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Chapter 12

Holistic Wisdom Education: Towards Transformational Creativity



Eeva K. Kallio, Laura Mononen, and Terhi Ek

Understanding Totality of Human Nature: Philosophical Background

The exploration of human nature's beliefs has traditionally been a domain of philosophical anthropology (Cahill et al., 2017). Philosophical anthropology grapples with fundamental inquiries: What constitutes the core of human nature, if it exists? Are we inclined towards goodness, badness, or both? Does free will exist? Numerous endeavors to answer these questions have yielded several solutions and frameworks in history and currently (e.g., Hannon & Lewens, 2018; Howard & Küpers, 2022; Pojman, 2005). Divergences emerge based on whether human nature is predominantly seen through a biological, societal, or individual lens.

Furthermore, normative questions come into play within this realm: envisioning the potential and boundaries of human beings' development. These inquiries are inherently value-driven and non-empirical. Nevertheless, these presuppositions underlie the human sciences, influencing research inquiries, methodologies, and consequently, outcomes. The inquiry into human nature also intricately intertwines with contemplating humanity's place in the cosmos or put differently, our connection to nature as a whole (Cahill et al., 2017).

Renowned Finnish philosopher-psychologist Lauri Rauhala (1914–2016) extensively delved into the holistic interpretation of human nature. According to his

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philosophy, human beings are grounded ontologically in these essential three prerequisites:

- A physical embodiment;
- A consciousness aspect of the psyche, beginning with primary foundational consciousness (e.g., sensory perception), followed by secondary meta- and value-consciousness (i.e., metacognition and recognized values¹);
- Existence within diverse contexts, operating as interwoven systems (Rauhala, 1990, 2005).

Human interaction takes place within these systems through cyclical “situational control circuit” (Rauhala, *ibid.*). Notably, intentionality emerges as a core facet of the mind, indicating the capacity to direct attention towards external or internal objects. This concept can loosely be equated to a mental “purpose” or “objective,” signifying that the human ascribes meanings to objects (Rauhala, *ibid.*).

Rauhala terms this perspective a holistic comprehension of human nature, wherein all constituent elements demand consideration in scientific or professional endeavors related to humans, thereby achieving a comprehensive perspective (see, for instance, LaVine & Tissaw, 2015, advocating holism instead of “fragmented examination” within psychology; see also Mascolo & Bidell, 2020; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). While rigorous analysis is often indispensable in scientific exploration, the overarching holistic context must not be overshadowed.

Of significance within Rauhala’s philosophy is his emphasis on the uniqueness of individuals: each person exists in distinctive circumstances and evolves as an individual of unparalleled identity. Rauhala’s philosophical foundation rests heavily upon the phenomenological philosophies of Heidegger and Husserl (Backman, 2016). Phenomenology entails meticulous depiction, analysis, and interpretation of lived psychological experiences. Husserl posits that these instances can solely be objects of reflection and scrutiny for humans, marking the characteristic that distinguishes us from other creatures (Heinämaa, 2014, 2020).

The assumptions about human nature wield remarkably potent influence in practical matters. In the Western context, stretching back to the Enlightenment period, the Cartesian perspective portraying humans as a superior species entitled to exploit nature and other life forms has left a major imprint. This perspective raises concerns as it grants humans the authority to determine the fates of other species, enabling domination over both nature and fellow individuals. Regrettably, over the passage of centuries, humans have devised means to perpetually exploit natural resources, subsequently hastening the degradation of the environment through the utilization of progressively sophisticated technologies.

The stark division established between humanity and nature has given rise to various worldwide predicaments. Should this trend persist, significant global

¹Rauhala employs the term “spirit” to denote consciousness encompassing values and self-awareness. However, due to the alternative connotation of this term in English, we substitute it with the aforementioned expressions. It’s important to note that he isn’t alluding to contemporary interpretations of spirituality.

hazards seem imminent. Based on the Rauhala's framework, the stringent isolation of humans from the surrounding natural world has yielded destructive repercussions on a global scale, engendering substantial existential risks. He asserts that a rigorous demarcation between humans and nature (as systems) doesn't truly exist; rather, there exists an incessant interplay between the two (Rauhala, 1990, 2005).

