways of being in familiar/local levels up to international levels (Lunneblad, 2009). As a future preschool teacher I was curious to see and explore another country's preschools so I applied for a SIDA scholarship to do a minor field study in another country as a means to further my intercultural awareness. SIDA is a Swedish government organisation with the aim to reduce poverty in the world (SIDA, 2014). One of the requirements for the scholarship was that the study should be conducted in a developing country as defined by the DAC list¹ and that it should revolve around the United Nations Millennium Goals². I chose to conduct my study in India since this is a very diverse country with many cultures, and I thought it would be interesting to explore their preschools to further my intercultural awareness. While in the field the concept of holistic education became interesting because working holistically is also a concept, which UNESCO uses in its recommendations for education and early childhood education. The term holistic includes care and education in the development of the child with an emphasis on developing the whole child. According to UNESCO seeing to the whole child means developing her or his emotional, social, physical and cognitive needs to develop a good foundation for lifelong learning and well-being (Marope

¹ See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/DAC%20List%20of%20ODA%20Recipients%202014%20final.pdf> (accessed 2015-12-17)

² See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (accessed 2015-10-29)

and Kaga, 2015, p.17, UNESCO, 2011 p.7-9). Since India has agreed to follow UNESCO's guidelines I found the subject of holistic education relevant to my study.

Upon arrival in India, I was given the information of two private English medium preschools, one playschool and one kindergarten, which my contact people suggested I visit. After having visited them, I decided to study what developmental areas of the children the teachers work with and how they do this. After studying both schools' manuals and curriculums my interest was directed toward the holistic curriculum since both schools' curriculums mentioned this concept. The playschool uses the term holistic to describe its curriculum which works to provide possibilities for all-round development which include intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic, sensorial, social and spiritual development. The kindergarten's mission statement states a wish to provide opportunities for holistic learning and growth which includes the six domains numeracy, language, creative, physical, cognitive, and personal, social and emotional development. The term holistic can entail many things depending on the context and who uses it, and there is no one explanation for it. Since I am to follow the Swedish preschool curriculum which states that "activities should be based on a holistic view of the child and his or her needs and be designed so that care, socialization and learning together form a coherent whole" (Skolverket, 2011, p.4) it makes sense that I should explore what a holistic approach to early childhood education can include.

1.2.1. The history of Holistic Education

Today many feel that the school systems focus too much on testing and scores, and developing basic academic skills rather than developing the whole child which includes other important aspects of human life beyond the working life. The schools and the children have become a part of a lifestyle based on consumption and materialism in a world of environmental destruction and corporate corruption. As a response to this development, or rather stagnation of ideas of teaching in an ever changing world, the holistic education movement has grown, especially in North America, but also Denmark, Japan and Korea (Miller, 2010, p. 4-8). Even at a preschool level this can be found even though, as Perlstein (in Miller, 2010, p 4) found, teachers have the opportunity to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the children. Hedges and Cooper's (2014) research in the USA, UK and New Zealand have shown that when the early childhood education suppliers apply a more playful way of working towards holistic outcomes the parents wish for a more academically focused education to prepare the children for the upcoming school years. The authors mean this is due to the lack of understanding of the early year's curriculum and pedagogy which do not meet the parents' expectations of learning language, academic skills and culture. Their belief being that play experiences do not teach academic concepts because this was not recognizable to the parents (Hedges & Cooper, 2014, p. 396-397).

Holistic education has roots dating back to the Greeks according to John Miller (2007, p. 67). Miller writes that it is largely based on a perennial philosophy which is a universal philosophy that respects the “diversity of spiritual traditions and practices” (Miller, 2007, p. 16). The philosophical standpoint of perennial philosophy acknowledges that the universe is in process and that unity underlies diversity and change. The relationship between the whole and the part, the many and the one, is at the centre of perennial philosophy (Miller, 2007, p. 17-18). Mahmoudi et al. (2012) state that holistic education has developed out of more than the perennial philosophy. Indigenous worldviews, life philosophy, ecological worldview, systems theory, as well as feminist thoughts are also a part of holistic education. However, it is the spiritual and mystical ideas which set holistic education apart from most other philosophies (Miller, 2007, Mahmoudi et al. 2012). There have been some critique toward holistic education. Blaicklock (2010) questions the effectiveness of the holistic early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki since there have been no studies conducted on the outcomes of this curriculum. His concern is that children are not being provided an adequate range of learning experiences at the expense of subject content areas like literacy and science due to the generalised nature of the guidelines of Te Whāriki.

1.2.2. Early childhood education in the state of Tamil Nadu and India 2015

In 2011 there were 164,5 million children aged 0-6 in India (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). According to National Council of Educational Research and Trainings report *National Focus Group on Early Childhood education* (2006, p. v) the public sector of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) only covers about 22% of the children aged 0-6 years and they estimate that the same number applies to the private sector implying a large number of children not getting care nor education. Kaul and Sankar (2009, p. 23) mention that there are no exact figures but gives the number of 10 million children getting ECCE through the private sector. Also UNESCO (2006, p. 19) gives this number of children getting ECCE via the private sector. Interestingly UNESCO’s report also mentions that in Tamil Nadu, even though the private sector has been primarily aimed at higher income families, also parents from low-income communities in urban areas seek to send their children to private preschools. English medium schools (where English is the language used for teaching) are often preferred and since there is no system of registration nor regulation for ECCE the programs offered vary widely (UNESCO, 2006, p.35-36). Since the private sector seems to be a big contributor to ECCE and since parents seem to prefer to send their children to private preschools I find it relevant to investigate what kind of education two private preschools provide.

In the state of Tamil Nadu in South India the children start school at the age of five. They have five years of primary school, three years of middle school, which is followed by secondary and higher secondary education. They also have two years of pre-primary education (often called kindergarten) where the entry

age is three (Government of Tamil Nadu, n/d). Between the ages of one and a half and three the children can attend playschools, crèches, anganwadi and balwadis depending on the areas they live in, the needs of the parents and if the parents can afford it. Playschools give informal education and are mostly privately run whereas the anganwadis are government services with the main function to provide health care in villages as a part of the Integrated Child Development Services implemented in 1975. They also provide pre-primary education in the neighbourhoods and at convenient times for the targeted children (Childline India foundation, n/d).

The fourth goal of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for sustainable development is to achieve universal primary education. While preschools are not a part of primary education it is believed that preschools and childcare centres are important to reach that goal. This can be seen in one of the sub goals of the primary education goal which states: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education “(UN, n/d). As a part of India’s 12th five year plan spanning from 2012-2017, and in an effort to reach the development goal of primary education for all, the Ministry Of Women and Child Development made a draft for an Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework in 2012 (Ministry Of Women and Child Development, 2012). The five year plan also stated that through the RTE Act 2009 the government has earmarked 25% of the seats in pre-primary education in the private sector (Planning Commission, 2013, p. 58, 186). Other recent plans and policies implemented in India have also spoken for the development of early childhood care and education. In 2005 the National Plan of action for Children was introduced and three of the goals of the plan are “To universalize early childhood services to ensure children’s physical, social, emotional and cognitive development “, “To ensure that care, protection and development opportunities are available to all children below 3 years” and “To ensure integrated care and development and pre-school learning opportunities for all children aged 3 to 6 years” (Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Women and Child Development, 2005, p. 14).

2. Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to explore the idea and (working) method of holistic education and to explore if traces of these can be found in four preschool teachers’ statements about their practices of two private preschools located in the state of Tamil Nadu in India.

The questions I seek to answer were:

1. What is the underlying idea of holistic education?
2. What working methods are recommended for holistic education?

3. Can the ideas of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?
4. Can the methods of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?

3. Theoretical approach

The theoretical approach in this study is social constructivism. I will here describe it, and why I chose it, and how I have used it in my study.

3.1. Social constructivism

Dahlin-Ivanoff (2015, p.82) states that social constructivism means that people's knowledge is socially constructed through social interaction. This knowledge is constantly updated through new experiences and it must be understood in its context. Within social constructivism the interaction between the people is considered a learning process, and through the interviews I, as well as the interviewees, are given opportunities to learn from each other through our interaction. An important aspect to consider, according to Wennerberg (2010) is that the societies we live in consist of various social institutions, like a preschool, which are socially constructed and built on habits and roles, which in turn are fabricated social compartments and not necessarily chosen by the individuals involved, i.e. there is an aspect of power to this. Since the meaning of holistic seems to vary depending on who uses it I find social constructivism to be a theory which can help me understand why this is.

According to Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne (2015, p. 35) the results obtained through interview in a social constructivist study reflects the linguistic and social context of the study in addition to the information received, i.e. social constructivism acknowledges that interviews cannot tell us everything about something since e.g. routines, concepts, and material have been habitualized over time. Thought- and action patterns are taken for granted, thus they will not always be voiced. What the teachers tell me is what they are aware of and what they consider important to share but there will be things they do not share. These things are instead silently implied by, and between, the participants in the institution which in this case are the teachers in the two preschool (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). The role and habits of the teachers in their classrooms are not necessarily actively chosen by them but have been developed and internalised over time as a response to their surroundings. The social constructivist approach perspective wants to question the natural and self-evident in social actions according to Bladini (2004). My knowledge and experiences of Swedish preschools enables me to question the natural social actions the interviewees tell me about, as well as the teachers' understanding of their own practices enables me to question my own understanding of the natural social practices in preschools.

4. Previous research

In this chapter I present some research on holistic approaches and education, which I found relevant. Some of the research presented here will be further explored in my literature review in chapter 6.1. The research presented here are studies from Oceania, Europe and North America and they regard different levels of education and various aspects of holistic education, holistic approach and the whole school which I consider relevant to gain an understanding of the idea and application of holistic education.

Idea of holistic education

The idea of holistic education is based on the idea that the development of academic skills is given too much attention leading to the neglect of other aspects of the child. The spiritual aspect of the human being is very important to holistic educators. However, a holistic approach aims to reach and develop the whole child, body, mind and spirit alike, thus creating overall wellbeing, unlike traditional schooling where the focus lies on the mind.

