Implementing a Holistic Approach to Education: Lessons Learnt From Latvian "Heart" Teachers' Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Aim. Recent studies have stressed that education transformation can be efficiently achieved by introducing a holistic approach, embedding a culture of teaching and learning for wholeness that espouses the holism of human beings and the world. A qualitative multiple study was performed to analyse Latvian "heart" teachers' narratives about themselves and their significant life experiences to identify their dominant approaches to life and work at school to answer the following research questions: What do the narratives of the seven Latvian "heart" teachers reveal about themselves and their approaches to life and work at school and the contributions of the participants' significant life experiences to their approaches? Are Latvian "heart" teachers' approaches holistic or not?

Methods. The research data encompasses seven cases based on semi-structured interviews with Latvian teachers nominated by their colleagues, students and/or parents to participate in the campaign HeartTeacher in the academic year 2021/2022. Qualitative data were processed and analysed using the QSR NVivo 12 software.

Results. Implementing a holistic approach to education is evident in the Latvian "heart" teachers' professional practices. In all seven cases, evidence was found about

providing a welcoming environment to all, reflecting on the interdependence of things and focusing on multiple connections as well as being an equal learning partner of others. However, a holistic approach to personal life is not sufficiently evident among the experienced "heart" teachers. By contrast, the novice "heart" teachers' approaches to personal life are perceived as more holistic.

Conclusion. A whole (holistic) teacher implements the holistic approach both in their professional and personal lives, not only caring for others but also for themselves, thereby achieving balance. A whole (holistic) teacher's life philosophy is based on the principles of wholeness, inclusion, connectedness, and balance among the different aspects of life.

Keywords: multiple case study, holistic approach, holistic curriculum, holistic education, narrative inquiry, whole (holistic) teacher

INTRODUCTION

While "everything is part of an interconnected whole … much of education is fragmented and does not reflect this reality" (Miller, 2022, p. 1). To facilitate the interconnectedness and transform the fragmented world, a new approach to education as a main driver of development is needed (Cedefop, 2019; Miseliunaite et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2016). Education 2030 states a renewed vision for education that should be "holistic, ambitious and aspirational" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 7). A holistic approach encompasses a wide range of multiple (e.g., philosophical, educational, health-careful) paradigms, trends and practices (Badjanova & Iliško, 2015a; Freeman, 2005; Gazibara, 2013; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Smuts, 1936; Tirri, 2011) based on the concept of holism. As mentioned by Joshua Freeman (2005), "the term holism is generally conceded to have been coined by the South African Jan Smuts in 1926" (p. 154). Jan Smuts (1936) defined holism (in Greek: ὅλος (*holos*) — whole, wholeness) as "a process of creative synthesis" and stressed that "as a process, it is not only creative but self-creative and its final structures are far more holistic than its initial structures" (p. 86), emphasising that a human's personality as "the highest and most complex of all wholes" is "the supreme embodiment of holism" (Smuts, 1936, p. 260). Many scientists believe (Badjanova & Iliško, 2015a, 2015b; Crowell, 2022; Miller, 2019, 2022; Miller et al., 2022) that education transformation can be efficiently achieved by introducing a holistic approach, embedding a culture of teaching and learning for wholeness that espouses the holism of human beings and the world. Nowadays, there are holistic education initiatives around the world, with the most evident practices in Asia, North America and Europe (e.g., Freedman, 2022; London, 2022; Miller, 2019; Miller et al., 2022; Nagarajan et al., 2022; Taitano, 2021; Taitano & Weistar, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Concept of Holistic Education

Although the term "holistic education" is relatively new (arising in the 1980s in North America), holistic education as a practice has been going on for centuries, and its importance dates back at least to Pestalozzi (Bruhlmeier, 2010; Gazibara, 2013; Miller, 2019; Rybska & Błaszak, 2020) or even farther to the indigenous people who were the first holistic educators (Miller, 2019). Holistic education as a vision of education that connects a fragmented world (Miseliunaite et al., 2022) and assists human beings in discovering their purpose for being present here and now (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022) is about a more balanced approach in educating and developing the whole person — body, mind, and spirit — by cultivating the relationships among the different aspects of the individual, e.g., spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, moral, social, and aesthetic — within the context of the interconnectedness of all living and non-living ecosystems on Earth based on multiple relationships between the part and the whole, the individual and community, the individual and nature and so on (Luvmour, 2021; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Miller, 2019, 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). Holistic education is a journey for both the educator and the student and restores a vision of wholeness, connectedness and sustainability by nurturing the development of the whole person; it revolves around relationships and concerns life experiences and respect for life and the never-fully-knowable source of life (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Objectives and Goals of Holistic Education