Rauhala's holistic perception of human nature originates from his critique of a reductionist-dualistic interpretation of it: he sees that human being is totality in the plurality, that is, is constituted of the mentioned plural factors, but act as coherent unity in plurality (ibid.). Within the realm of education, this dualistic type of viewpoint regarding human nature has led to the present scenario where humans are no longer linked with nature or, in some instances, have become estranged from it—particularly in Western societies. The pursuit of the collective welfare (referred to as self-transcendence in the terminology of wisdom research) should inherently encompass all living and non-living ecosystems, extending globally across the entire planet. This approach ensures that it remains integrated into human experiences and isn't beyond the scope of deliberate human choices.

Wisdom: Multiple Perspectives, Ethics, and Pedagogies

Recently, the attributes that Rauhala has affiliated with the second tier of psyche, namely value- and meta-consciousness, as explicated earlier using psychological terms, have gained widespread linkage with wisdom within nearly all prominent psychological models rooted in empirical evidence (for instance, Grossmann et al., 2020). Additionally, due to the inherent individual uniqueness of human beings, stemming from the intricate interplay of their contextual circumstances, biology, and personal learning history (commonly referred to as the “horizon,” in Rauhala's terms), the realm of creativity becomes plausible. Some scholars have even identified creativity as a facet of wisdom (Karami et al., 2020; Sternberg, 2003).

Multiperspective-integrative thinking and perspectival metacognition are recognized as crucial attributes associated with wisdom (Ardelt, 2004; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Grossmann et al., 2020). This development has additionally been recognized as integrative thinking (Kallio, 2011), operating contextually dependent and closely linked to wisdom (Kallio, 2020). It has also been labeled as dialectical thinking (Paletz et al., 2018). Interestingly, dialectical thinking has also been correlated with wisdom. Paletz et al. (2018) posits that dialectical thinking can originate from various sources, such as Hegel, Eastern cultures, or “naive dialectical” perspectives. While not delving to extensive analysis of the historical origins of these terms, we adopt Paletz et al.'s (2018) characterization that mature integrative thinking aligns with Hegelian dialectical logic, which highlights the significance of synthesizing and integrating opposing viewpoints, as well disparate ones (ibid., p. 13). They further suggest that this advanced form of thinking is associated with creativity (ibid., p. 15). However, empirical studies investigating the relationship between wisdom and dialectical thinking present limited evidence, necessitating

further research (Chua et al., 2022). These three concepts (wisdom, multiperspective-integrative thinking, and creativity) exhibit, however, theoretical resemblances, as they all underscore the capacity to fuse together disparate and contradictory elements. We extend this idea to its application in holistic education as a tool for transformative creativity.

Wisdom emerges as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Some initial consensus exists concerning its fundamental psychological aspects (Bangen et al., 2013; Glück & Weststrate, 2022). It can be perceived as the exemplary embodiment of human behavior, a sought-after and deeply esteemed virtue of character (Swartwood, 2022). Depending on the scholar, wisdom encompasses various additional dimensions, along with the integration of multiple perspectives. Notably, ethical action stands as one of the most pivotal dimensions. Nusbaum (2018) has highlighted that self-transcendence may be the distinguishing factor that sets wisdom apart from its closely related fields of study—self-transcendence as defined by ethical intentions, and practical actions geared toward the common good. Given its intricate nature, the diverse dimensions of wisdom interweave with one another. This amalgamation includes the capacity for metacognition, and socio-cognitive perspective-taking, which entails the ability to emotionally distance oneself and foster compassionate sentiments toward others (Grossmann et al., 2020). These dimensions pave the way for ethical self-transcendence.

Wisdom predominantly finds its roots in life experiences (Glück & Bluck, 2013) and the consequent process of learning of them. In addition, intentional pedagogy can have at least some impact on this issue (Tynjälä et al., *In submission*). Wisdom doesn't emerge mysteriously during adulthood; it necessitates an ongoing journey of experiential growth. For instance, metacognition gradually develops across the lifespan, from childhood through adulthood (Gascoine et al., 2017), although there exist varying findings about its initial appearance. Metacognition stands as an essential component of integrative thinking, making these findings of notable significance. This principle extends to all the attributes tied to wisdom: none of them can fully manifest in adulthood without prior developmental groundwork. Nevertheless, during earlier stages of development, genetic inheritance, cultural influences, and upbringing significantly shape this process (LoBue et al., 2019; Whitebread et al., 2019). In adulthood, these factors are integrated with one's own self-determination and agency (Ferrero, 2022; Lemmetty & Collin, 2020).