John Miller concludes that an important dimension of holistic education is on relationships. In *The Holistic Curriculum: Second Edition* (2007) he presents six different relationships which should be included in a holistic curriculum in order to develop the whole child. These relationships are; the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, between mind and body, the relationships among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship to the earth, and a relationship to our souls (Miller, 2007, p. 89). On top of these connections Miller has found three ways of teaching and learning which should be used and incorporated in holistic education. Transmission, transaction and transformational teaching. These three regard different psychologies and focuses as well as they can be considered to be connected to three body locations; body, mind and soul. These teaching orientations as well as the relationships, or connections which Miller also calls them, are to be balanced and included in education.

In her doctoral dissertation *Holistic education: an analysis of its pedagogical application* Lucila Rudge theoretically explores the pedagogical application of the philosophical ideas promoted by the holistic education movement in the four different approaches to schooling; Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Neohumanist, and Waldorf Schools (Rudge, 2008, p. ii, 55). She wanted to see if spirituality and humanistic ideals could be jointly applied in education since holistic education advocates this which is commonly separated. She synthesized eight broad principles: “spirituality, reverence to life/nature, interconnectedness, human wholeness, individual uniqueness, caring relations, freedom/autonomy, and democracy” (Rudge, 2008, p. iii) to analyze the application of the four approaches to schooling. She then searched for pedagogical features in the different systems which she meant could promote each of the

principles such as the arts, meditation, earth connections, experiential learning, physical space, transdisciplinary approach and more.

Rudge found that there are tensions in jointly applying humanistic ideals and spirituality but that it does not seem impossible since the school systems she looked at seemed to have varying degrees of the two. There were three principles which seemed the hardest to accommodate at the same time; the democratic principle and the two spiritual principles of reverence for life/nature and human spirituality. Particularly democracy seemed to be difficult to fully apply in Waldorf and Neohumanist schools due to possible interference to their ideology about how they guide the children through their developmental processes. Montessori schools seemed to be the system which best applied humanistic ideals like democracy with their philosophical curriculum (Rudge, 2008, p. 203-222).

Application of holistic education

Fuemana-Foa'i, Pohio and Terreni (2008) provide narratives of how they build communities in early childhood using visual arts. In New Zealand the national early childhood curriculum is considered a holistic curriculum and the narratives of Fuemana-Foa'i, Pohio and Terreni show how arts can enforce a holistic outcome to early childhood. Highlighted is the significance of the context of family and community and an acknowledgement that the child carries prior experiences to the early childhood context. The narratives demonstrate how the four principles of relationships, holistic development, empowerment, and family and community can be realized. The visual arts provide a meaningful channel for seeing and hearing the voices of the children and their families. The stories tell us how that through encounters with visual arts communities are strengthened (Fuemana-Foa'I et al., 2008, p.24-32). An example is the visual arts form of tapa which is specific to the Pasifika culture through which the children collaborated to create a tiled table where the children drew patterns and symbols of significance to them and engaged in discussion about their experiences of this art form. Another example is the implementation of local mythology, legends and traditional art forms into the preschool environment like paintings on the wall which can encourage the children to ask questions and want to explore them which might lead to them creating their own interpretations of them to create a connection to the community. Fuemana-Foa'I et al. promote the idea that children should be actively engaged in their experiences by them taking more of a leadership role rather than being passive receptors of information. The authors find that when teachers take time to closely listen and recognize the multifaceted ways in which children represent, present, and transform ideas through the mode of visual arts transformational learning experiences may occur (Fuemana-Foa'I et al., 2008, p.28-32).

Instead of focusing on visual arts Bone, Cullen and Loveridge (2007) have explored one of the pillars of holistic education; spirituality. Their article is based on the result of their case studies of three different preschool settings, and it gives us an insight into some of the results from the Montessori casa and proposes that “spirituality has the power to introduce mystery and wonder into otherwise mundane events“(Bone et al., 2007, p. 344). They state that words like spirituality and holistic can be challenging to accept since they often are connected to fundamentalism and religious doctrine, but the study gives examples of how spirituality instead can be found in everyday actions. They mean that spirituality as a part of the early childhood curriculum has the potential to connect instead of divide people. Examples of pedagogical practices and children’s day-to-day experiences which may be spiritual are; showing caring behaviours, being welcomed, and listening (Bone et al., 2007, p. 347). An example of the practice of care for others, or courtesy was an episode where a boy inconvenienced himself to help a girl settle into an activity after having been uncomfortable being back after a holiday. She had found an older/younger sibling relationship with him and he had accepted the role of the older more confident one. In this the spiritual dimension can be revealed in the ability to forget the self and embrace the oneness (Bone et al., 2007, p. 349-350). Bone et al. also observed the act of being welcomed in the hallway, which can be considered a ritual space. An episode described was where a child and teacher are very pleased to see each other and a strong bond is observed (Bone et al., 2007, p. 348).

With the help of the above previous research I have gained an understanding of the idea of holistic education. Some of these will be further explored in my literature review. It is my understanding that no studies exactly like mine have been done before where the ideas and methods of holistic education have been traced as a whole, and not specific aspects, in a preschool practice nor in the statements of preschool teachers about their practices. Based on the previous research I will use holistic education and holistic approach to education interchangeably and I connect holistic curriculum and whole child development to those terms.

5. Method

5.1. Research design

This study is based on two parts; one literature review and one based on qualitative interviews. In the first part central pedagogical ideas of and (working) methods for holistic approach to education is identified. This is done by reviewing a few of the central works within the research field.

After that I will trace these pedagogical ideas and methods in the work of two preschools. The choice of these two preschools is based on the fact that their curriculums commit them to work holistically, and that they are found in the state of Tamil Nadu in India which has committed itself to working holistically

following UNESCO guidelines. I have interviewed four preschool teachers about their pedagogical outlook and working methods. By analyzing these interviews I aim to explore if there are traces of holistic pedagogics in their perceptions and work methods.

My research design builds on Herbert Tingsten's analysis of ideology as explained by Bergström & Boréus (2005) which will be illuminated in 5.2.1.

5.1.1. Literature review

My literature review aims to answer the first two questions of my study: What is the underlying idea of holistic education? What working methods are recommended for holistic education? The result of the literature review provides a theoretical understanding of the ideas behind holistic education as well as gives a methodological framework for working with this. This aided me in my analysis of the data collected through interviews, which I will describe later.

I found the literature used for this study via Söder Scholar, Södertörn University's own search engine, Google Scholar, Google's search engine, as well as the search engine ERIC. I used search words like holistic education and holistic approach to early childhood education and development. When choosing the literature to explore further in this study I looked for texts, which gave examples of the theory as well as the methodology of holistic education. John P. Miller reoccurred often through references in other articles. Since his work was more accessible than others' they are a big part of my literature review since his work pertain both the idea and theory of it, as well as concrete examples.

I am aware that there is more research and texts regarding holistic education out there, however due to time limitations on the search for, and analysis of, these only some of it is present in this study. This may mean that some aspects found important by other researchers will not be included here. The studies I found were mainly conducted in developed western countries like Canada, New Zealand and USA, which may be problematic since my study was conducted in India and may give examples not applicable to a developing, non-western country. Had I found research conducted in India or Asia which could have given me examples of theory and/or methodology I would have included them.

5.1.2. Qualitative interviews

I used semi-structured interviews to answer the questions 'Can the ideas of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?' and 'Can the methods of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?'. I interviewed four teachers at two different preschools. One was a playschool where the children were of the ages 1,5-

2,5, and the other a kindergarten where the children were of the ages 3,5-5. The schools were selected with the help of my contact persons in India who suggested the two. I am aware that this may have had an effect on my results since they may have chosen schools which they considered better or nicer than others. Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne (2015, p. 37-39) states that the method of semi-structured interviews is common in qualitative studies and it helps in discovering the concept of something which is the purpose of my study. With me during the interviews I had an interview guide with mainly open questions. The structure allows follow-up questions for the teachers' answers which increases the chance of gaining deeper and/or more developed answers as Stúkat (2011, p. 44-45) states.

I recorded the interviews on my smartphone to be able to focus on the interviewees rather than worrying about writing down all the answers or missing anything. I also took some notes during the interviews to remember the follow-up questions I had. I made sure my phone worked well, had battery and enough memory. I also did a test recording before the first interview at each school. The interviews were held out in the field. I had planned on holding them individually and without the presence of children so that the interview might be as little disturbed as possible and the interviewee won't be influenced by what others answer (Stukát, 2011, p. 45-46). However, during the interviews at the playschool the Principal joined us for the interviews and due to hierarchical aspects I did not feel I could oppose this. This may have affected the teachers' answers as her presence may have led them to give biased answers or it might have given the teachers the courage to speak to me. The principal was eager to answer when the teachers hesitated, she may have felt a need or wanted to give the 'correct' answers. Both interviews lasted for about one hour. The interviews at the kindergarten were held in a classroom where a few children sat quietly resting. During my first interview the second teacher entered and sat to do her work. This later affected the interview I held with her since she sometimes referred to the first teachers answers. I countered this by asking for more examples for the specific age group she worked with. The first interview lasted one hour, the second lasted 35 minutes.

Although the interviews were conducted in English I realised during my initial visits to the schools that we did not always understand each other due to different usage of words and sentence structures, so, I brought an interpreter. I am aware that using an interpreter adds another person's interpretation on top of my interpretation of the answers and that the translator can have their own agenda or may take on the role of interviewer and or interviewee as Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 160-161) cautions for. The interpreter present at the playschool was an Indian woman with a doctorate which may have affected the teachers' answers in that she had a higher education than they thus may have been perceived as having a higher status. The interpreter present at the kindergarten was an Indian man. The fact that he was a man, and the teachers were female, might have affected the teachers' answers in a similar way as with the highly

educated woman. The teachers may not have felt free or comfortable enough to give honest answers but rather edited answers.

5.1.2.1. Introduction of preschools and the interviewed teachers

Initially my contact people recommended the preschools presented here. I chose to continue with these since their curriculums commit them to work holistically, and that they are found in the state of Tamil Nadu in India which has committed itself to working holistically following UNESCO guidelines. The teachers in my study are referred to as the abbreviated forms of the groups with which they work, so PG works with playgroup, NG works with the nursery group, LKG works with lower kindergarten children, and UKG works with the upper kindergarten children.