The main objective of holistic education is to bring out the best in every learner, starting with the soul (Taitano, 2021). Each person has their own purpose as part of a larger story, and holistic education attempts to help learners discover that purpose (Miller, 2022). Besides a sense of purpose, holistic education has a broad set of goals, embracing wholeness, wisdom, compassion, well-being and a sense of awe and wonder (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022). Wisdom is seeing deeply into the nature of things and acting on that understanding based on recognising the interconnectedness of things that can lead to a natural compassion for all beings (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022). Well-being is also a significant goal of holistic education (London, 2022; Miller, 2022; Nagarajan et al., 2022). Moreover, holistic education seeks to nurture awe, wonder and curiosity (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022). Self-knowledge (or self-understanding), self-regulation (or self-management), self-cultivation (or self-creating) and self-care are oriented towards each person's holistic development (Crowell, 2022; Gazibara, 2013; Lieģeniece, 2013; Luvmour, 2021).

Basic Principles of Holistic Education

The three basic principles of holistic education are connections, inclusion and balance (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022). The first principle is based on reflecting on the interdependent nature of things and focusing on the six main connections (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Multiple connections in holistic education
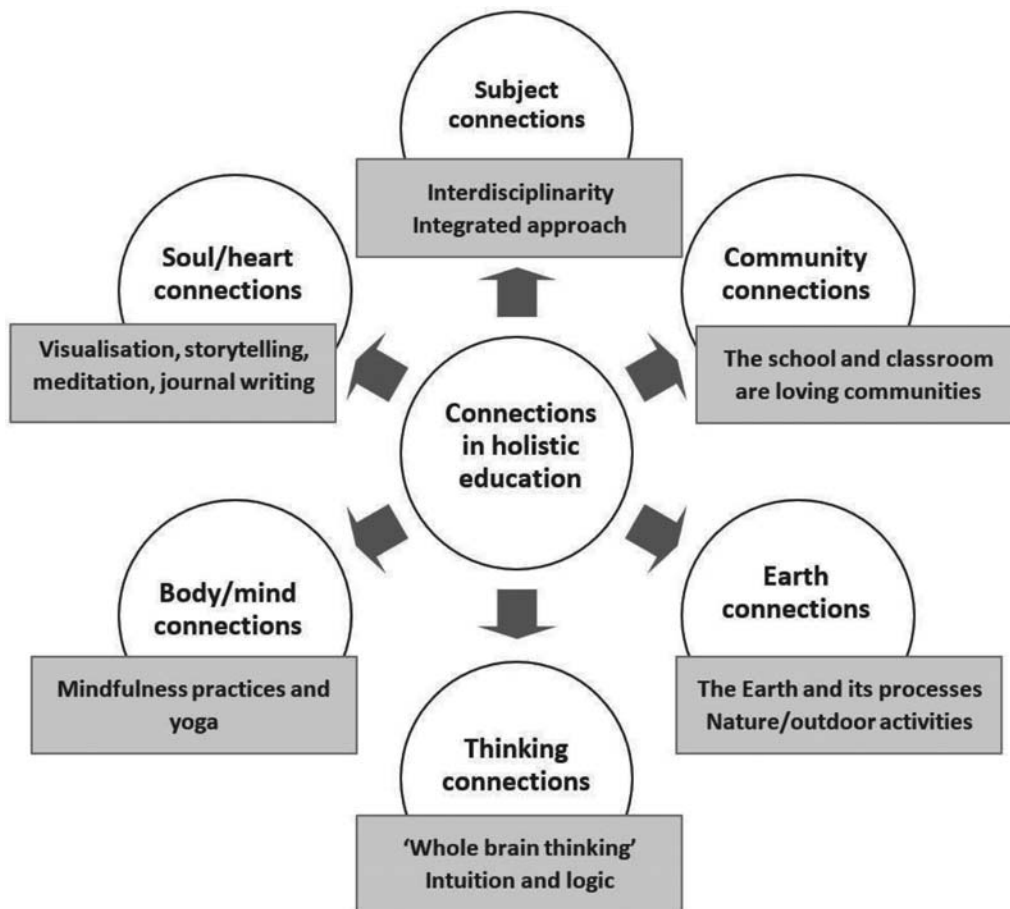
Source. Developed by the authors, based on Miller (2022), Miller et al. (2022).

The second principle aims to avoid labelling and stereotyping students and provides a welcoming environment to all students by employing the three broad approaches to teaching and learning: transmission (direct instruction), transaction (teacher–student and student–student interactions) and transformation (connecting to and nurturing the inner life of the student). The third principle is based on the Eastern understanding of the balance of yang and yin as complementary energies and differs from the Western view, which has independent polarities (for more details, see Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022).