This interaction enables the prospect of self-education: within formal education, societal influences direct the individual, but later in life, one can shift to becoming the subject of their own self-education and -cultivation (Levenson et al., 2001). Ancient philosophies have used pragmatic training methods, techniques like imagery work to facilitate this kind of personal transformation (Hadot, 2002). Presently, some of such techniques is integrated into cognitive psychotherapy, and historically they can be traced back to the ancient philosophical school of Stoicism (Robertson, 2019). In both instances, the aim remains the transformation of one's mindset through specific behavioral modification methods as imagery (Hagger & Convoy, 2020), constituting a form of self-education.

Creative Mind and Its Capacity for Transformation

The realm of creativity research presents a paradox: it is simultaneously marked by the exceptional, the challenging, and the extraordinary, while also being rooted in the universal, the commonplace, and the ordinary. The concept of creativity is profoundly intricate and has been interpreted in numerous ways (Sternberg, 2021). Often, creativity is defined as the result of a process that involves the “ability to generate a solution that is both novel and appropriate” (Sternberg, 1999, p. 3). Although Runco and Jaeger (2012) attribute the formal definition to Stein (1953), earlier researchers and thinkers had already hinted at similar descriptions, and this perspective remains dominant in Western approaches to creativity (Sternberg, 2021).

Recent times have brought to light the realization that this understanding of creativity falls short; a significant portion of creativity is harnessed for malicious purposes. The concept of transformative creativity (Sternberg, 2021) now demands attention, focusing on elucidating how the innovative and valuable creations are utilized, and how the capacity and inclination to ethically assess the outcomes of creativity can be better facilitated.

Understanding creativity in real-life situations (outside of controlled laboratory environments), and particularly the way it bestows happiness, internal motivation, and a state of flow upon those engaged, remains an intricate phenomenon that continues to challenge scientists in terms of explanation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2019). In recent times, the field of creativity research has been noted to be undergoing a crisis due to its previous emphasis on individualistic and static approaches to exploring creativity (Glăveanu, 2014; Malinin, 2019). Furthermore, there’s a consensus that in order for the field to progress, a new language capable of encompassing its systemic and contextual nature must be developed (Glăveanu, 2013; Montuori, 2011).

A shift toward a dynamic systems approach has been proposed as a paradigmatic change (Malinin, 2016, 2019; Montuori, 2011), which reshapes how creativity is theorized, conceptualized, and subsequently put into practice in research settings. This change in perspective influences the understanding of creativity as a phenomenon, taking into account its intricate interactions and influences, ultimately leading to a more nuanced and holistic exploration.

The “4E paradigm” of cognition is firmly rooted in the dynamical systems paradigm and the principles of complexity science (Thompson, 2010; Malinin, 2019). This framework asserts that the mind is embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended (Newen et al., 2018a). It proposes that mental processes do not occur in isolation or exclusively within the confines of the mind (dualism); rather, they are rooted in the brain and the body (embodied), and they are intertwined with the physical, social, and cultural environment (embedded). According to this view, mind actively participates in shaping its surroundings (enactive) and also incorporates technology as an extension of its cognitive processes (extended).

The notion that cognition is oriented toward action and is most effectively understood within the context of the interaction between a person and their environment has gained prominence since the early twenty-first century (Newen et al., 2018b).

This perspective acknowledges the intricate interplay between an individual's cognitive processes and the external world they engage with.

The perspective of embodied dynamism concerning the mind and creativity offers a profound comprehension of subjectivity and the evolution of the self. It places greater emphasis than preceding viewpoints on how the mind interacts with its surroundings, as well as with tools and artifacts (the results of human creativity), as pivotal elements in the emergence of creativity (Glăveanu, 2013; Malinin, 2019). The skilled, creative practitioner works 'in the moment', 'hands-on' and reflects *ad hoc* as well as after the creative process, refining their creations as well as their own creative thinking and action process (Schön, 1983) and their unique way of seeing the world (Gabora, 2016).

The capacity to withstand the uncertainties inherent in the creative process and the diversity and richness of ideas constitute the foundational attributes of a creative mind (Gabora, 2016). Consequently, a fundamental trait of a creative mind is the ability to manage conflicts and navigate through states of disequilibrium, which necessitates aptitude in synthesis and integration. Integrative thinking, which welcomes and embraces a wide array of thinking styles (Kallio, 2011, 2020) is pivotal in this regard.