Playschool

This playschool is located in a city with about a million inhabitants. The children were aged 1,5-2,5 in the playgroup and 2,5-3,5 in the nursery group but follows a curriculum which is a part of a whole school system from playgroup to 12th standard. This preschool had connections with a primary school and follows the Kidzee iLLUME way of teaching and curriculum (Zee Learn Ltd, n/d). The playschool provides continuous Kidzee training which according to the teachers is Montessori training. The ratio is 20 children to two teachers, and the school has 4 groups. Kidzee uses the term holistic to describe its curriculum in addition to their mission of providing children with possibilities for all-round development. Intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic, sensorial, social and spiritual development are listed as pillars to developing the child's ability to cope with the challenges of life (Zee Interactive learning Systems Ltd., 2003-04, p.1, 6).

PG has a Bachelor in Communications, MBD and has had Montessori training through Kidzee. NG has a Bachelor in Communications and a GDC course (General diploma in co-operation). She has also attended Kidzee Montessori training. At this preschool the principal took part in the interviews and I have chosen to also include answers from her. She is referred to as Principal.

Kindergarten

The kindergarten is a part of a larger school with classes spanning from nursery (from 2,5 years) to 12th standard (18 years). The ratio is 20 children to one teacher and one assistant in both upper and lower kindergarten. The children are aged 3,5-4,5 in lower kindergarten, and 4,5-5 in upper kindergarten. The school is located about 20 minutes outside of a city with a million inhabitants, in the country side. This school follows the XSEED way of teaching and the curriculum is connected to CBSE (Central Board of Secondary education) and is national. The higher levels also follows an international curriculum. In the XSEED approach for the early programme the mission and vision states that they want to provide

opportunities for holistic learning and growth. They include six domains in their holistic development; numeracy, language, creative, physical, cognitive, and personal, social and emotional (XSEED Education, 2014, p. 7). The school provides continuous XSEED training once or twice per year.

LKG has a Bachelor of Arts in Tamil Literature and has done a one year Montessori training course.

UKG has a Bachelor degree in business administration and has taken an advanced diploma in Montessori.

5.2. Method of analysis

Herbert Tingsten's theory on 'analysis of ideas' organized the study and was used as a method in my analysis. I will here describe these elements of his theory and how I relate them to my study.

5.2.1. Tingsten's ideology analysis

As a means of exploring and summarizing the literature in the first part of my study, I found Tingsten's description of an ideology provided by Bergström & Boréus (2005, p. 151) useful. I consider the holistic approach to be similar to that which Tingsten regards as ideology. It helps me find out what the core of holistic approach is and how it should be practiced. The elements provided in Tingsten's description of an ideology are;

1. Basic value premises
2. The inclusion of reality reviews in the ideological statements about various phenomena and conditions in society
3. Concrete recommendations

In my study I will use the first and the third element since they embody what my study is about, the idea and practical implications of holistic education. Basic value premises is explained as e.g. a certain perception of justice or a certain view of human nature. This I relate to the idea of the whole person which is found in holistic education. Concrete recommendations entails the existence of e.g. an action proposal of the governance formation (Bergström & Boréus, 2005, p. 151). I relate this to concrete examples of pedagogy and methods suggested and applied in holistic education practices. In the analysis of the interviews I used guides which I created from my analysis of the literature. These guides are presented in 6.1.3. By using Tingsten's elements to structure my analysis of both the literature review and my interview study I can answer the research questions listed in chapter 2.

5.3. Generalisability, validity, reliability and the role of the researcher

This study is not made to gain knowledge which can be generalised to all preschools in Tamil Nadu nor in India. My text does not aim to give a full, overall picture of these teachers as I only took part of a small

piece of their lives and therefore only can interpret and trace holistic education in that. If someone else was to conduct the same study they would likely not get the exact same results as I did.

The validity of my research I see as relatively high as the qualitative semi-structured interview is adapted to gather information about with what and how the participants work, to gather information about the subjects' experiences as Stúkat (2011, p. 133) writes. I rate the validity and reliability of my transcription to be lower since I, as an individual, have my own understanding of what was said in the interviews. During the transcription I tried to remain as true to the interviewees' answers as possible, but I acknowledge that the results are my interpretations of the answers, and meanings may have been lost or altered due to misinterpretations or un-hearable words from the recordings as Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 262-266) mention.

During the process of this study I have reflected on my role as researcher as a western woman conducting a study in India. My being from Sweden may have altered how the participants chose to portray the playschool. I am aware of the power structure involved in interviews. I recognize that my role as a soon to be preschool teacher with my own knowledge and understanding of the development of the preschool child and the preschool organization will have influenced my understanding of the teachers' answers thus influencing the follow-up questions I asked or did not ask, as well as my interpretations in my analysis.

5.4. Ethical implications

All the teachers signed a consent form and were given the chance to read the information letter attached to it about their rights to participate and what my study was going to be about in agreement with the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The teachers at the playschool seemed nervous, but since they are adults I assumed they would tell me if they really didn't want to partake. In hind sight the principals and interpreters presence may have hindered them from saying no, but it may also have given them the courage to stay and try. For the safety and anonymity of the teachers I have chosen to use the acronyms of the age group they work with when referring to who said what (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p. 10). I have also chosen to refer to the schools according to the age groups they work with, i.e. playschool and kindergarten to further instil anonymity of the teachers.

Because there is such high competition in the private school sector and for copyright reasons I have chosen to only refer to the curriculums and manuals, not quote them. Since this is not a study of the curriculum but an exploration of holistic education and whether it is traceable or not in the teachers' statements about their practices I feel this should suffice. The curriculums were used only to see what areas of development they should be working with to determine what holistic might entail in those schools to give a direction to my study.

6. Results and analysis

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is intended to answer my first two questions with the aim to provide an understanding of the underlying idea and working methods used in holistic education through a literature exploration using Tingsten's elements of ideology earlier outlined. It will provide a framework of the approach as well as some key concepts which I use in my analysis of the four interviews I conducted in order to help me explore the four preschool teachers' practices. The analysis and results from the interviews will be presented in the second part of this chapter with the purpose of answering the last two questions. In my study I use the terms child/children and student/students interchangeably as they in this study mean the same thing.

6.1. Literature review

I will here present my literature review. The purpose is to identify central and underlying pedagogical ideas and methods from a holistic perspective.

To gain an understanding of the pedagogical ideas and application of the subject I have explored the writings of researchers and teachers Miller (2007, 2010), Rudge (2008), Bone, Cullen & Loveridge (2007) and Tirri (2011). This, bearing in mind that all methods and approaches presented in them may not be transferable to a preschool level but may help provide guidelines for what a holistic approach and holistic education, can entail. This chapter is divided into two parts; Basic value premises and Concrete recommendations.

6.1.1. Basic value premises

I will here present what I perceive to be the ideas behind holistic education.

The researcher, author and lecturer John P. Miller has written many books based on his research on holistic education and has tried to define what this approach can include since holistic education "is *not* to be defined as a particular method or technique; it must be seen as a *paradigm*, a set of basic assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways" (Miller, 1992, p.21 in Rudge, 2008, p. 6).

The whole child

In the book *Whole Child Education* Miller (2010) begins by quoting Gandhi who stated that the child's spiritual and physical faculties together with the development of the mind are one big whole. Only through proper exercise and training of the body can education of the intellect come. Head, hand and heart, or the mind, body and spirit as Miller calls them, all need to be educated (Miller, 2010, p. 7).

Within the idea of the whole child there are certain developmental areas to be included. Miller (2007, 2010) acknowledges the physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, emotional and aesthetic areas while Tirri (2011, p.159) includes the social, emotional, cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions of educating the whole person. It is interesting to find that there are differences in what is included in the concept of the whole person. Tirri doesn't mention the physical aspect of the whole person, while Miller doesn't mention morals as its own area. Perhaps this is because Tirri's study is set in secondary school where focus mostly is on subject skills, and because morals may be included in Miller's spiritual, social, emotional, and cognitive development (Miller, 2007, p. 65, 77, 91, 2010, p. 25-26). Tirri brings up the challenge which the schools of today face which is that of creating pedagogical environments that are "sensitive to numerous individual backgrounds in order to support students' social and academic success" stating that students benefit both academically and socially when supported by a caring classroom and school environment (Tirri, 2011, p. 159). Like Tirri, Miller maintains that it is not only the basic skills commonly taught in schools which should be included in education and that there is more to the person than his or her academic knowledge (Miller, 2007, 2010).

Rudge found in her study that the goal of holistic education is to integrate unbiased achievement (academic achievement) with the personal, subjective, spiritual, and interior aspects of life. It recognises that thinking, feeling, willing and sensing are dependent and deeply connected to each other and that without the others one doesn't exist. The whole person is to be involved in learning, not just the brain. Interconnections are key. Learning is considered a whole, transforming act, a physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, cognitive and spiritual process (2008, p. 122-124).

Connections

Another main idea of holistic education is that of connections and interconnectedness on various levels between the child/student and internal and external elements which enable and encourage development and learning of the whole person. Miller lists six connections which can be divided into internal/individual and external connections which will be explored here (Miller, 2007, 2014).

Internal connections

The connections Miller considers to be internal, i.e. more on an individual level, are *thinking connections*, *body-mind connections* and *soul connections*. The *thinking connections* to be made are between linear thinking and intuition. He means that by including intuition to linear thinking children can gain a fuller development. Linear thinking is connected to academic learning via linear problem solving. According to Miller a balance between intuition/insight and analytic thinking make for creative thinking, holistic thinking. If linear thinking is overemphasized spontaneity of dealing with problems are lost while too

much focus on the intuitive can lead to us losing our ground (Miller, 2010, p. 72). Miller makes no distinction as to what ages this connection should be worked on but Rudge (2008, p. 60) found in her study that e.g. the Waldorf schools consider the development of thinking to happen at different stages giving the adolescent period (ages 14-21) to be when reasoning, thinking and abstract posers of the intellect develop.

