

# ***Exploring Possibilities for Holistic Professional Development: Reflections on an Experimental Program***

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## **Abstract**

Dominant Western approaches to teachers' professional development (PD) remain rooted in the technical rationality of the early 20th century. This paradigm strives for a decontextualized universality of "what works" in PD through a commitment to precision and objectivity in methods and measurements. Unfortunately, this paradigm cannot adequately address the multidimensional complexity of individual teaching and learning contexts. In its attempts to construct universal best practices through the isolation of one variable at a time, the lens of technical rationality instead contributes to the fragmentation of teaching and ignores the diversity of teachers, learners, and environments in schools. A holistic approach to PD, however, draws on this complexity and diversity to nurture teachers' relationships with their own soul, their students, their colleagues, and their world. This paper presents and explores an example of a holistic approach to PD in a secondary school in Ontario. The justification and design of the approach is outlined in detail, followed by a summary of its strengths and limitations based on participants feedback and facilitator reflections. Based on the overwhelmingly positive responses, further research into holistic approaches to PD is encouraged.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Laurie Fraser, whose embodiment of the principles and spirit of holistic approaches to education was instrumental in the co-design and co-facilitation of this professional learning experience. This experience, and this paper, would not have been possible without her.

**Keywords:** *teacher learning, professional development, holistic education, core reflection*

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## Introduction

While working as a special educator in a high school in New York City, I had an experience that fundamentally reoriented my perspective on teacher education and development. I found myself co-teaching with an exceptionally effective grade nine veteran math teacher in one classroom, and a struggling first-year grade ten math teacher in another. On paper, many of the variables operating in these two classrooms were similar, if not identical. Both teachers were working in the same school, in the same school year, and in the same subject area. The new teacher even had the same students that the veteran teacher had had the year before. Theoretically, the new teacher ought to have simply adopted the “best practices” of the veteran teacher in order to be effective. The new teacher attempted this at first but had to quickly abandon the approach. The veteran teacher’s pedagogy worked for him not because it tapped into universal “best practice,” but because what he did resonated with who he was as a person and as a teacher. His practice drew on his own particular values, qualities, and experience, and relied on (and further cultivated) his professional relationships with his students and the school community. Consequently, attempts by the new teacher to replicate the practices of the veteran teacher failed. Instead, he had to engage in his own pedagogical experiments, perpetually failing and succeeding and failing again to develop a pedagogy authentic to his own reality. Seeing this story unfold underscored the limitations of many approaches to teachers’ professional development (PD) that focus solely on propagating a particular practice, without recognizing (let alone honoring) the individual realities of the teachers involved.

This impetus to look outward for the “best practices” in our school(s) or in our field and then

replicate them, rather than starting from a place of personal authenticity, is due in part to the conditioning that we as teachers receive from our own schooling and training. Much of today’s Western approach to curriculum and pedagogy continues to be rooted in the technical rationality of the early 20th century that strives for universality based on precision, objectivity, and a reductionist and fragmented prescription of activities (Kliebard, 1975; J. P. Miller, 2018; R. Miller, 1990; Rodriguez & Fitzpatrick, 2014). This reductionist orientation has driven approaches to teacher development as well. Currently, there is general agreement in the literature that the purpose of PD is to (a) change teacher practice in order to (b) improve student outcomes, generally in the pursuit of the dissemination of identified best practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Merchie et al., 2018; Vermunt, 2014; Whitcomb et al., 2009; Zepeda, 2012). In reality, teaching goes far beyond technique (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015; J. P. Miller, 2014; Schön, 1984) and that there is no single “best way” to teach (Palmer, 2017; Rodriguez & Fitzpatrick, 2014; van Manen, 2016). Indeed, despite decades of research based on the topic, researchers are still struggling to adequately define “effective” PD (Merchie et al., 2018; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). In its attempts to construct the universal best practices through the isolation of one variable at a time, the lens of technical rationality instead contributes to the fragmentation of teaching and ignores the diversity and multidimensional reality of teachers, learners, classroom, school, and larger societal communities (Lewis & Hogan, 2019; Simmie, 2021). We need more holistic approaches to PD that, instead, acknowledge and embrace this multidimensional diversity and are rooted in the unique lived realities of the teachers involved. We need holistic approaches to PD that can nurture

rather than ignore, or sever, the connections and relationships between a teacher and their own soul, their students, their colleagues, and their world. This paper explores an example of one such experimental holistic approach to PD in a secondary school in Ontario.