Holistic Pedagogy to Transformational Creativity

Holistic Education

Throughout history, human growth and development have been scrutinized from myriad viewpoints. Educational objectives, whether formal or informal, have experienced shifts over the years driven by policies and values. In recent times, the question of education's role in preventing ecological catastrophes and addressing other complex challenges has emerged. Despite this, education has not yielded solutions to prevent human actions and their repercussions, which have led to numerous issues for both humanity and the planet. How can we cultivate individuals who make choices beneficial for the entire world while acting as free agents? We posit that holistic education presents itself as a promising avenue to achieve this aspiration.

Holistic education is an approach that encompasses a range of multimodal tools and methodologies, spanning emotional, volitional, cognitive, and ethical aspects of education in tandem (Miller et al., 2019). This educational paradigm is crucial in addressing substantial global and societal challenges, and it is requiring the harmonization of diverse psychological domains. Pedagogy rooted in action, incorporating emotional and affective dimensions, emerges as a potent mechanism for achieving enduring outcomes, such as fostering a strong bond with nature and cultivating positive attitudes toward it (Barrable, 2019). Thereby this kind of holistic pedagogy can be one way to support transformational creativity.

When discussing the concept of education, we are referring to a broad scope that encompasses learners of all ages, both within formal institutions and informal contexts. Education surpasses mere socialization (as discussed by Martusewicz, 2022; Leonard, 2016; Noddings, 2007). Martusewicz (2022) advocates for a pedagogy of responsibility that extends to encompass not only human beings but also non-human species, aligning with the principles of ecopedagogy (Misiaszek, 2020, 2021, 2022). This paradigm shift involves moving away from the prevailing anthropocentric standpoint. Simultaneously, humans are prompted to introspect upon their own responsibilities, ethical commitments, and worldviews through self-awareness and profound contemplation, akin to “self-techniques” (Foucault, 1988; Hadot, 2002).

Everyday life presents numerous moral and value-related dilemmas that prove challenging to address ethically from a planetary perspective (Misiaszek, 2021). This underscores the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of the human condition, along with a holistic approach that facilitates a broader outlook and an appreciation of wholeness. In line with this, psychological research on wisdom emphasizes the role of ethics. Ethical wisdom pedagogy (Arthur et al., 2016) seeks to foster ethical thinking and behaviors with character and virtue education. Concurrently, the responsibility falls upon the individual: a journey of learning to comprehend and clarify one’s values (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015). Negotiating the perpetual conflict between external expectations and the acceptance of responsibility and implementation of actions proves to be intricate, particularly in the context of acknowledging individual autonomy and the power to choose.

Holistic education is a form of education that aims to nurture the whole individual, encompassing the mind, body, and spirit (Miller et al., 2019). Nature assumes a significant role in holistic pedagogy, as its endeavors to align with the natural world, emphasizing holistic interdependence and interconnectedness as guiding principles for teaching and learning (ibid., p. xxiv). In contemporary times, its significance becomes evident in its purpose: “Holistic education delves into profound learning that encompasses the entirety of the human being. This education also holds the promise of fostering growth and flourishing for both the planet and all its inhabitants” (ibid., xxv). In the present context, this implies coexisting harmoniously with diverse species and the entire ecosystem. However, we must also grasp transformative creativity aspect, understanding the necessity for individuals to undergo profound personal transformation, beyond merely effecting changes in systems (Krishnamurti, 2010).

Our theoretical starting points are summarized in Fig. 12.1.