A link between *mind and body* is vital to the development of the whole child. According to Miller (2010, p. 8-9) one of the reasons that there is child obesity and eating disorders is that the children do not develop a harmonious relationship to their bodies. The recognition of the body as an important aspect in educating the whole child can create a wellbeing which is lacking in today's (western) society. If the children have a harmonious relationship, a connection, to their bodies, then embodied learning will be possible. Within holistic education embodied learning, or experiential learning as Rudge (2008) calls it, is emphasised. Learning by doing, the saying coined by Dewey, comes to mind, which involves not only the mind for learning, but the whole body as well. But if there is no connection between the mind and the body, where the mind has learnt to read the signals of the body, it may hinder the child's development and learning (Miller, 2010, 61, 70-71) and there is a risk that the children become "emotional illiterates" (Miller, 2007, p. 113) when they cannot read nor express the emotions they feel in their body.

Soul connections is the third internal connection. Miller (2007 p. 178, 2010, p. 74) explains the soul as a mysterious energy which gives purpose and meaning to one's life. It is what Ghandi called the heart. The soul, along with the ego, make up the self. The ego part can be understood as the socialized sense of who we are e.g. mother, son or our job identity. The soul, though, is beyond that self, and Miller paints the image of the soul opening up when we see a child play or hear a piece of music, or simply is present in nature (2007, p. 14). Since the soul is considered a part of the whole person, the spiritual part, it is important that it is not lost or neglected. Rudge (2008, p. 151) states that without a connection to one's own soul it is not possible to connect to others regardless of being a child or an adult.

External connections

The external connections of Miller's are *subject connections*, *community connection* and *earth connections*. *Subject connections* can also be referred to as integrated curriculum. The integration can occur on three levels. At a multidisciplinary level the curriculum has separate subjects but there are links between them e.g. a history teacher may refer to a specific historical period's art and include an exploration of art from that period. The interdisciplinary level integrates two or three subjects around a problem or a theme. Waldorf education, for example, connects different subjects through the arts in an interdisciplinary approach, but there are many ways through which school subjects and academic

disciplines can be connected (Miller, 2007, p. 131-146, Rudge, 2008, p. 116-117). On a transdisciplinary level several subjects are combined around a broad theme e.g. issues of poverty in society. Rudge (2008, p. 112) found that Montessori's cosmic curriculum for children aged 6-12 aimed to integrate knowledge from various areas around one theme, i.e. using a transdisciplinary approach. The idea of subject connections also includes connecting subject to the community. Through this a connection between the self and the community can be made too, as well as the subject becoming more meaningful to the child. Subjects become more relevant and less abstract if subject matter can be related to the inner life of the child (Miller, 2007, p. 131).

Like subject connections, the *connection to the community* exist on different levels. Community refers to every level of community from the classroom to the global community. Interpersonal, social action skills alongside community service skills are developed through a connection between individual and community. Miller means that a good relationship between the self and the community can be created by recognising the importance of the non-verbal, paying attention to the aesthetic environment, telling stories about the school, having rituals and celebrations, valuing authenticity and truth, and encouraging an environment where people can speak without fear (2010, p. 63-67). Hence, building classroom and school communities can provide a psychologically safe environment which will aid in children's development. Through community experiences children will form connections with others which can help them in their learning, e.g. through cooperative learning with peers (Miller, 2007, p. 148-160). Tirri (2011, p. 164) found that the connection between peers of teachers and students, and student-teacher connections creating a whole school community was important for the wellbeing of all, teachers and students alike. Respectful and caring relationships among the members of a community can promote respect, tolerance and understanding of diversity as Rudge (2008, p. 146) found that the four school systems indirectly promoted in her study.

The third connection Miller refers to is the *relationship to the earth*. It can be developed by listening to the voices of the earth like water pouring, the wind blowing and animal sounds enabling us to see ourselves as a part of the web of life and not separated from the earth. This connection, like the others, works towards the child's understanding of a bigger picture, of the fact that everything is interconnected. We as humans have an impact on the earth like the ozone layer thinning (Miller, 2007, p. 162). Working with earth connections can instil a reverence for life and nature. When working with this with the youngest children their natural sense of wonder can be stimulated while it, according to Miller, reawakens this sense of awe amongst older students or adults (2007, p. 175). Rudge found that working with the earth connection involved caring for and/or being in the environment. The earth connection can teach them about the interdependences of our planetary ecosystem and develop reverence for all forms of life in

the children, thus forming responsible young adults who understands, cares for and respects the environment which they live in (Rudge, 2008, p. 97-100).

Conclusion

As we can see holistic education includes a specific view of the child, which is that we are a whole person comprised of various parts which equally need to be developed. The whole child should be considered and involved in the learning process. Inclusion and balance of all the aspects of the human should be evident in a holistic approach to education. When working with the whole child internal and external connections should be considered and included which can provide the children with an understanding of how aspects of life are interdependent and connected.

6.1.2. Concrete recommendations

I will here present suggested methods which enables a holistic approach to education. According to Miller (1992, p. 21 in Rudge, 2008, p. 6) there is no one particular technique or method for holistic education but after having studied a few important works I have identified what can be considered characteristic for working holistically. I will present these here.

Transmission teaching

According to Miller transmission teaching historically has two strands. One focuses on the student studying standard subjects taught in a traditional style, i.e. the teacher transfers knowledge to the student. The other strand regards behaviour where the relationship is stimulus-response. In both strands there is little or no room for analysis or reflection of the information passed on. Miller gives the example of the young child learning to speak through repetition and imitation of how the parents speak or hitting a golf ball where the instructor first shows and then the skill is repeated over and over (Miller, 2010, p. 9). Mastery learning, phonics and cultural literacy are taught in transmission teaching. The evaluation methods commonly used for this teaching include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and standardized tests. The aim of transmission teaching is “mastering school subjects with a focus on content” (Miller, 2010, p. 15-20) and learning basic skills such as basic math skills, reading, and writing as well as acquiring basic cultural values.

Transactional teaching

Transactional teaching usually involves pursuing some sort of inquiry or solving a problem. This method is more interactive although Miller states that it is mainly cognitive. Knowledge is seen as something which can be manipulated and not something fixed in small units. A model often used for transaction learning is the scientific method which John Dewey (1938/1969) noted is ‘the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences of the world in which we live’ (p. 88

in Miller, 2010, p. 10). In contrast to transmission teaching the transaction position has an emphasis on dialogue between student and teacher where the teacher holds the belief that students/children create their own meaning and knowledge (Miller, 2010, p. 10-11, 21). Problem-based learning, case study method, moral dilemmas, and discipline based inquiry are teaching and learning strategies used in transaction teaching. Evaluation methods used are observation, interviews, rubrics (Miller, 2010, p. 21-29). The aim of transaction teaching is that the children are able to solve problems in a variety of contexts (e.g., math, science, and everyday problems) as well as develop inquiry skills and develop critical thinking skills (Miller, 2010, p. 21-22).

Transformational teaching

Instead of focusing on only cognitive development, or on units of subjects the wholeness of the child is acknowledged in transformational learning. The child and the curriculum are here seen as connected rather than separate. The view that everything is interconnected underlies transformational teaching (Miller, 2010, p. 29-30). One of the main aspects of the transformation position is a recognition of the student's inner life and how it can be nourished. Examples of how teachers work with this position are; storytelling, role playing, creative problem solving, and drama. These examples Miller means encourages students to make various types of connections which make learning socially and personally meaningful to them (Miller, 2010, p. 11-12). Other examples of teaching and learning strategies given are; autobiographies/journals and service learning. Ways of evaluation given are self-evaluation, peer evaluation, portfolios and performance tasks (Miller, 2010, p. 29-38). The aims of transformational teaching include sense of purpose in one's life, compassion, wisdom and social responsibility (Miller, 2010, p. 30, 38).

Arts

Storytelling and literature can be considered art. These can be used to connect to one's soul on top of being a way to build relationships with others, creating community and enabling social and emotional development (Miller, 2010, p. 51, 123). The arts can be used to capture the children's imagination. Drama and dance can be used to develop the children physically as well as create a mind-body connection. Visual arts like painting and drama, music, woodwork, handwork, sculpturing, singing are all artistic and creative activities which Rudge found to be used in the various school systems to foster spirituality, reverence for life and nature, interconnectedness and learning, and human wholeness (2008, p. 89-131). She found that while Waldorf schools use arts as a means to connect the whole person including using it as a spiritual act, Reggio schools see it as a medium for learning and a language of expression rather than a way to connect the child with its spirituality. She, however, points out that while arts are not explicitly linked to spirituality the arts indirectly promotes it (Rudge, 2008, p. 90-91). In Waldorf the arts is used to

give the children an experience where the human aspects feeling, thinking and willing are harmonized, a whole learning experience is fostered through this.

Yoga, meditation, mindfulness

Yoga and meditation was used as a means to create soul connections, body-mind connections, thinking connections and subject connections. By focusing and quieting the mind a more receptive mode of consciousness can be reached which can aid the intuition-linear thinking connection as well as it can help children connect subjects to themselves and other subjects (Miller, 2010, p. 73). Mindfulness focuses on moment-to-moment awareness and connects body and mind and can enhance experiences. It encourages us to slow down and focus on the task at hand (Miller, 2007, p. 118-119). Each child is encouraged to speak and the teacher always responds and comments and everyone is encouraged to listen. There is a spiritual quality to the listening which is demonstrated when we “attend to each other as human beings who are worthy of whole-hearted attention” (Bone et al., 2007, p. 349). Bone writes that she can feel the teacher’s spiritual nature at moments like this. Tranquillity is communicated by the teacher. Also teacher are encouraged to meditate or yoga to be present in the now and be able to step back from troublesome situations (Miller, 2010, p. 64, 104).

Experiential learning

Experiential learning was something Rudge found all four school systems to include in their educational approaches. Especially in the early childhood programs the idea of learning by doing was present through free play, art, games, singing, dancing, movement, and meditation. Also in the later years they were encouraged to practice e.g. the arts, gardening, cooking and trips, concretely experiencing concepts. The purpose being to connect what the students learn to real life situations and vice versa creating community and earth connections. Appropriate materials like that which encourages sensory development and stimulates the imagination and give the children joy are suggested (Rudge, 2008, p. 115, 128-130). In Montessori Schools, children use their hands to manipulate the letters of the alphabet, internalize the sounds of them, and when ready for it, compose words (Rudge, 2008, p. 126). Experiencing rituals and celebrating auspicious dates and seasonal festivals can not only teach them about the particular religions or traditions, it also connects the child to the community and may create a soul/spiritual connection. The act of gardening can connect the child to the community and the earth (Miller, 2010, p. 122-123). These activities and methods can be connected to the transaction and transformational teaching approaches.