### **Conceptualizing a Holistic Approach to Professional Development**

An explanation of the approach to “holistic professional development” described in this paper first requires a brief discussion of concepts of holistic education more generally. As many have noted, there is no one way to conceptualize or enact holistic education (Forbes & Martin, 2004; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2018; R. Miller, 1990). It has an extraordinary, lengthy, and varied history, interwoven with the perennial philosophy (J. P. Miller, 2018) with roots in philosophy, pedagogy, psychology, theology, and indigenous thought (Battiste, 2017; Forbes & Martin, 2004; J. P. Miller, 2018). Despite its complexity, breadth, and nuance, there are two qualities that are frequently identified as integral to a holistic approach. First and foremost, in contrast to the reductionism (R. Miller, 1990) and technical rationality (J. P. Miller, 2014) of traditional schooling, holistic education focuses on the education of the whole being (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Neves, 2009). This generally includes emphasizing a spiritual dimension (J. P. Miller, 2018; R. Miller, 1990) and/or the pursuit of a person’s unique and comprehensive self-actualization, or “ultimacy” (Forbes & Martin, 2004). Second, there is a common emphasis on the interconnectedness of reality, and the communal nature of living and learning in the world. Where more traditional “objective” and “scientific” approaches attempt to manipulate isolated variables in teaching and learning as though operating a complex machine, holistic

education refocuses on balancing and nurturing relationships between various aspects within our individual selves, our relationships with other people and the wider world, and our different ways of knowing and interacting with reality (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; J. P. Miller, 2019; R. Miller, 1990). Putting these two elements together, J. P. Miller’s seminal work on holistic curriculum defines holistic education as, simply, the education of “the whole person – body, mind, and spirit – within the context of an interconnected world” (2019, p. 5).

Working from this perspective, Miller (2014) and others (Bukor, 2015; Culham et al., 2018; Korthagen, 2004; Schiller, 2018; Tan, 2012) advocate for holistic approaches to teacher education, and development specifically, that go beyond isolated and exclusively rationalized, externalized behaviours valued only on the basis of their impact on measurable student outcomes. Unfortunately, holistic approaches to PD appear to be exceedingly rare, and seem to be largely absent from PD research (Simmie, 2021). This scarcity is particularly significant given the vast quantity of studies on teachers’ PD that have been conducted over the last few decades (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Furthermore, the few approaches to PD in the literature that are explicitly “holistic” seem to understand and operationalize their holistic approach in different ways. For example, Kriek and Grayson’s “holistic professional development model” focuses on an integration of “content knowledge, teaching approaches, and professional attitudes” (2009, p. 187) while Golden and Brown’s model, in contrast, “takes a comprehensive look at the whole person” and the “many facets that affect” the goal of the PD (2017, p. 266). Meanwhile, McNulty and Ortiz focus their “holistic” PD on “theoretical concepts of

learner-centered curriculum, negotiation in curriculum development, and synthetic curriculum design, in order to connect practice and theory” (2007, p. 139). These and other works that focus on “holistic” professional development, e.g. (Bukor, 2015; Niemi, 2015), seem to use the term to mean that the PD addresses multiple variables, elements, or factors at the same time, although the specific variables addressed are unique to each study. Interestingly, these authors do not position their work in relation to literature exploring holistic education more generally.

The notable exception is Korthagen’s core reflection framework (2004, 2012; Korthagen & Nuijten, 2018), a framework for an explicitly holistic approach to PD that has been incorporated into a number of PD studies over the last decade (e.g. Attema-Noordewier & Fred, 2012; Kim & Greene, 2011; Koster & van den Berg, 2014; Pérez et al., 2010). The core reflection framework was central to the design and implementation of the approach to PD described below. Indeed, our conceptualization of our “holistic” approach to PD is drawn largely from Korthagen’s work with core reflection specifically and J.P. Miller’s (2019) conceptualizing of holistic education more generally. Consequently, in this paper, we conceptualize “holistic professional development” as PD that is both (a) focused on honouring and cultivating teachers’ whole beings in the work, and (b) authentically responsive to, and emergent from, teachers’ interconnected lived realities and experiences. What follows is our attempt to put this theoretical approach into practice.

