



## Holistic Development and Forest School

The term 'Holistic', when referring to human development, comes from the idea of 'holism' which emerged in the 1970's in educational thinking - that things need to be understood as a whole. The Oxford English Dictionary quotes

"...characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole."

It is possible to analyse human development under separate aspects such as physical, intellectual, social and emotional development but all these aspects interact with each other in the life of real people to comprise holistic development. There are a number of views expressed by philosophers, thinkers and educators over the centuries about holistic development.

One of the world renowned thinkers on education and human development was Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986), he espoused the individual as one who should see him/herself as an integrated whole and unique and we are only truly free when we see ourselves as a 'global citizen' – as part of the human race.

*"The highest function of education is to bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole."* (Krishnamurti, 1964)

He saw love of the world, and higher deeper thinking combined with 'freedom' of the mind as essential to whole human development. He did not expound any philosophy or religion, but rather talked of the things that concern all of us in our everyday life the problems of living in modern society with its violence and corruption; of the individual's search for security and happiness; and the need for mankind to free itself from inner burdens of fear, anger, hurt, sorrow, and so on. He unravelled with great precision the subtle workings of the human mind and pointed to the need for bringing to our daily life a deeply meditative and religious quality (<http://www.krishnamurticentre.org.uk/teachings>)



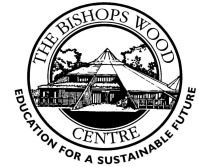
Many of the The Swiss humanitarians Johann Pestalozzi, Rudolf Steiner; the American Transcendentalists - Thoreau, Emerson and Alcott; the founders of “progressive” education - Francis Parker and John Dewey – and pioneers such as Maria Montessori, among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the developing child. All saw contact with the 'real', and often the natural world as something essential to child development.

Ron Miller, a contemporary educationalist, sees a holistic way of thinking as one that encompasses and integrates multiple layers of meaning and experience rather than defining human possibilities narrowly. Every child is more than a future employee; every person’s intelligence and abilities are far more complex than his or her scores on standardized tests. In his book 'What are Schools for' (1997) he demonstrates that holistic education, grounded in a fundamentally different worldview, reflects very different assumptions about education and schooling than the common western view, integrating the emotional, physical, psychological and cognitive aspects of child development.

With Forest School being based in a 'real' multisensory world, not bound by subjects, there is more opportunity for integration of all the aspects highlighted above. Working on a simple task such as setting up a house for a woodland creature – be they make believe or real, involves physical (gross and fine) development along with creativity, mathematical, social, communication and even a spiritual aspect regarding 'what is home' – a truly holistic experience not bound by traditional 'school subjects'. Indeed Sara knight has written extensively on what Forest School is and isn't and sees it as a holistic model, agreeing with Ron Miller to an extent, "In the same way, the Forest School experience differs from other forms of outdoor education in that its principle goal is to permanently change the participants for the good, not just to impart a one-off set of information or experiences." (Knight, 2009)

# Bishops Wood Centre

OCN accredited training for Forest School



Forest School can be seen as a way of integrating all human attributes and to equip individuals to live a fulfilling life and at the same time rise to life's challenges in a thoughtful and 'whole' global way – as Krishnamurti espoused 'to encourage us all to be truly integrated worldly individuals.'

## References and useful websites

Knight, S (2009) *Forest Schools & Outdoor Learning in the Early Years*. Sage publications Ltd, London

Krishnamurti, J (1964) *Think on These Things*. Harper and Row, New York

Miller, Ron (1997). *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture, 3rd Edition*. Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press

<http://infed.org/mobi/a-brief-introduction-to-holistic-education>

<http://www.pathsoflearning.net> (Ron Miller)

[www.green-changemakers.blogspot.com/2009/06/holistic-education-introduction.html](http://www.green-changemakers.blogspot.com/2009/06/holistic-education-introduction.html)

<http://www.holistic-education.net/about.htm>