Visualisation

To develop connections between linear thinking and intuition Miller (2007, p. 89-100, 2010, p. 133-135) suggests techniques like visualisation integrated with more traditional thinking approaches. Visualisations

uses a set of images in an undirected or directed manner sometimes referred to as guided imagery. When visualising the 'mind's eye' is used to follow a particular set of images, e.g. imagining climbing a mountain or imagining throwing basketballs into a hoop (Miller, 2007, p. 96-97). It can also be used for relaxation as well as way to create a deeper understanding of subject matter, as well as a method for emotional healing and self-esteem. Children's imagination can be nurtured through visualisation in writing, reading, math, art and music (Miller, 2010, Rudge, 2008).

Conclusion

In holistic education the aim is to develop the whole child, not only academic or cognitive skills, and it attempts to connect the child to the community and the world. The three teaching approaches transmission, transaction, and transformation, Miller provides, enables holistic learning when integrated. As we can see there is an interconnectedness between the various relationships and the activities. For example, the arts does not only develop one aspect of the human but has the ability to develop several, whether it is intentional or not. It is positive in the way that since there are so many ways to doing this it is easier to reach each whole child since the teacher is not bound to one way of teaching, but challenging in the way that there is an even bigger responsibility on the teacher to see each child and understand what he or she needs to develop as a whole person and provide it. Holistic education entails that the teacher has a certain approach to teaching which includes an understanding that all children are different and the methods for developing mind, body and spirit are many and varied.

6.1.3. Interview analysis tool

I will here present the analysis tools I will use when analysing my interviews. The tables below show the main ideas and methods of holistic education that I found and presented in the literature review. Using these tools I seek to trace their components in the interviews of the preschool teachers working at preschools with holistic curriculums.

Table 1. Idea guide

The idea of holistic education	
The whole child	Connections
Body	Internal
Mind	External
Spirit	

Table 2. Method guide

Working methods
Transmission teaching
Transactional teaching
Transformational teaching
Arts
Yoga, meditation, mindfulness
Experiential learning
Visualisation

6.2. Interview results and analysis

The results and analysis of the interviews will here be presented in two parts. The first show the Basic value premises I traced and the second part show the Concrete recommendations of holistic education which I found in the interviews. The teachers are referred to as the abbreviated forms of the groups with which they work i.e. PG works in playgroup, NG works in nursery group, LKG in lower kindergarten and UKG in upper kindergarten.

6.2.1. Basic value premises

When interpreting the teachers' interview answers I could to some extent trace the values which I found in the literature review which is presented in the idea guide in 6.1.3. I will here present my findings.

The whole child

The idea of the whole child could be found in the statements of the curriculum where, as shown in 5.1.2.1., both schools had similar aspects of the whole child which they sought to develop which align well with the perception of the whole person in holistic education. The kindergarten mentioned numeracy, language, creative, physical, cognitive, and personal, social and emotional, while the playschool declared they worked with intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic, sensorial, social and spiritual development. As we can see the schools aim to develop more than just academic skills like language and numeracy. Traces of the idea of developing the whole child, body, mind and spirit, were present in the interviews. These traces I will explore here.

Body

That the teachers worked with the development of the body was evident in the interviews. They wanted to help the children develop both fine and gross motor skills. Mostly the activities were integrated with other aims like literacy where the fine motor skill of holding a pen was practiced, beading was used to enhance fine motor skills but can also be considered an art activity, or pushing items while playing and having fun. For LKG physical development meant "we are encouraging them to play in the park. And we are encouraging them to play in the outdoor" where the children hop, jump, climb, jump, run, catch, play hide and seek. Also at the playschool basic movement and muscle coordination was encouraged during playtime like "using their feet" and "climb a slide". Dance was another activity performed at both schools to develop the body.

Physical safety was also something which the schools endorsed. In all four interviews there was a big emphasis on how the children behaved towards other children, the teachers, parents and other adults.

Most common was that of sharing and not hitting or hurting others as well as the physical safety of specifically the girls, but also the boys. All the teachers mention the good and the bad touch. UKG mentions the “abuse to many girl children” and that they teach the girls how to sit right and behave right, as well as teaching the boys to help the girls if they fall which can promote a good classroom community. UKG also observes the general health of the child, “one day, two day means you can, ok, she’s tired or not feeling well. Daily if she is sleeping [over a long period of time], we will inform the principal and then we will call the parents. Maybe she’s deficiency in [something]”. The health and bodily wellbeing of the child is, as shown by the teachers’ statements, present in the practices of the preschools thus integrating care and education as the UNESCO guidelines promote (Marope and Kaga, 2015).

Mind

During my study it became apparent that school readiness was very important to the teachers. Both the playschool and the kindergarten keep track of the children’s development of the different areas through the use of milestone books and workbooks. Both schools have set day structures where there is time allotted for, among other things, language development and mathematics in addition to the free play session described earlier. Even with the youngest children, the 1,5-2,5 year olds, in playgroup, were taught English which isn’t their mother tongue, however they keep it simple at this level and expect the children to start learning the phonetics for the alphabet. Each teacher spoke of preparing her children for the next level.

NG: Here what we say in Nursery level is getting ready for the next level that is kindergarten. So we make some basic needs such as alphabets, numbers, unique environmental concepts, colours, shapes & opposites. Beyond this we dealt learning, habit, moral, values is very essential at this stage.

At the nursery level being prepared for the next education level, kindergarten, included alphabets, numbers, and concepts, which lead to cognitive and academic development. This was similar to the expected outcomes of LKG and UKG, but they seemed to work at different difficulty levels. UKG mentioned writing whole words while LKG worked on teaching the letters of the alphabet, like NG. PG, which worked with the youngest children, was the only teacher who worked more with the physical development and spoken language development. I connect this to the findings of Rudge (2008) who saw that the school systems adapted the teaching to the maturity of the children.

PG: The importance of holistic approach is early childhood educators are being challenged to incorporate a teaching practice that focuses less on milestones of academic development and more on physical, emotional & psychological.

In contrast to the quote from PG, which aligns with the idea of holistic education, I found that there seemed to be a rather big focus on the children learning the correct way to speak, write, and learning numbers (both symbols and the names) in all four age-groups. This can also be reflected in how the days are structured with planned lesson or activities. Although the learning activities can be seen as a development of the children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills it seems to still be very related to the academic skills they need for the future. UKG told me that she even teaches the children more than the workbooks include in mathematics because she felt it was too slow. The book taught up to 20 whereas she taught the number names up to 50 and the numbers symbols up to 70. I feel that this contradicts the idea of holistic education since it suggests a big focus on academic achievement. I deduce that this is because in India education is seen as a way to create sustainable development of the country. English is important in the international arena, and English medium schooling can be considered a way to give the children a head start in their lives. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that the body and spirit are forgotten since I did find traces of these elements of the child too.

Spirit

It was interesting to me that during the interviews when asked how they worked with the specified areas at each school the teachers at the playschool told they did not work with spirituality although their curriculum mentioned it while the teachers at the kindergarten said that they do work with it although their curriculum does not list spirituality as one of the development areas of the child.

- Principal: Spiritually we are not going. We are not [re]cipricating any religious oriented things.
But we use to celebrate all the festivals, so at the time we just give the detail about what we are celebrating. If so we are celebrating Krishna Jenti, it's a birthday of lord Krishna.
So, we will say who is Krishna and birth detail, everything.
- NG: Often they supply in traditional dresses.
- K: Why? What do they learn from dressing up?
- NG: Like Krishna, the differences they have so they can ask them to come in.

The principal answers "Spiritually we are not going". I found her seemingly strong rejection of the word spiritual as strange due to the curriculum mentioning it but also since they at the playschool, according to the principal and NG and PG, teach the children about various religious festivals. Perhaps I found this strange since I, myself, feel that religion always has a sense of spirituality to it while spirituality does not have to be connected to religion. Perhaps the term spirituality means something else to them, as Bone et al. (2007) mention, it can have different and often a more radical meaning. NG's statement that the children learn the differences between various religious festivals by dressing up reiterates the statement of Bone et al. (2007) that the differences are usually what is taught when working with various religions while the similarities and the things which can connect people are overlooked.

UKG did not seem to shy away from the term spirituality.

- UKG: Through prayers, festivals. Festivals, prayers. (...) We are having a separate class prayer also. In that prayer we ask the child to pray for the parent and relatives, friends. And I use to tell that if you ask anything to God he will give immediately. Like that, so even they are doing the prayer at morning and night, they are doing. After getting up from the bed, immediately they have to go and wish their mother. Before going to the bed they have to pray to the God. Like that, we are insisting the children.
- K: Mm, ok. But you say the children do prayers, do they pray to their own Gods?
- UKG: Yes. Eh, no, no. The prayer it will be a common prayer. (unhearable) We never insist on any name of the god. We never insist.

LKG gave the answer that they do the same celebrations and activities in lower kindergarten as they do in upper kindergarten, often together with them. UKG's statement that she tells the children that God will give them what they ask for can be interpreted as creating a sense of wonder in the world which Bone et al. (2007, p. 344) mention as an important part of the spiritual in the holistic approach. The fact that they do not insist on any name for the God to which the children pray can be seen as the creation of a connection to something bigger than oneself which also is a part of a spiritual development. It does not only include connecting to one's own soul through the feelings of wonder. Like the kindergarten, the playschool also has a class prayer. In addition to its spiritual connection these class prayers can be connected to the creation and the sustaining of a classroom community.

Connections

In the interviews I could, to some extent, trace the idea of the internal connections *thinking connections*, *body-mind connections* and *soul connections*, and the external connections *subject connections*, *community connections* and *earth connections*, as described in 6.1.1. I will here show the traces of the idea of connections which I found in the interviews.

Internal connections

The idea that linear *thinking* and intuition should be connected in a holistic approach to education was hardly present. Only UKG mentioned anything similar to this connection where she associated higher order thinking with creative development.