Holistic Curriculum

To provide holistic education, it is necessary to foster designing and delivering curricula "that are evidence-based and holistic" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 43). A holistic curriculum helps achieve the objectives and goals of holistic education based on the three basic principles mentioned previously. Furthermore, according to Eliza Rybska and Maciej Błaszak (2020), holistic education posits that educational design and lesson planning need to draw on three elements (i.e., sensibility, functionality, and rationality) that are crucial when they exist in unison to connect the internal and external worlds. Sensibility refers to the design features of a lesson and the educational environment that serve to create a sense of welcoming comfort, as well as the safety and homeostasis that are necessary to engage with learning, participate in interactions and elicit the cognitive processes required for persistence and higher-order thinking (Rybska & Błaszak, 2020). "Functionality refers to any action that supports students' attention and working memory, and supports them in performing cognitively demanding tasks" (Rybska & Błaszak, 2020, p. 50). "Rationality refers to the facility of students to reflect on the six values, care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity and liberty, and how these values relate to the elements present in the school environment and their own emotional engagement" (Rybska & Błaszak, p. 54).

When planning the development of a holistic curriculum, all its design levels (e.g., module, topic, lesson) should be considered, beginning with the general and ending with the specific (Surikova & Sidorova, 2023). During the implementation of the curriculum, teachers can facilitate its efficacy by compensating for its weaknesses with their strengths and making it even more holistic (Surikova & Sidorova, 2023).

Whole (Holistic) Teachers

Holistic education requires whole teachers with a holistic understanding of their students, themselves and the world (London, 2022; Luvmour, 2021; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Miller, 2019, 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). John Miller (2022) highlighted that holistic teachers "believe that they are a part of something greater than themselves, which can be called the cosmic symphony" (p. 2). Holistic education also requires the teachers to be responsible not only for the holistic development of their students but also for nourishing their own inner lives and for their well-being by caring for their own bodies, minds and spirits to bring their most authentic selves to the classroom and be present while teaching (Crowell, 2022; London, 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Taitano, 2021). Beyond being professional and ethical teachers, they need competencies related both to their character and conduct to promote the holistic development of their students (Tirri, 2014) and themselves. Holistic teachers should be responsive, caring and empathetic to meet individual

student's needs as opposed to using a one-size-fits-all approach (Jones, 2019). They should be role models of enthusiastic learners and ready to be meaningful learning partners for their students (Freedman, 2022). They are encouraged to build relationships with students and colleagues (Luvmour, 2021) and develop an organic rhythm in their teaching based on the main principles of holistic education (i.e., connections, inclusion, and balance), inclusive approaches (i.e., transmission, transaction and transformation) (Miller, 2022) and a combination of the three elements of holistic education (i.e., sensibility, functionality, and rationality) to connect the internal and external worlds (Rybska & Błaszak, 2020).

Holistic educational practices are confronted with challenges regarding the changing role of educators and the shortage of teachers prepared to work in holistic education settings (Miseliunaite et al., 2022). A holistic approach to teacher profession and education is needed (Castañeda et al., 2021; Korthagen, 2004; Körkkö, 2021), which profiles teachers' professional complexities in a contemporary world and defines teacher learning as multidimensional and multilevel. Servet Altan and Jennie Farber Lane (2018) emphasised the importance of listening to teachers' stories and experiences, stressing that practising teachers' narratives are "key resources for the design of effective teacher education programmes" (p. 246). Qualitative case studies using narrative analysis (inquiry) are an important source for exploring the influences of teachers' significant life experiences (including their dispositions, implicit theories or beliefs) on their pedagogical thinking and practices (Altan & Lane, 2018; Jones, 2019; Männikkö & Husu, 2020; Rissanen et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Methodology

Research Objectives, Questions and Design

In early October 2021, while anticipating the World Teachers' Day, the Latvian magazine *Skola & Ģimene* (School & Family), the Latvian educational platform *E-klase* (E-classroom) and the newspaper *Latvijas Avīze* (Latvian newspaper) launched the campaign *SirdsSkolotājs* (HeartTeacher), where everyone had the opportunity to sign up for participation and honour Latvian educators who, through their work, have inspired, done more or differently, as mentioned in professional descriptions, and are a great example of an ideal educator. Teachers who registered for participation in this campaign will be referred to as "heart" teachers in the context of this article, considering the campaign's name.

A qualitative seven-case study was performed to analyse the "heart" teachers' narratives about themselves and their significant life experiences to identify their dominant approaches to life and work at school, as well as the enabling factors that contributed to these approaches. Hypothetically presuming that "heart" teachers are mainly holis-

tic teachers who maintain a holistic approach to their personal and professional lives, the research questions were formulated as follows: What do the narratives of the seven Latvian "heart" teachers reveal about (a) themselves and their approaches to life and work at school and (b) the contributions of participants' significant life experiences to their approaches? Are Latvian "heart" teachers' approaches holistic or not?