### **Context of the Professional Development**

The authors currently work at an independent secondary school in Ontario, Canada in the roles of special educator, researcher, teacher coach, wellbeing coordinator, and advising program

coordinator. In our school’s advising structure, students are placed in groups of 18-20 students in their 9th grade year, and then stay with that same adviser teacher and group of students through to their graduation four years later. Year 9 is, then, an especially significant year for both adviser and advisees. It is challenging for advisers for three main reasons. First, they are leaving students they have come to know over four years to start fresh with a new and unknown group. Second, they are transitioning from working with more mature students (Year 12) to students who are less mature (Year 9). Furthermore, the advising curriculum is unique to each year level, requiring advisers to orient themselves to a new curriculum. In order to help support this transition, the authors collaborated on designing and implementing a PD experience for ten incoming Year 9 advisers in the spring of 2021. At the time, schools in Ontario were closed to in-person learning due to a wave of Covid-19. This meant that the PD would have to be entirely online, which added another layer of challenge. We lay out the approach we adopted and its impact below. We believe that, while limited in scope, this approach is a powerful testament to the potential of holistic approaches to PD.

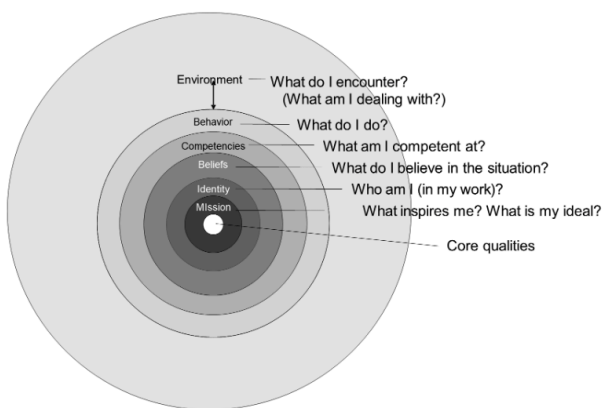
### **The Holistic Design**

Using Korthagen and Nuijten’s (2018) core reflection framework, guided by Miller’s (2019) principles of holistic education, we designed a week of PD for the incoming Year 9 advisers (see Table 4). Korthagen and Nuijten’s core reflection framework not only recognizes, but works in and with teachers’ multilayered realities. In particular, we appreciated that the core reflection framework addresses teachers’ core qualities, values, and environmental contexts while giving space to the importance of technical competency as well. In order to be able to address all of the elements, we

designed four sessions of PD to be spread out over four consecutive days. Each session focused on one or more layers of the onion model of core reflection, illustrated in Figure 1 below. The layer(s) we focused on in each session are noted under the session titles in Table 4. We moved outward from the centre of the onion to the outer layer(s) as we progressed through the week, with the final session focused on seeking resonance across all of the layers, which is the ultimate goal of core reflection work (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2018).

**Figure 1**

**Core Reflection Onion Model**



*Note.* This figure above illustrates the layers of “core reflection,” from Korthagen, F. A. J., & Nuijten, E. E. (2018). Core Reflection. In the *International Handbook of Holistic Education* (pp. 89–99). Routledge.

In designing the activities for each session, we were guided by what Miller (2019) calls the three principles of holistic education; balance, inclusion and connection. Miller argues that, like the Taoist concepts of yin and yang, we need to *balance* complementary and interconnected energies. We focused on four of the complementary forces that Miller identifies, summarized briefly in Table 1. While it is impossible to completely split these

pairs of interconnected forces, a particular activity will often emphasize one side more than the other. For example, while a group discussion will often also nurture the individual learning of each participant, there is a stronger emphasis on group learning. Consequently, we endeavored to select and sequence activities that would balance these emphases over the course of each session. I have noted the intended emphasis of each activity in the second column, “Balance,” in Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7 below.