- UKG: The creative development also the same thing. The creative development in the... We can see in the English and maths also. If we are giving one problem the child may use different method to do the work. One boy can do in counting. Some maybe have different. So that we will see when they are doing the workbook. (...) Now I'm teaching CVC words, before that I can ask any child to... Next, higher order thinking, whether he is having any higher order thinking. I'll ask. If he comes out with any new idea that is a creative development.

The quote suggest that the children are encouraged to think creatively to solve problems. A balance between intuition, which can provide this creative solution, and linear thinking could be interpreted here. Perhaps the lack of thinking connections can be attributed to the fact that the expectations of the children in the playschool and kindergarten are set at a lower level than that which can be expected in higher levels of education, and that the idea of a thinking connection is meant for older children with more developed cognition and thinking skills. After all, the only teacher to mention this was the one who worked with the oldest children who will start primary school the next year.

When it comes to *body-mind connection* both NG and UKG told of an exercise where the children are to sit quietly with closed eyes. The activity is used to help the children regulate themselves when they are “shouting or playing” or not “doing work properly”. It seems that at the kindergarten there is a purpose behind the implementation with a systematic introduction at the beginning of the term. UKG says they “will give some exercise to hands (UKG opens and closes hands), close your palm, open your palm, close it. Like that, open your eyes, close your eyes. To get the concentration”. When the body is calm the mind can concentrate on the task at hand whether it is understanding what they are feeling, both bodily and emotionally, or learning mathematics. It was never explored further how often the teachers at both school use this technique. It would have been interesting to find out whether the teachers could see a difference in the classroom before and after they started doing this like Viglas (2014) saw in her class after the implementation of mindfulness. It may be possible that these activities of stillness/quietness has something to do with the teachers Montessori education since Rudge (2008, p. 92) found in her study that Montessori schools value this. I draw a connection to Bone et al.’s (2007) everyday spirituality in a teacher’s ability to communicate tranquility and the above activities of sitting quiet and focusing on one thing. However the focus in these examples seem to be on correcting the children’s’ behavior rather than giving them a spiritual experience. The mind-body connection could also be traced in the children experiencing things first hand, like going on fieldtrips where the child can make connections between what they experience with the concepts or subjects they are working with connected to Dewey’s ‘learning by doing’ where the body is a tool for learning.

If we perceive it impossible to connect to others without a connection to one’s soul as Rudge (2008, p. 151) stated in her study then there are traces of *soul connections* found in the teachers statements. Throughout the four interviews the connection between teacher and child was important in the teachers work. PG explained that “This is the first [time the children] came out of home. They should feel safe and happy environment. So, we show our love and affection and be a second mother to them”. Having the qualities of “a friend”, a “good care taker” and being “lovable” were suggested by the teachers. These can be considered as qualities important to connecting with other people. Having a “mother’s touch”, as they

called it, I consider brings a special connection into the relationship between child and teacher. This relationship implicates not only that the teachers have a connection to their souls, but I also consider there to be a spiritual connection between the child and teacher in their mother-child relationship. I believe this to be beyond the usual connection between teacher and child creating what Miller (2007, p. 178) calls a mysterious energy creating meaning in life.

External connections

When it comes to *subject connections* I mentioned earlier that all the groups have planned structures for their days. A day at the playschool included free play (four corners with different materials chosen by the teachers), assembly (attendance, prayer, singing of anthems), language time, mathematics, concept time (where they worked with monthly themes/concepts), rhymes time, tummy time, play time, and a session with colouring worksheets, writing and readiness. A day at the kindergarten consisted of circle time, theme time, mathematics, English, playtime, and Tamil. When listed like this it seems as though the setup is multidisciplinary, i.e. the subjects are separate but may have some content links as Miller (2010, p. 61) describes it. However, when the teachers speak about the different parts of the day and about the different developmental areas I could see that there are interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary integration of subjects too.

- UKG: First here when they are coming here in the morning we will conduct circle time, in the circle time they will know what we are going to learn the whole day.
- K: Ok, alright.
- UKG: Next theme time. It is the rules and regulations, what they have to follow during their learning. If they are going to learn transport means they have to learn the rules. While going in a bus, while going in a train so they will learn the environment study during the theme time. So next we'll have maths time. They will learn the maths. And English time. Play time also it will be related to this, the topic.
- K: To that (point to notes on paper about themes)
- UKG: Learning about the transport means in the playtime they will pretend play as in going to the bus or train. Or they will make the draw a train, bus and they will put their friends are going. So this will, everything will be connected together for in a day.

Here we can see that there are specific purposes behind each part of the day. In this dialogue I perceive the activities to be transdisciplinary, i.e. nearly all the subjects like mathematics and language, even play, are integrated in a broad theme e.g. transportation (Miller, 2010, p. 61). The subject integration also include an integration of the various developmental areas of the child. For example, social development can be seen through the learning of rules and regulations as well as during their fieldtrips, which I will get back to later. Aspects of aesthetic and cognitive development can be seen in the drawing during playtime and the teaching of mathematics.

The idea of *community connections* was very evident in the teachers' answers. Creating a safe and happy classroom community seemed to be a priority.

LKG: So the surrounding is good, then only they can adapt with us. The mothering care. Mothering touch, don't worry, we will do anything for you, don't worry we will be here. So like that we are telling continuously then only they can remove the fear. They can remove the fear then only they can get adapting.

The quote shows what all teachers spoke of, their idea being that if the children do not feel safe and adapt to the preschool environment they will not be able to learn. By creating a loving and caring atmosphere the teachers mean they will create a good learning environment in the classroom where both teachers and children respect each other, i.e. a classroom community. Rituals is another way of creating community according to Miller (2007, p. 153). In both schools I found daily and weekly rituals of prayer and the singing of school anthems which I believe create a school community. Also the connection to the local community was found in their monthly field trips where the children got to meet different community services and speak to different workers.

Earth connections, however, was less evident but it could be traced in the schools theme days where they celebrate e.g. earth day and green day. On those days they teach the children to not use plastics and that trees should be planted not cut down. According to PG this is "Because it is very, it is polluted to our earth, no? So that's why we teach that we should avoid plastics. We should use natural recycling things". This goes along with the general idea of sustainable development and it follows the idea behind Miller (2007) promoting an earth connection; the fact that we humans have an impact on the earth. Creating a sense of awe and awareness by experiencing nature like Rudge (2008) and Miller (2007) I traced to the teachers taking the children on field trips.

PG: We took them out to the park to explore the nature and surrounding environment. There, the children learn about the variety of plants and various seasons. We ask them how they felt in that particular place whether it is hot or cool?

Although the purpose is to have the children experience the concepts they are working with there is evidence of an earth connection too.

Conclusion

As we can see I have found traces of the ideas of holistic education in the interviews regarding the whole child as well as the various connections although they are not directly referred to as these. The main purposes given by the teachers of some of the examples above are not explicitly connected to the ideas, but I believe that they can still involve or promote human wholeness and connections which is the goal of a holistic approach to education.

6.2.2. Concrete recommendations

I will here present the methods of holistic education I traced in the interviews.

Transmission teaching

In the transcripts I found that transmission teaching was used to teach phonics, cultural values and subject content, through what Miller called transferring knowledge and repetition (2010, p. 9-20). The teachers often said that they ‘tell them’ and ‘show them’ when working with the children which I see as the traditional style where teachers transfer knowledge.

PG: From this age, that is playgroup one point five years, it is very important to teach them how to clean themselves. For every week we check their nails, and every day we ask ‘Did you bath? Did you brush your teeth? Have you clean yourself?’ So every time we teach about that. We have to clean our self. Like that, so we give importance on it.

UKG: Yes. If I give the book the, immediately they will ask what is this man, enthusiastically they will come and work with this thing. So if I tell the sentence they will immediately they will write. Before I’m taking this class, what this number no? Before this I will teach them orally and in note also, in separate note. I will teach everything in a separate note. (...) After they will understand the concept and give the workbook.

As UKG told, the children repeat what they learn in different work- and notebooks. The use of repetition and using more than one material were also found as methods for “mastering school subjects with a focus on content” (Miller, 2010, p. 9-16). PG also mentioned when working with concepts that she will say ”this is an a-a-apple” which suggests the development of phonics through repetition, consistent with Miller’s (2010) idea of transmission teaching. The interview excerpts show the teaching of basic moral values and behavior by asking of questions through which the teachers impose their values. The teachers also said that they use storytelling as a means to transfer knowledge of courtesy and good habits. Since the children are in early childhood I do not find it strange that transmission teaching was often found since young children learn through imitation and repetition as Miller (2009) also mentions.

Transaction teaching

In the playschool it was important for the teachers that the children were given time to choose their own activities. Every day they had free play time where the teachers set up different activities which the children were encouraged to explore and choose from freely.

PG: Free play sessions means we give four corner arrangements. Each corner different types of activities. Like one corner puzzles, one corner paper, crayons or colouring anything also, and another corner books. Like that. So, how they explore the four corners. It’s like that.

K: Do they kids get to choose which corner?

PG: Yeah. They have to choose it. The kids have to choose it. We won’t interfere with them.

K: Do they have to change corners?

PG: Yeah, for five seconds they have to choose. Five minutes.

- K: Five minutes, ok. So they get to try every corner?
PG: Yeah every corner they have to try.

I interpret that transactional teaching can be seen here not via a verbal dialogue between the teacher and child but through the children's exploration of the teachers' classroom which they have adapted according to the needs of the children and the teaching aims. Like Tirri (2011, p. 162) saw in her study, I found evidence of Vygotsky's proximal development zone when the teachers spoke of their practices. I interpret that the teachers work using the proximal development zone by creating a good learning environment suitable to the group's level. At first glance this episode might not seem like free play since it seems very structured and the materials provided are chosen by the teachers. However, the activity itself is free in the sense that the children choose freely what to play with. Structured freedom with specific development goals. The teachers can be considered be the scaffolding supporting the children's own development without interfering with the children's decisions, as PG puts it. The teachers can be seen to believe that children create their own knowledge, in this case through play with the guidance from the teachers, which Miller means is a part of transaction teaching (2010, p. 10-11, 21).