Research Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The research data encompasses seven cases (see Table 1) based on semi-structured interviews with Latvian teachers nominated by their colleagues, students and/or parents to participate in the campaign HeartTeacher in the academic year 2021/2022. Semi-structured interviews using narrative inquiry were conducted in Latvian at the teachers' workplaces. In accordance with the campaign's terms, the interview materials, along with photos from the teachers' private archives and fragments of the applicants' letters, were published online and were publicly accessible to everyone. With regards to this study, the research data was anonymised.

Table 1

Participants' profiles

"Heart" teachers' codes	Gender	Work experience as a teacher	Workplace/status	Position
HT 1	Female	40 years	Secondary school/public	Mathematics teacher
HT 2	Female	5 years	Preschool education institution/public	Preschool teacher
HT 3	Female	35 years	Secondary school/public	School librarian, media literacy teacher and course 'Project work' teacher
HT 4	Female	21 years	State gymnasium/public	Latvian language and literature teacher
HT 5	Male	10 years	Secondary school/public	Sports teacher
HT 6	Female	9 years	Basic school/public	Primary teacher
HT 7	Female	3 years	Secondary school/public	English and German teacher

Source. Own research.

Data Processing and Analysis Procedure

To answer the research questions, a qualitative content analysis via categorical coding was conducted. A deductive approach with a pre-set coding system (see Table 2) was used, which was elaborated based on (a) the onion model developed by Fred Korthagen

(2004) and reflected by Minna Körkkö (2021); (b) the main categories, themes and experiences of the teachers that emerged as identified by Altan and Lane (2018); (c) the aims, main principles and inclusive approaches of holistic education (Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022) and (d) the research findings regarding the main holistic teacher's features (Crowell, 2022; Freedman, 2022; Jones, 2019; London, 2022; Miller, 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Taitano, 2021).

Table 2

A pre-set coding system

Category	Questions	Theme: Sub-themes
Environment	Why did you decide to become a teacher? What did you have to deal with?	Learning environments: *Family, School, Neighbourhood*
Behaviour, competencies and beliefs	What do you do? What can you do? What moves you to do what you do? What do you believe in? Which experiences are you choosing as significant? Why? In what ways did these life experiences contribute to your way of thinking and behaving? How did these life experiences contribute to your teaching practices?	Branching out: *Reading, Professional development* Enjoying life: *Spending time in nature, Having hobbies, Working with love* Persisting: *Striving for better education and better life conditions, Not giving up on one's endeavours* Reflecting on the interdependence of things and focusing on the multiple connections: *Subject, Community, Earth, Thinking, Body/Mind, Soul/Heart* Providing a welcoming environment to all, using and integrating the three basic approaches: *Transmission, Transaction, Transformation* Balancing complementary energies: *Individual & group, Content & process, Knowledge & imagination, Rational & intuitive, Quantitative & qualitative*
Identity, mission and core qualities	Who are you? How do you see your role as a teacher? What kind of teacher do you want to be? What is your ideal and mission?	Teachers' qualities, roles, ideals, dreams and missions: *To transmit knowledge to others; To be a responsible professional; To be responsible for the academic achievements of others; To be a good subject teacher; To be a trust person for others; To be responsible for the holistic development of others; To encourage and help others in discovering their purposes; To be an inspiring role model for others; To be an equal learning partner of others; To be authentic and present while learning and teaching; To care for his/her own body, mind and spirit*

Source. Developed by the authors, based on Altan & Lane (2018), Korthagen (2004), Körkkö (2021), Miller (2022), Miller et al. (2022), etc.

Qualitative data processing and analysis were performed using the QSR NVivo 12 software: (a) determining the number of coded units of meaning (i.e., references) for each theme/sub-theme, which indicates how often research participants talk about it and (b) obtaining coverage, which indicates how succinctly or extensively the interviewees reflect on it.

First, each case was carefully analysed and coded in three stages, starting with a general context that impacted becoming a teacher in stage 1, which focused on the category "Environment", followed by stage 2, which focused on the category "Behaviour, competencies and beliefs", and ending in stage 3, which focused on the category "Identity, mission and core qualities". Second, the coding results were validated and compared with the letter contents submitted by the applicants for the HeartTeacher campaign (students, parents and/or colleagues). Third, the data analysis continued with a cross-case analysis to compare the coding results and identify the common tendencies and/or similarities.

The reliability of the qualitative data analysis was enhanced by the fact that the data processing and analysis were reviewed by two researchers. The coding was conducted by the first author. After each stage in the deductive analysis process, the second researcher suggested revisions for the categories, themes and sub-themes; thus, the preset coding system was precise and updated several times.