**Table 1**

*Balance*

Individual/ Group	Content/ Process	Rational/ Intuitive	Technique/ Vision
Balance opportunities for individual learning and group learning.	Balance covering opportunities for learners to process that content.	Merge rational and intuitive analysis and exploration of ideas and problems.	Balance developing specific techniques with cultivating a holistic appreciation for our students.

Miller’s principle of *inclusion* refers to the need for holistic educational experiences to include three “educational orientations” (2019, p. 13), which he calls transmission, transaction, and transformation. I briefly summarize each orientation in Table 2. While a transmission orientation is sometimes important, and remains dominant in schools today, Miller (2019) argues that a holistic approach to education needs to engage all three. Initially, we planned to use these three orientations as the primary guide to our design. We intended to progress from

transmission, to transaction, to transformation orientations over the course of the PD. However, it became clear during the design process that such a linear approach did not resonate with either the spirit of the principle of inclusion or our own priorities for the PD experience. Instead, in keeping with the principle of balance, we worked hard to ensure that we engaged in all three orientations at some point during each individual session. I have indicated the intended educational orientation in parentheses and italics next to the name of each activity in Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7.

**Table 2**

*Inclusion’s Educational Orientations*

Transmission	Transaction	Transformation
Omnidirectional. Knowledge and/or skills are received by the learner.	Bidirectional. The learner interacts with, manipulates, and/or changes knowledge and/or skills as they learn them.	Nondirectional, emergent, expansive. The distinction between learning and the knowledge and/or skills being learned blurs. Connections are made by the learner to other knowledge and/or skills, or other aspects of the learner’s being.

Finally, guided by Miller’s (2019) third principle of *connection*, we sought to cultivate relationships with, within, and between each of our advisers

through this PD experience. We focused on four of Miller’s six kinds of relationships that can be nurtured through the exploration and making of connections: relationships between mind and body, between domains of knowledge, between self and community, and to the soul (see Table 3). The third and fourth relationships, between self and community and to the soul, were our primary foci. We believed that these two were most essential to our work as advisers, and most in need of attention given the disconnection and mental and spiritual distress of the pandemic and its effects. Similar to the elements of *balance* and *inclusion* noted above, we tried to be intentional about the cultivation of both of these connections in each of our sessions. I note the relational focus of each activity in the third column, “Connection,” in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 below.

**Table 3**

*Connection*

Mind and Body	Domains of Knowledge	Self and Community	To the Soul
Connect physiological and cognitive processes.	Connect knowledge and skills across discipline and subject areas.	Connect oneself with others in a community.	Connect learning to one’s own soul, the sense of our self that transcends the thoughts and concerns of the ego.

**Overview of Sessions**

Session 1 (“Why do we do this work?”) focused on the core reflection onion model layers of core qualities, mission, and identity of each of the advisers. We started by articulating and being transparent about our goals for the PD while

providing space and time for these goals to be contested. We wanted to ensure that, first and foremost, the intended focus of the week was going to be meaningful to the advisers. Following affirmation of the perceived value of our intentions, we then spent the majority of our time on the visualization, pair share, and jamboard activities to give space and time to honour and bring the advisers' strengths and skills, values and

beliefs, and core qualities as advisers into the shared learning space. The discussion at the end then served as a kind of celebration of the advisers, while highlighting, in both explicit and implicit ways, each adviser's sense of purpose in their advising work, and their sense of identity as advisers. Table 4 lays out our plan and sequence.

**Table 4**

*Session 1: Why do we do this work?*

Session Activities ( <i>Educational Orientation</i> )	Balance Emphasis	Connection Focus
<p>Music Opening / Weather Report Check-In (<i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers share favourite songs to be added to a group playlist used throughout the remaining sessions.</li> <li>Advisers describe their current state of mind and heart in terms of the weather. (e.g. "clear and warm with patchy cloud cover" or "cool, damp and foggy")</li> </ul>	Group, Intuitive	Self and Community
<p>Overview of the PD priorities (<i>Transmission</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surface advisers' collective experience and wisdom</li> <li>Present draft statement on our purpose in advising</li> <li>Develop knowledge of, and relationships with, each other as a Year 9 adviser community</li> <li>Establish authentically collaborative norms</li> <li>Review this PD for improvements for next year's cohort of advisers</li> </ul>	Individual, Content, Rational	Domains of Knowledge, Self and Community
<p>Visualization of Peak Experience (<i>Transformation</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided visualization of a positive advising experience from advisers' the past</li> </ul>	Individual, Intuitive	To the Soul, Mind and Body
<p>Pair Share (<i>Transaction</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers share visualization with a partner. As one partner is sharing their story, the other looks for (and takes notes on) the following: the adviser's strengths and skills, values &amp; beliefs, and core qualities as an adviser</li> </ul>	Group, Process, Vision	Self and Community
<p>Jamboard Share (<i>Transaction</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers post what they heard in their partners' stories</li> <li>Group discussion of what is seen across the notes</li> </ul>	Group, Process, Rational, Technique	Domains of Knowledge