- LKG: Activity based everyday on what they have given in work book. They have given the curriculum, madam, we have the curriculum, madame, manual. They have given the activity. Like that, what does mean by sink, float? Float means what? Sink means what? We have to do the activity. We can take one bowl of water then ask the children to put the beads, some beads are floating but some beads are sink. Like that they have to learn. What is mean by float. The visible, visible also they can (..) experience.

LKG's quote shows an example of a scientific method where she means the experience of an experiment will raise questions which can lead to dialogue. The problem based activity of floating objects which includes observation, experimentation and dialogue aligns with Miller's (2010) idea of transaction teaching.

Transformational teaching

Common to all the teachers was that they all wanted the children to like to learn. The principal at the playschool told during the interview with NG that "So we can't make them to sit and force them to study because they get hesitation for the study when we force them to do. So, a little bit we can take a letter or so", suggesting they take into consideration the inner life of the child too since they do not want to force the academic learning. Also at the kindergarten it was important to not force the children to do anything they didn't want to.

- UKG: The only thing we should not force them. We have to, little by little, in activity we have to teach them. We should not force them to do anything. If we force, they won't do anything.
K: And how...you try to make it fun for them, or?

- UKG: Ah yes. We are having a cd player or we have numbers also we are having a game. So grouping, they, in a number they will run run run, they will run. We stop and we will say the number. They say the number, they will group into one two three like that we will do.
- K: Ok, so learning through play?
- UKG: Without forcing anything, we have to give them in a playway method.

I found the playway method was used at both schools. The teachers mean that this way makes learning fun and meaningful for the children which an important aspect in transformational learning. Playing can be considered cooperative learning, as we can gather from the above example where the children have to work together to form groups consisting of a specified number of children thus embodying the concept of that number. Cooperative learning is one of the strategies used in transformational teaching and Miller (2007, p. 11) states that it can make learning socially and personally meaningful. This strengthens the teachers' idea of the playway method making learning meaningful to the children. In lower kindergarten, for example, they have a class Toto, a doll which was used for teaching, acting out, moral stories. Upper kindergarten used a puppet during circle time which encouraged the children to speak in the circle. At the kindergarten the children are encouraged to play outside to aid the physical development. NG mentioned that they used voice modification while telling stories to make them more fun and therefore meaningful for the children. When something is meaningful to someone their inner life can be nourished (Miller, 2010).

Arts

When discussing the children's academic development the use of worksheets, colouring and drawing was used as a means to this. Arts as its own subject was not found, rather, it was integrated into the other day activities or monthly concept, similar to what Rudge (2008) found in the Reggio Emilia schools where art is used for learning.

- UKG: Learning about the transport means in the playtime they will pretend play as in going to the bus or train. Or they will make the draw a train, bus and they will put their friends are going. So this will, everything will be connected together for in a day.

Drawing a train connects art to the concept they are working at the time which lets the child explore and manipulate the idea of a train by it choosing the colour, or as in this case the friends are included in the picture. In the playschool the children are encouraged to make animals or fruits using different materials like forks, paper and paint to aid the children in understanding the concept through visual aids. The arts dance and singing were also found. Singing was used as a means to develop the children's language during e.g. rhymes time at the playschool, while dance was strictly physical fitness development. These art forms were also given as examples of how the teachers make activities and learning fun and meaningful indicating the teachers work from an idea that the whole child should be involved in learning.

Not only the mind (thinking) should be enticed, but as the Waldorf school system encouraged, so should feeling and willing too (Rudge, 2008).

Yoga, meditation, mindfulness

When I comes to using yoga, meditation or mindfulness I found traces of this, however, it was not something which they referred to as yoga, meditation or mindfulness. The principal said that they do not work with mediation or yoga while discussing spirituality in the interview with NG. NG, however, gave yoga as an example of something they do for exercise, but did not explain it further. At the time of the interview I unfortunately did not recognize this conflict of utterances between NG and the Principal. It would have been interesting to have discussed this. Yoga is an activity which Miller (2010) suggests as a means to connect body, mind and soul. UKG mentioned that yoga is something which they do later in the school, it would have been interesting to discuss why they do not do it in kindergarten also since the difficulty of the activity can be alter according to ability.

UKG: So they can get concentration. At the beginning of class, month of June, we are starting the classroom, that time we will give some exercise to hands (UKG opens and closes hands), close your palm, open your palm, close it. Like that, open your eyes, close your eyes. To get the concentration. And also this movement, like (unbearable). So, this enable us to writing and playing, listen to us first. From the beginning itself. If we start this in the beginning itself means they won't write. So, little little funny activities we can..

NG: Like, what I do is just ask them to close their eyes for just two minutes, and just "mmm", like mumbling sound. To get about the feel. I do like that.

Both NG and UKG gave the example of what I interpret as a kind of meditation or mindfulness as a means of soothing a child who is angry or sad, which I briefly mentioned earlier under the concept of mind-body connections. Meditation is a method often mentioned as a means to create concentration and a way of connecting body and mind (Miller, 2007, 2010). These two examples of meditation can be seen to be uses as a means to instill quietness and creating focus in the moment as UKG says. Even though the teachers do not define their activities as meditation or mindfulness I interpret them to have the same effect as those Miller suggests meditation and mindfulness to have.

Experiential learning

When it comes to experiential learning I found that it was incorporated into the concept based learning that both schools use. It does not only give the children theoretical knowledge and practical experiences in the classroom, it also provides out-of-classroom experiences through fieldtrips. The field trips enable the children to practically explore what the concepts mean through interactions with the real thing.

UKG: When we are learning about the helpers we will take them to the market, post office and shopping complex, like that. So they can see the helpers there.

(...)

K: Ok. Do they get to speak to, like, the postman or the train conductor?

UKG: Ah yes. They speak. They speak to the vegetable vendor, they ask the names. They eh enthusiastically they are coming out. 'What is this, what is this?' They are asking the English names. If they tell the Tamil name our children will tell the English name.

The fieldtrips and hands on experiences like that of the fruit goes along the idea of Dewey (through Miller, 2000) which stated that education is life, not a preparation for life. Through this experience the children can have a meaning-making and creative dialogue with the world as Miller (2000) puts it. Not only can this be considered a means of concept learning, it also shows an effort to create a community-individual connection of which I spoke earlier.

Some of the in-the-classroom experiences which the schools provided the children with were different religious ceremonies and celebrations like Diwali and Christmas.

K: What do they learn when you celebrate Diwali?

NG: They happy by, we'll take them out, we'll make them to hold that everything, crackers and all. They're just happy, they'll be in a happy mood. They enjoy that.

K: So the purpose is that they get to experience Diwali?

Principal: What's about the festivals? If it is Diwali, why are we Diwali, and we will just say the story about that (unhearable), so one able person who have been influences over all the peoples. So that is a God, Goddesses, sorry. Goddesses who saved from him. Likewise the story is there. (...) Yeah, that's the Diwali, it means that the good defeats the evil. So we should be in a good manner likewise. So we should not harm others, harm other peoples and we should not disturb others. Like this we will just make a simple concept out of that.

In both schools the children were asked to dress up in different attires special to the festivals, to try different foods related to them and experience some of the ceremonies. Through these experiences the teachers aimed to create equality, teach morals and values, different cultures, as well as teach them about different religions. I connect these to Miller's (2010) subject connection since more than one aspect of the child can develop through this. UKG also mentions that apart from learning the Indian culture the children also learn about each other, they learn about their friends and their family traditions, creating a community connection.

Visualisation and metaphor

At the playschool I found a trace of the visualization method. The sequence of hear-visualise-reflect was mentioned when discussing how the teachers teach.

NG: What they do, they visualize and according to that they reflect.

K: Ok, so the child does that. And is this about everything? Like, mathematics, English?

NG: Yeah yeah. All of it.

Principal: That works very well for the concept wise. And when we see through the way we use is perfectly straining their mind. So whatever, for the last month only, for Abdul Kalam's

birthday we just show the rocket Mohachi. They are just know how the rocket is separating in the particular air before they break or. From the starting itself it starts as a set of rocket. So when we saw the video they are just asking questions. 'Why it separating mam?', 'Why, what's going on?', 'Why this much fire?'. Likewise they will come up with the questions when they saw the videos. So that will develop them very well in their signs way.

This method shows that the teachers believe the child to be a capable human being. However, the quote above shows that the visualisation they speak about is concrete visual aids, the children hear and see the rocket in a video which evokes questions and reflections in the children. The visualisation Miller (2007, 2010) refers to is more abstract, where images in the mind can induce creative thinking or make connections between subjects. I still consider the way which the playschool uses visualisation as a holistic approach to education since it encourages reflection and imagination. At the age of the children at the playschool concrete visuals can be considered an adapted version of Miller's abstract visualisation which is more suited for the level of development of the children.

Conclusion

As shown, the methods of teaching found in my literature review could be traced in the statements of the four preschool teachers. My interview study suggests that the different methods and outcomes are interconnected, i.e. arts can be considered transformational teaching, and mediation can be used to create mind-body connections or enable thinking connections. By including different methods the whole child can be developed and the various connections between individual and internal and external element can be made. Correlating with the findings in my literature review, my study proposes that an integrated, inclusive, and balanced use of these methods can lead to a development of all the aspects of the child including social, emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual and aesthetic.

7. Discussion and conclusion

7.1. Discussion

This study has been interesting to see evolve from having had a completely different idea from the beginning to the study becoming what it is now. At first during the interviews I felt that there were little to no holistic aspects in the stories of the four teachers, but as my work progressed and I better understood the theories and the transcripts I started seeing traces of the results of my literature review in the interview answers. As Rudge (2008) often found in her study, I also found that though the activities and the ideas which the teachers spoke of did not explicitly or purposefully promote holistic learning, I could still connect the teachers examples to the idea of developing the whole child seeing as all aspects of the child could be traced in the work of the teachers. The episodes about meditative actions for calming and concentration, where I interpret the teacher's purposes to be correcting behaviour so that they can conduct

classes and do planned activities rather than developing a mind-body connection or developing the whole child, is one such example. The concentration activity can still encourage a mind-body connection. I was surprised to find that there were so many similarities in ideas and methods in the two schools. I would have guessed there would have been more differences since they follow different curriculums and manuals. It makes me question the need for a national curriculum for all, but at the same time I believe that the development of a single national curriculum with clear, concrete, guidelines to follow is important for the equal provision of quality early childhood education and care since there are so many varieties available in India.