Results

In the seven individual semi-structured interviews, the participants shared their significant life experiences regarding their learning environments, which impacted becoming a teacher, as well as their main dispositions, beliefs and practices, including their approaches to life and work at school. The deductive content analysis results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

The deductive content analysis results

Category	Themes/Sub-themes	Count of references (coverage)						
		HT1	HT2	HT3	HT4	HT5	HT6	HT7
Environment	Family	-	-	1 (0.91%)	-	1 (1.69%)	-	1 (2.84%)
	School	1 (4.36%)	-	1 (2.49%)	1 (2.71%)	2 (6.16%)	1 (5.71%)	1 (1.41%)
	Neighbourhood	-	1 (17.61%)	-	-	-	-	-
Behaviour, competencies, and beliefs	Branching out	1 (0.88%)	-	2 (8.76%)	2 (8.29%)	-	2 (8.72%)	1 (3.47%)
	Enjoying life	1 (0.44%)	1 (2.11%)	-	-	-	1 (0.88%)	-
	Persisting	2 (15.48%)	2 (9.48%)	-	-	3 (10.12%)	3 (7.74%)	4 (10.26%)
	Reflecting on interdependence	5 (13.68%)	5 (22.60%)	4 (14.48%)	3 (10.05%)	3 (17.35%)	3 (15.34%)	2 (4.14%)
	Providing a welcoming environment	2 (3.47%)	2 (3.55%)	5 (22.77%)	8 (26.24%)	4 (12.26%)	7 (31.54%)	4 (14.64%)
	Balancing complementary energies	3 (4.58%)	-	-	-	1 (2.78%)	1 (2.65%)	2 (4.63%)
Identity, mission, and core qualities	To transmit knowledge to others	-	-	1 (2.00%)	-	-	-	-
	To be a responsible professional	1 (0.57%)	1 (3.90%)	1 (2.62%)	-	-	-	-
	To be responsible for the academic achievements of others	4 (15.54%)	-	-	2 (3.07%)	-	-	-
	To be a good subject teacher	3 (8.30%)	-	2 (1.45%)	-	-	-	-
	To be a trust person for others	-	-	-	1 (2.74%)	-	-	2 (3.92%)
	To be responsible for the holistic development of others	-	2 (7.31%)	2 (12.25%)	4 (3.79%)	6 (21.93%)	3 (10.83%)	2 (6.47%)
	To encourage and help others in discovering their purposes	-	2 (6.01%)	-	6 (15.73%)	1 (4.84%)	-	2 (9.39%)
	To be an inspiring role model for others	-	2 (5.55%)	2 (4.50%)	3 (14.10%)	-	-	1 (1.20%)
	To be an equal learning partner of others	2 (2.66%)	1 (0.85%)	2 (7.48%)	4 (9.59%)	1 (5.97%)	2 (9.36%)	7 (14.56%)
	To be authentic and present while learning and teaching	1 (4.12%)	-	1 (3.70%)	2 (3.95%)	2 (12.59%)	2 (5.32%)	2 (6.86%)
	To care for his/her own body, mind and spirit	-	1 (2.11%)	-	-	1 (0.25%)	-	1 (2.09%)
Total count of references (coverage)	26 (61.75%)	20 (56.03%)	24 (64.24%)	36 (65.53%)	25 (63.00%)	25 (74.21%)	32 (55.04%)	

Source. Own research.

Case HT1 (an Experienced Mathematics Teacher, Female)

Since childhood, HT1 has always wanted to become a maths teacher because she is drawn to mathematics, especially geometry. She believes that it is crucial to approach the profession with a high sense of responsibility to thoroughly understand the subject that is taught and find ways to keep the students engaged by connecting each lesson's topic with practical content. In addition, the educator should not be elevated above the students, looking down on them, because teachers and students are equally important. Moreover, it is essential to be demanding but also empathetic — work "work must be done with heart and soul". HT1 believes that a "teacher must not always be serious", because there are moments during the lessons when it is necessary to release tension and make jokes. However, one must also know how to do it without offending or hurting anyone. HT1 emphasises that working in school has become more challenging over the years: the changes in methods and bureaucracy have increased teachers' work. Despite the difficulties, HT1 has not been disappointed in choosing to become a teacher because she feels younger and more energetic when she is with students. The Student Council has written the following in their application letter for HT1:

> Participating in teacher's [HT1] classes is truly a joy… Maths lessons are not rigid and academically dull! The teacher excels in making this serious subject engaging, sometimes even humorous, as mathematical formulas and concepts are played with in anecdotes as well. With this educator, it has never been boring! [HT1] is teacher number one because she is smart, professional, firm, fair and genuine.