Session 2 (“Why do we do this work?”) focused on the core reflection layer of beliefs. We wanted to collectively explore reasons for prioritizing belonging in our advising work with our students to ensure that a focus on belonging in Year 9 advising resonated with advisers' experiences and beliefs. We reviewed and discussed challenges and

opportunities for students in our specific school context, before turning to literature on the role of belonging in schools in general. In our final discussion, we were surprised and excited by just how deeply a focus on belonging seemed to resonate with advisers' beliefs, analyses of our own context, and interpretations of the literature.

**Table 5**

*Session 2 Focus: Why do we do this work?*

Session Activities ( <i>Educational Orientation</i> )	Balance Emphasis	Connection Focus
Music (group playlist) / One word check-in ( <i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers share their current state of mind and heart through a single word or phrase</li> </ul>	Group, Intuitive	Self and Community, To the Soul
Sharing of Year 9 Advising Focus on Belonging ( <i>Transmission</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share recent mental health data for youth and for our school specifically</li> <li>Review school's well-being framework: highlight centrality of relationships</li> <li>Sharing of how an appreciative inquiry activity done with advisers in the previous year surfaced relationships as the top priority</li> <li>Belonging is the essence of authentic relationships and is central to well-being</li> </ul>	Individual, Content, Rational, Vision	Domains of Knowledge, To the Soul
Jigsaw: Read or watch and summarize your text for the whole group ( <i>Transaction</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small groups read or watch a specific and unique article, paper, or video</li> <li>Each group summarizes the main ideas</li> <li>Each group discusses freely and notes any insights and/or questions that emerge</li> </ul>	Group, Rational and Intuitive, Technique	Self and Community
Share ( <i>Transaction</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groups share: What resonated? What did not? What questions do we have?</li> </ul>	Group, Intuitive, Vision	Domains of Knowledge
Waterfall Chat: Pulse Check ( <i>Transformation &amp; Transaction</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are we thinking and feeling right now?</li> </ul>	Individual, Intuitive, Vision	To the Soul

Session 3 (“Why Belonging curriculum?”) focused on the core reflection layers of competencies,

behaviour, and environment. In this session, we shared known strategies for fostering belonging in



advising classrooms as well as an overview of the Belonging curriculum resources that would be available to them throughout the following year. We wanted advisers to have a chance to develop familiarity with the Belonging resources while simultaneously ensuring that advisers understood that these and other resources that would be

shared were meant to be supportive rather than prescriptive. The final activity, which focused on testing out one of the Belonging activities, seemed to strike this balance as some advisers articulated ways they would adopt and implement the activity while others shared hesitations and alternative approaches. We made a point to affirm and support the full spectrum of perspectives.

**Table 6**

*Session 3: Why Belonging curriculum?*

Session Activities ( <i>Educational Orientation</i> )	Balance Emphasis	Connection Focus
Music (group playlist) / Weather Report ( <i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers describe their current state of mind and heart in terms of the weather. (e.g. “clear and warm with patchy cloud cover” or “cool, damp and foggy”)</li> </ul>	Group, Intuitive	Self and Community, To the Soul
Highlight Powerful Advising Techniques ( <i>Transmission</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voice: ensure all students have a voice</li> <li>Time: be patient, use wait time, focus on process over content</li> <li>Routine: find routines that work for the group, e.g. entry music, check-ins, door greetings, sitting in a circle, etc.; it is ultimately about practicing being together</li> <li>Embrace Individuality: Each of our rooms will be unique to who we are as advisers and our group of students</li> </ul>	Individual, Content, Rational, Technique	Domains of Knowledge
Example Advising Activity: Passion Swap ( <i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pairs engage in activity</li> <li>Group discussions of the strengths and limitations of activities like this</li> <li>Group discussion of different ways we might approach this activity with our own students</li> </ul>	Process, Intuitive, Technique & Vision	Self and Community, To the Soul