By applying a social constructivist approach to my interpretations I can understand that why I found the results I found may be because of my background in early childhood education both as a substitute and as a student teacher when the way the teachers spoke about how they worked and with what they worked initially clashed with my preconceptions of how a preschool practice can be planned and accomplished. My initial understanding of the holistic consisted of the idea that “care, socialization and learning together form a coherent whole” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 4) and the fear that the ambition of transmitting knowledge will overtake the aspect of care which Halldén (2007) voices, affected my initial reactions to this study. We as human beings construct our own knowledge in relation to the communities and societies we live in. The way I interpreted the interviews is that even though they state that emotional and social development is the most important I still saw a huge focus on academic skills like reading, writing and mathematics. Perhaps this is due to India being a developing country where education equals a better life and a way to contribute to a sustainable development of the country of India, and as NG told; to “work for the glory of India”. There seems to be an internalized understanding that children can only exceed in life if they have well developed academic skills. Compared to Sweden there is little focus on the individual and individual uniqueness. I come from an individualistic society where individual uniqueness is important, while India has a more community based society. The way they work reflect this, referring to their fieldtrips and the importance of a classroom community, and I have found that my reactions to and interpretations of the interviews also reflect this.

Although I found aspects of holistic education in the interview study I still saw a greater focus on the academic development and achievement which cannot be ignored. This seems counterproductive of the holistic aspects of the preschool practices mentioned by the teachers since holistic education was developed as a response to the high focus on academic/basic skills and test scores with the aim of bringing balance to the development of mind, body and spirit. The focus on academic and school readiness is important, and holistic education does not suggest it be ignored, it simply promotes a holistic approach where more (all) aspects of the child are given opportunities to be developed where various

methods are used, not only the old school way, the traditional/transmission teaching. Exploring these four preschool teachers' classrooms through interviews, and analyzing them using my tool created from the literature review, has given me a broader understanding of what a preschool practice can entail. Even though I felt like there was too big a focus on the academic development I can also understand Blaiklocks (2010) concerns about the worries of 'schoolification' of early childhood education and his critique of the holistic curriculum Te Wariki not being concrete enough which makes the curriculum very interpretative. I can understand the critique of the holistic curriculum since when conducting both my literature- and interview study I sometimes found it hard to specify and separate the idea and the methods since this approach to education is, as Miller stated, no one particular technique or method for holistic education (1992, p. 21 in Rudge, 2008, p. 6) making it difficult to decide what is holistic work or not. My understanding now is that the ideas of holistic education need balance, inclusion and connection of methods leading to an approach to education which I conclude make it holistic.

As the study showed there were differences in what areas of development should be included according to Miller (2007) and Tirri (2011) as well as the curriculums of the preschools I visited. Perhaps this is because the terms used can include various aspects depending on who is using them since there is no one definition of the term holistic and what it entails in relation to education. Since UNSECO (Marope & Kaga, 2015), Miller (2007, 2010), Skolverket, The Swedish National Agency for Education, (2011), and the two private preschools include different aspects in the holistic approach to education it would have been preferable for this kind of study if there existed a general worldwide document describing the idea and suggested methods. Granted, my study would have looked completely different then and it would probably have included a more critical aspect to the analysis of the teacher's answers which I do not have in this study since the purpose of it is not to see to what extent the preschools work holistically. It is rather an exploration of whether or not there are aspects of holistic education, as I understand it through my literature review, in preschools which follow holistic curriculums and the UNESCO guidelines.

7.2. Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to explore what holistic education entails and if a holistic approach can be traced in four preschool teachers' classrooms in two private preschools in the state of Tamil Nadu, India, since a holistic approach to early childhood education is encouraged by UNESCO (Marope & Kaga, 2015). The questions I sought to answer were:

1. What is the underlying idea of holistic education?
2. What working methods are recommended for holistic education?
3. Can the ideas of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?

4. Can the methods of holistic education be traced/found in the four teachers' statements about their practice in the two different preschools? If so, which are present?

The underlying ideas of holistic education I found in my literature review were that we are a whole person comprised of various parts which equally need to be developed and that creating opportunities for inclusion, balance and connections are all important in developing the physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, emotional and aesthetic parts of the individual, the mind, body and soul. The idea of connection was another important dimension of holistic education which consisted of the internal connections between thinking types, body and mind, and soul connections, as well as the external connections regarding subjects, communities, and the earth. The working methods often suggested in the literature I reviewed included the three teaching ways of transmission, transaction and transformational teaching. In addition to them I recognized the arts, yoga, meditation and mindfulness, experiential learning and visualization as concrete recommendations which aids the application of a holistic approach to education.

In my interview study I found that all of the ideas and methods from my literature review could be more or less traced even though the ideas the teachers followed in their work was not referred to as the whole person or connection, and purpose behind some of the methods were other than what Miller (2007, 2010) would have used them for. The conclusions I draw from my results are that even though the two preschools do not explicitly work holistically, even if they follow self-proclaimed holistic curriculums as shown in the introduction of the preschools, I found many aspects of the teachers' work to have traces of holistic ideas. This spurs me to go out into the working life with a new and wider understanding of what aspects of the child the activities and methods I choose to use can and will develop in the child. The study has made me realise to a larger extent how everything is interconnected and the importance of balance, connections and inclusion of methods. The study has also given me a more concrete understanding of the holistic approach to early childhood, the integration of care, learning and socialisation, which The Swedish National Agency for Education wants me to use.

8. Suggestions for further studies

For further studies I would find it interesting to do a comparative study of Swedish and Indian preschools seeing how my initial understanding of preschool practices clashed with my experiences of the Indian preschools through the interviews with the teachers. I would also find it interesting to not only conduct interviews of active teachers but also to conduct observations to see if there are aspects which are not exposed in the interviews, perhaps hidden and internalised information which can come to light through observations. It would also have been very interesting to compare a private preschool with a state run one.

It would also be interesting to conduct a similar study in two Swedish preschools to see if all the ideas and methods could more or less be traced in their practices as told in the statements of teachers as I was able to do in this study. Seeing how the cultures of Sweden and India are different it would also be interesting to conduct a study looking to see how the different cultures present themselves in preschool practices.

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Appendices

Interview guide

Background:

1. What education do you have?
2. Do you get continuous training through this job? What kind?
3. What are the ages of the children in playgroup, nursery/ LKG, UKG at your school?
4. How many children are there in each group? What is the teacher-child ratio? How many teachers and children do you have all in all at this school?
5. What kind of care and education do you provide? What makes parents choose your school over others?

Holistic education

1. Can you describe what a day here looks like for the children? How is a day here structured? How does this structure with its different activities develop the whole child?
2. Your curriculum mission states that you seek to “ensure opportunities for holistic learning and growth” where
 - language learning
 - numeracy development
 - cognitive development
 - physical development
 - creative development
 - personal, social and emotional development.

Can you please give examples of how you work with these, what activities do you do which develop these areas?

3. What pedagogical philosophies or theories lay behind the way you work/the education and care which you provide?
4. How would you say the children learn best?
5. What role do the children have in their own development? How much can the children influence what and how they learn during the day?
6. What role do you, the teachers, have in the children’s development? How do you help develop the whole child? What are good qualities to have as a teacher?

7. How important is the environment for the development of the child? How do you use your preschool facilities, to help develop the children? How do you create a good and safe learning environment?
8. Do you work with developing the children's spirituality/soul/heart? Why/why not? How?

Possible follow ups

9. How do you handle behavioral issues (like tantrums, attention seeking)? Why have you chosen that way?
10. How do you make learning joyful and meaningful for the children? Why?
11. How do you work with developing the children's understanding and acceptance of different classes/social background, ethnicities, cultures, religions? How do you work with the children's previous experiences/knowledge/skills, their individuality? Why?
12. What ethics/morals/values are important to teach the children? How do you do this? Why?
13. What life skills do you teach the children? How do you do this? Why are they important?
14. How do you support children who might have other needs than the "average" child?
15. Do you teach the children about the local community? What do you teach and how? Why?
16. Do you teach the children about the international/global community? Why? How?
17. How do you work with equality and gender equality? Why?
18. How do you work with democracy? Why?
19. How do you develop the children's relationship with nature and the surrounding environment?
20. What does the relationship between school and parents look like? Is it important for the child's development? How much influence do they have on the education you provide?
21. How do you prepare the children for their upcoming school years? For the future beyond the school years?
22. What is the most important thing for the children to develop and learn in the age group you work with? Why?

Information and consent form



XXX, 2015-10-13

Dear Madame/Sir,

I am a student at Södertörns Högskola in Stockholm, Sweden, studying the Preschool teacher programme with an intercultural profile. During the seventh, and last, semester of the programme I am writing a bachelor thesis containing a minor study relevant to the preschool field and my upcoming role as a preschool teacher. The study will be about working holistically with preschool children in relation to sustainable development. My interest lies in the teacher's perspective on how they work holistically and what the academic frameworks they follow say about it (curriculum for example).

To gather material for my study I would like to visit your school to conduct interviews with one or more pre-school teachers. I will record the interviews so that I can transcribe the answers fully.

While completing my essay I will follow the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council. These include anonymity and confidentiality. This means that the identity of children, parents, staff and preschool may not, and will not, be disclosed. The collected material will be anonymised and no registers about personal data will be kept for this study. The material will not be used in any other context other than in my own study. The finished essay will be published digitally through the publication database DiVA.

With this letter I would like to ask for your consent to partake in my study. All participation is voluntary and can be ended at any time, even after the collecting of material has begun. If you give your consent please fill in the attached form.

Please contact me or my professor for more information.

Kind regards,
Karin Andersson

Mobile No:
Email:

My professor:
Soheyla Yazdanpanah
Telephone No:
Email:

Form of consent to participate in study

I consent to participate in the study.

Your name:

Your signature:

The form should be returned to Karin Andersson. If you do not consent to participating in the study please disregard this letter.