Case HT2 (a Novice Preschool Teacher, Female)

HT2's path to the teaching profession was not easy or swift, although the educator admits that she had been inherently drawn to pedagogy throughout her entire life. While on maternity leave, she realised that she wanted to try working in a preschool educational institution, as it is the first step of the educational system. However, she did not rush into studying preschool pedagogy; instead, she decided to work as a nanny first. Upon starting work, she quickly regretted not immediately enrolling in university, so the following autumn, she began studying and working as an educator. HT2 is convinced that a child's personality is shaped up to the age of seven, "therefore, everything we say and do while working with children is crucial. Such young children do not analyse what is good or bad. They simply absorb everything and then mirror us. Hence, teachers must recognise the profound responsibility they bear". HT2 believes there is a necessity for an individualised approach for each child, a successful collaboration among preschool educators, caregivers and parents, as well as succession between preschool and primary school. HT2 has observed that children are currently more open and free-spirited than in the past, yet it has become more challenging to surprise and

delight them. It is precisely the "sparkle in children's eyes, the opportunity to witness their discovery and growth" that provides the utmost satisfaction and anchors the educator to this profession. Apart from the work duties, HT2 has several hobbies. She is learning to sew, enjoys going by the seaside, seeks answers to various psychological questions and explores practices for self-organisation, such as the usefulness of writing gratitude notes and engaging in sauna rituals and cold baths. In their application letter, the parents of HT2's students have written:

> All of us, the parents of the group, are proud of, inspired by, and trust our fantastic educator, as she is a nurturer whose work is her labour of love and life's calling. From her experience, other educators can definitely learn and draw inspiration!

Case HT3 (an Experienced Media Literacy Teacher and School Librarian, Female)

The decision of HT3 to become a teacher was influenced by both her parents and the school. While attending secondary school, she encountered a fantastic Latvian language teacher whom she aspired to emulate. HT3 states,

> Teaching is the essence of my life. Working with students brings me the greatest joy. I am very fortunate as my path has crossed with many wonderful young people. These encounters have enriched both them and me, providing a sense of fulfilment.

Her main principle is to maintain a respectful attitude towards the students. HT3 is convinced that the trust of the students in their teacher brings immense happiness, saying,

> School is primarily a school of life. Yes, we provide knowledge in a specific subject, but the main goal is to prepare the students to cope with challenges and difficulties in their lives and enable them to communicate with others and build relationships.

She adds that a teacher's job is not easy. It requires a lot of patience, as modern students and their parents are demanding and knowledgeable, thus putting pressure on the teacher to be a professional and work with the best conscience. Regarding the school environment, HT3 says, "We see each child with an individual approach. The school has a family atmosphere where children feel very comfortable". A student has written the following in their application letter about HT3:

> She is a Teacher with a capital 'T', a true heart Teacher. An angel with warm eyes and active hands. She is the school's guiding spirit who knows how to uplift the mood when we feel down, who can encourage and inspire new projects and crazy ideas that seem impossible to accomplish, yet under her guidance, everything comes together. The library is a haven of peace and warmth in our school. Even if someone enters in a bit of a 'storm', they leave the library as a radiant and positive individual. Primary school children spend all their breaks

in the reading room and can often be found there after classes, drawn by the warmth and positive atmosphere. With this teacher, media literacy classes are never boring; she has an incredible sense of humour. Intelligent, wise of heart, responsive and helpful—this is how my classmates describe our teacher.

Case HT4 (an Experienced Latvian Language and Literature Teacher, Female)

Replying to the question of how the teacher came to the decision to work in school, HT4 admitted,

> I have wanted to become a teacher since childhood. I have been dreaming about this profession since the third grade. However, my biggest source of inspiration in choosing this profession was my literature teacher… Even before that, I was interested in the Latvian language and enjoyed reading books. However, it was this teacher who made me realise that literature could also provide answers to important questions for myself.

HT4 believes that the main focus of the work is the "children's emotional well-being". She is convinced that teaching Latvian language and literature "provides an opportunity to delve into children's souls". Through creative assignments, students reveal "their emotional worlds". To encourage students to read, HT4 organises reader seminars every semester, where students share their reading experiences by discussing some of the books they have read. HT4 talks about one of the ways to promote reading among students:

> I share stories about the books I read myself. In the next reader's seminar, it is satisfying when at least one of the children chooses a book that I have talked about. However, an even greater satisfaction comes when a student talks about a book recommended by a classmate.