Session 4 (“Moving forward”) focused on finding and amplifying resonance across all the layers of core reflection. We wanted to give advisers more time to explore the resources in the Belonging curriculum in order to think about and share out how each thought they may approach their work in advising the following year. We started by

highlighting the value in the diversity of our approaches, and the priority that what we do in our advising rooms resonates with all the layers of our work, from our core values to our behaviours. Interestingly, while we had originally planned for each adviser to share their choice, we ultimately spent more time working through opportunities

and challenges for our work in the advising space in our particular context. This was particularly helpful because not only did it serve as time for the advisers to problem solve their own practice, but it also identified some specific takeaways for

my colleague to bring to administration about needs and challenges for the advising program more generally. It is also worth noting that the provision of food went a long way in making this final session special and meaningful.

## Table 7

### Session 4: Moving forward

Session Activities ( <i>Educational Orientation</i> )	Balance Emphasis	Connection Focus
Music (group playlist) / Celebrations Activity ( <i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisers share one thing from the previous day or week, outside of the PD sessions, that they would like to celebrate</li> </ul>	Group, Intuitive	Self and Community, To the Soul
Surprise gift of food delivered to advisers' doors		Mind and Body
Collaborative Exploring of Curriculum Activities ( <i>Transaction</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual advisers select one activity from the curriculum that they would like to do with their group</li> <li>Group share: How does this activity resonate (or not) with an awareness of (1) how Year 9 students might respond, and (2) your values, personality and skills as an adviser?</li> </ul>	Individual & Group Content & Process Rational & Intuitive Technique & Vision	Domains of Knowledge, Self and Community
Final Waterfall Chat Debrief ( <i>Transaction &amp; Transformation</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual advisers respond to the following prompts: What are you worried about? What are you hopeful about? What would help you do this work?</li> </ul>	Individual, Process, Intuitive, Vision	Domains of Knowledge, To the Soul

It may have been easier to approach this PD in the traditional way, rooted in principles of technical rationality discussed above. For example, we could have focused on transmitting expectations and knowledge that we thought would be helpful to

incoming Year 9 advisers, perhaps in the form of a 30- or 45-minute presentation. This is not something either of the authors wanted to do, however, for two primary reasons. First, we knew that we were going to be working with

experienced educators who knew and cared a lot about the work of advising. We wanted not only to recognize that, but to honour it, defer to it, and amplify it. Second, we knew that the Year 9 advising Belonging curriculum was not, itself, the most important element of the time that advisers and advisees would be spending together. The curriculum was meant to be used to support advisers' efforts to cultivate relationships with and between students and foster a sense of belonging in the group. It was imperative to us that advisers felt empowered to make the best decisions for themselves and their groups, rather than feel pressure to "do what was required." A traditional, solely transmissive approach to PD, regardless of its content or style, would have struggled to address either of these factors. It seemed abundantly clear to us that the more holistic approach was necessary. I (L. Smith) share my own reflections of the impact of this PD below.

### **Impact**

J.P. Miller (2019) presents four aims of holistic education: (1) wholeness/well-being, (2) wisdom and compassion, (3) awe and wonder, and (4) sense of purpose/mastery. While these aims were not an intentional part of our PD design process, they are useful here for framing the holistic impact of the PD on ourselves and the incoming Year 9 advisers. My reflections on the impact of the PD are based on my own notes on each session, as well as advisers' responses to an anonymous exit slip that was completed after each session. The exit slip asked for a 1-5 rating of the session and provided an optional space for any questions, comments, or concerns.