In her role as a teacher, she enjoys the fact that no day is the same; there is always a need to adapt. The students' achievements also bring her joy. It is not just about high achievements but also about cases where a student, despite challenges, managed to complete school or enrol where they had planned. It also brings her joy when former students become teachers themselves. A student has written the following in their application letter about HT4:

> Teacher [HT4] has been teaching me since the seventh grade. Initially, she seemed quite strict, but over the years, I realised that I had never learned from a teacher who was so deeply invested in their subject and could engage students to do more than required. Teacher [HT4] was always willing to take extra classes and never turned away those who struggled with the subject. She was always ready to help with one's studies, providing emotional support as well. I truly appreciated this, as there was no one else who would truly listen to me. In the 11th grade, I started writing poetry and entrusted teacher [HT4] with reading my

work. She was always supportive and found time to read my pieces, which were not related to the curriculum, and provided recommendations that continue to help me to this day… She is a teacher I will always remember and to whom I will always be grateful.

Case HT5 (a Novice Sports Teacher, Male)

HT5 confesses that in his youth, he wanted to become a police officer and never considered becoming a teacher; he stumbled into this profession quite accidentally. Now, he feels that he is in the right place at school. Although the job is tough and demands a lot of energy, it brings him much joy. He particularly enjoys working with young children, drawn by their enthusiasm and sporting spirit:

Children enthusiastically participate in classes: they run, jump and throw with great joy. In moments like this, I feel like a big child myself and join in as well… I feel better with the little ones, as they are inherently freer, and in my opinion, they haven't formed any negative thoughts about teachers yet.

A colleague has written the following in their application letter about HT5:

He is always in a positive mood; he never overlooks the problems of the students. If you hear cheerful laughter somewhere, you can be sure that teacher [HT5] is around… His physical education classes are innovative, self-guided and employ various methods. The teacher keeps coming up with new and fresh ideas… [HT5] is endowed with the talent of an actor. He manages to rehearse roles swiftly with such ease and naturalness… In school events, he is an irreplaceable Santa Claus, leader, assistant and a versatile character player… Humanity, positivity and calmness are what we lack in others and surely in ourselves. A teacher can teach students with various methods, but what matters most is his humanity. Children need a lot of love, something they will never have too much of. Teacher [HT5] is like that—humane, energetic, positive and understanding.

Case HT6 (a Novice Primary School Teacher, Female)

Pedagogy was not her initial career choice. HT6 had originally studied cultural management and had been involved in organising various events. She stopped event management when she moved to the capital city for love. She was hired after responding to an advertisement seeking a deputy director for organisational work in a school. However, she soon wanted to leave because the demands of the school director were very rigid. Instead of accepting her resignation, the director encouraged her to start working as a teacher, as he saw her great potential. HT6 excels at implementing the principles outlined in the new educational curriculum, one of them being finding connections between subjects and providing knowledge to students as a whole rather

than splitting it across different domains. She says, "It is only logical to explore a single topic across different subjects", acknowledging that in primary school where one teacher teaches multiple subjects, working this way is easier than in the upper grades, where several educators work with the same class and must mutually agree on how and what to teach. To avoid monotony and boredom, HT6 plans her lessons diversely, ensuring that it is not just about sitting at one's desk. For instance, in ethics class, everyone can sit in a circle and take turns discussing the topic; in the next class, they might work by the blackboard, while in another, they might work in groups or engage in crafts. HT6 believes that it is crucial to listen to every child in primary school as not everyone has the opportunity to express themselves at home. It is important to treat each child with respect. "A teacher should not enter the classroom as an all-knowing leader to whom everyone listens". In her role as a teacher, she finds her motivation in the love provided by the students, as well as the energy exchange with the school children: "There are moments when they come to hug me after a successful lesson and say, 'This was the coolest day since I started school'. In those moments, I see the purpose of my work". HT6 adds,

> You simply have to feel proud of your lessons. If you do not derive enjoyment from your work, if there is no sense of accomplishment that you nailed it and the kids were fully engaged in the task you assigned, then there is no point in doing that work.

In their letters of recommendation, the parents of the students praised HT6 for her efforts in ensuring the class remained unified. HT6 acknowledges that achieving this is not easy, but she always stands against inequality: "As soon as I notice any bias towards someone in the class, we discuss it in the morning circle, watch interviews about bullying and role-play scenarios, as there is no one-size-fits-all solution to handle it".