### **Wholeness/well-being**

In their comments, many advisers shared appreciation for the culture and the dynamics of

the PD. They expressed specific appreciation for the working environment, the humour, and the opportunity to talk openly and authentically. After the last session, one adviser commented that they felt "very supported as an adviser," and another called the PD "therapeutic and refreshing." Encouragingly, none of the comments that were submitted were critical of the PD sessions themselves. This was particularly noteworthy given the fact that this week of PD was entirely online. Additionally, thanks to Covid-19, the PD was held at the end of one of the advisers' most challenging and demoralizing school years. Even in this context, it seems that approaching the PD holistically allowed most of the advisers to be nurtured and energized, rather than further drained, by the experience.

### **Wisdom and compassion**

Advisers expressed appreciation for the content of the PD and for its relevance to their work as advisers. The work we did with belonging seemed to particularly resonate. Also moving was how wisdom and compassion was shared between us as the week progressed. By opening up spaces for authentic and vulnerable conversations, guided by openness rooted in genuine care for one another and our students, we all had opportunities to share and receive wisdom and compassion over the course of the four sessions. In response to one of our discussions, one adviser wrote in the chat of the "Love love love" that was present. This wisdom and compassion were not only in relation to our work in advising, but also to other aspects of life that would periodically emerge.

### **Awe and wonder**

The sharing of wisdom and compassion led to an increasing sense of awe and wonder that we developed for one another and for our work.

Advisers commented on how appreciative they were to get a chance to see each other more deeply, and would often elevate each other's questions, comments, and concerns. Seeing each other's perspectives allowed us to develop a more profound appreciation for the depth and meaning of the work itself. By the end of the week, it was clear that the work of advising has the potential to be profoundly transformative for advisees' academic and social lives, and that our growth as advisers is a lifelong journey.

### **Sense of purpose/mastery**

Advisers left the PD feeling greater clarity of purpose in our advising work and better prepared to engage in that work. On the anonymous exit slip that asked advisers to score that day's session, 72% of the scores were fives and 28% were fours. No adviser gave any session less than a four out of five. One adviser commented that "this is by far the most informative PD I have taken part in this year." A number of the comments were appreciative of what we covered, with one commenting that it addressed "profoundly important territory," and many asked that we continue the work. While the work is ongoing, both my own observations and the comments of the advisers suggest that meaningful progress and growth towards greater mastery was made.

### **Limitations**

While none of the submitted comments expressed criticisms of the sessions themselves, there were articulated frustrations with the timing and scheduling of the sessions. One adviser spoke to the challenge of having short sessions in the middle of the school day that focused on such emotionally and intellectually demanding work. It was stressful to have to switch gears so quickly, and limited their capacity to engage fully in the

short time that was available. Others also spoke to the need for more time, suggesting that half or full day sessions would have been better. Lastly, some advisers commented that the advising structure itself warranted examination. Specifically, the number of students in a group (around 20) and excessive programming were cited as stifling of the relational work that advisers felt was central to the work. While not a direct criticism of the professional development experience itself, these concerns do underscore its limitations in the face of structural and programmatic obstacles.

### **Conclusion**

The attempt at a holistic approach to PD described in this paper had a more significantly positive impact than either of the authors expected. By using Korthagen and Nuijten's (2018) core reflection framework, guided by Miller's (2019) holistic principles of balance, inclusion, and connection, the PD had a positive impact on participating advisers' wholeness/well-being, wisdom and compassion, awe and wonder, and sense of purpose/mastery. It is remarkable how many of the most impactful qualities of the PD would likely have been entirely absent if we had approached the PD design through the lens of technical rationality, as is customary today. For example, it is likely that we would not have had a space that allowed for the open and honest sharing of thoughts and experiences that led to some of the most valuable learning and growth, both individually and as a group. In fact, we likely would not have even known these qualities were missing if we had approached this PD in the customary way, beyond a vague sense of the PD being ineffective and/or uninspired. It was only through applying a different philosophical lens, in this case a holistic lens, that other, richer and more meaningful possibilities for professional learning and growth became evident. As such,

although limited in scope, this example of an experimental holistic approach to PD provides insight into the possibilities for future PD research and programming. Ultimately, we hope that our experience may encourage other teachers and educators to develop and implement more holistic approaches to PD that work with teachers' whole beings situated in diverse and interconnected realities.

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### Author Bio

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