Case HT7 (a Novice English and German Teacher, Female)

HT7 got into teaching almost accidentally. While studying translation, she took a part-time job and began teaching English to young children in kindergarten. She then received an offer to try out teaching in a school. HT7 acknowledges that she tries to be the kind of teacher she missed when she was a student herself: a teacher who is always approachable for a chat and someone the students could ask advice from when needed. She does not want to be the kind of educator who only delivers their subject and does not care about the other aspects of teaching. While working in this profession, the young educator realised that this is what she wants to do: "I enjoy seeing the 'click' that happens in students when they understand something". Equally important are the relationships formed with the students: "There are times when I see that a student is having a bad day, but I still managed to improve it. During those times, I am convinced that it is worth working in the school". Furthermore, teachers are delighted by classes

where students encourage and uplift each other. HT7 is confident that "students learn how to treat others from how the teacher behaves". The young educator acknowledges that not only students' knowledge matters to her but also their emotional well-being. Therefore, during classes, she asks how students are doing and tries to notice if anyone is facing any concerns. As foreign language classes cover various topics, serious conversations "about life" often naturally arise. During class, there is usually soft music playing in the background, so the students feel better and more secure, as even at home, when young people study, there is often music in the background. HT7 admits that being a teacher is exhausting, but it is precisely communication with students that helps rejuvenate energy. A student wrote the following in her application letter about HT7:

> I have been studying under [HT7] for two years now. She has always said that she is the kind of teacher she never had: a teacher who is like a friend, who can listen and give advice equally well. [HT7] is a very warm and determined teacher. We are truly fortunate to have her, and I greatly appreciate that… We had to write an essay in English on a familiar topic… Before starting the essay, the whole class was tired. [HT7] asked if we were okay, and I started crying because I felt mentally exhausted. The teacher allowed me to go outside. She calmed me down and motivated me. Throughout the remaining days, she made sure I was okay, which made me feel special. The next day, the teacher reminded me that I could come to her for help or for a conversation and that she would always assist.

Summary of the Results

Within the category "Environment", it was identified (see Table 3) that the process of becoming a teacher was impacted by neighbourhood (one case), school (three cases), family and school (three cases).

In all cases within the category "Behaviour, competencies and beliefs" (see Table 3), evidence was found about providing a welcoming environment to all and reflecting on the interdependence of things and focusing on the multiple connections. In five cases (71%), persistence was evident (all novice teachers and one experienced teacher). In another five cases, including all experienced teachers and two novice teachers, branching out (e.g., reading, professional development) was identified. In four cases (57%), balancing complementary energies was mentioned by three novice teachers and one experienced teacher.

Evidence about being an equal learning partner of others was found in all cases within the category "Identity, mission and core qualities" (see Table 3). In six cases (86%), being authentic and present while learning and teaching (all experienced teachers and three novice teachers) and being responsible for the holistic development of others (all novice teachers and two experienced teachers) were evident. In four cases (57%), being an inspiring role model for others (two experienced teachers and two novice teachers) and encouraging and helping others in discovering their purposes

(one experienced teacher and three novice teachers) were evident. Three of four novice teachers (75%) mentioned caring for his/her own body, mind and spirit. By contrast, nobody from the experienced teachers mentioned self-care directly. Two of three experienced teachers (67%) stressed the importance of being a good subject teacher and being responsible for the academic achievements of others. By contrast, nobody from the novice teachers talked about this directly.

Regardless of their work experience, in the applicants' letters, both experienced and novice "heart" teachers were described as fair, honest, genuine, humane, warm-hearted, responsive, helpful, supportive, understanding, positive and with a sense of humour.

Conclusion

Implementing a holistic approach to education is more or less evident in the Latvian "heart" teachers' professional practices. A holistic approach to personal life is not sufficiently evident among the experienced "heart" teachers. By contrast, the novice "heart" teachers' approaches to personal life are perceived as more holistic: they care more for their own bodies, minds and spirits. They enjoy life more, spend time in nature, have hobbies, facilitate their well-being and resilience, strive for better education and better life conditions and do not give up on their endeavours.

A whole (holistic) teacher implements the holistic approach both in his/her professional life and personal life, not only caring for others but also for him/herself, thereby balancing both professional and personal lives. A whole (holistic) teacher's life philosophy is based on the principles of wholeness, inclusion, connectedness, and balance among different aspects of life.

The findings consistently underscore the significance of a holistic approach to teacher identity, encompassing not only the academic aspects but also emotional, relational, and personal dimensions. Emphasising the development of teachers' emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills and authentic presence can contribute to creating an enriching and inclusive classroom experience.

The identified themes suggest that the journey to becoming a teacher is an ongoing process of reflection, growth, and adaptation. Both experienced and novice teachers expressed a commitment to continuous improvement, emphasising their willingness to adapt to changing educational landscapes and student needs. This commitment to lifelong learning aligns with the evolving nature of education and the need for educators to remain responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The distinction in self-care discussions between novice and experienced teachers suggests a potential area for further exploration. This raises questions about the evolving nature of a teacher's identity and how self-care becomes intertwined with one's teaching philosophy over time. Future research could delve deeper into how experienced educators sustain their well-being amidst the demands of their profession.

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