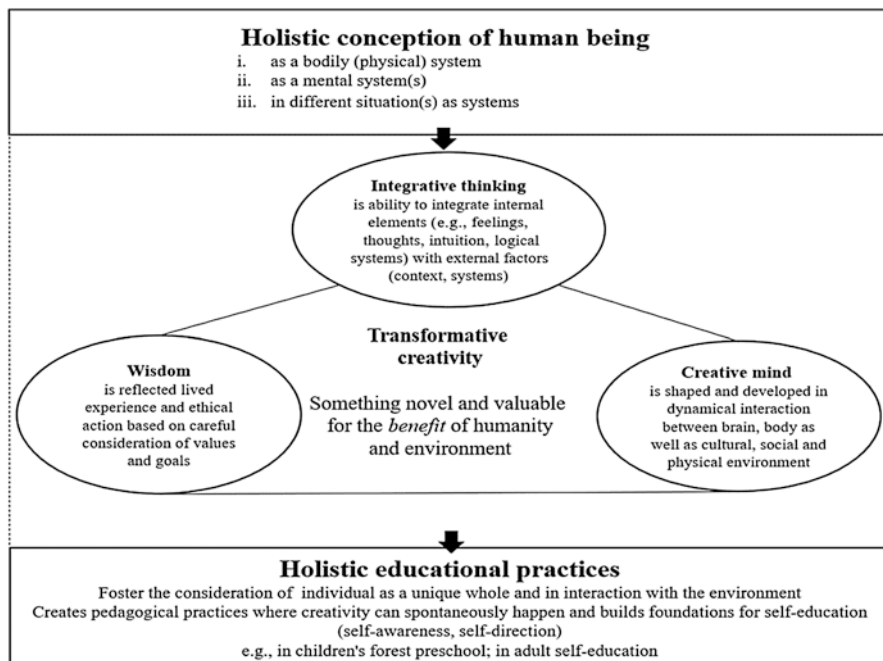


Fig. 12.1 Summary of the main theoretical claims of the article

Initial Findings: Appearance of Transformative Creativity in Finnish Preschool Education in a Forest Environment

Holistic education endeavors to align education with nature. Based on Miller (2007) nature at its core is interrelated and dynamic: “We can see this dynamism and connectedness in the atom, organic systems, the biosphere, and the universe itself” (Brantmeier, 2019, p. 80). One illustrative instance of holistic education can be observed in forest pedagogy, which manifests in the Finnish context as curriculum-based early childhood education and pre-primary education conducted within a forest setting. A tangible outcome stemming from this holistic learning approach is exemplified in an ongoing study within the research project titled “Development of Wisdom and Construction of Forest Relationship in Preschool Education in Forests” (WIFOR, 2023). The research seeks to answer the query regarding the type of wisdom of 6-year-old children can acquire through learning in forest preschool environment.²

²Between 2021 and 2022, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with professionals ($N = 10$) employed at two distinct Finnish municipal pre-primaries, where the adjacent forest served as the primary learning milieu. The participants comprised early childhood education teachers and childhood education nurses, with experience ranging from a few months to six years within the forest preschool setting. The data underwent analysis using qualitative data-driven content analysis methodology (Ek & Kallio, 2023).

Based on the initial findings of the research, it appears that the daily activities of pre-primary education within a forest setting, facilitated by adept teachers and educators in a well-organized learning environment, enables of both wisdom and creativity to emerge. Notably, dimensions of wisdom, like compassion (Ardelt et al., 2018) and practical wisdom (Kristjánsson et al., 2021) have surfaced. Compassion become evident in the connections forged with the natural surroundings and the individuals engaged in this environment, including both peers and staff members (Ek & Kallio, 2023). In this case the forest as a learning environment means the diverse areas of forest or forested nature areas where children play, hike, and learn academic and practical knowledge which is mainly curriculum-based but also informal and experienced (Ek et al., [in preparation](#)).

Upon dissecting the constituents of wisdom, it became evident that the forms of creativity mentioned earlier might not be achievable without an educational approach that nurtures the growth of wisdom. Play occupies a significant position in fostering creativity and innovation (Bateson & Martin, 2013). The pedagogy in the forest outlined earlier offers children a platform for creativity that is expansive, diverse, and transformative. Nevertheless, these outcomes are not spontaneous; they necessitate the presence of skilled educators and caregivers equipped with a holistic understanding. These professionals play a pivotal role in facilitating the type of imaginative play discussed previously, guiding children in their interactions within natural settings such as forests or forest-like areas, and providing clear directions for environmentally conscious play.

Adult Self-education as a Form of Holistic Pedagogy

Throughout world wisdom traditions, a recurring emphasis has been placed on the notion that genuine progress in personal development hinges upon an individual's own metamorphosis and deliberate pursuit of growth (Foucault, 1988; Hadot, 2002). This process, often referred to as self-education or -cultivation, stands as a central theme within numerous "Eastern" wisdom traditions, as in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Daoism (Gowans, 2021). Equally, it constitutes an integral component of major religions, including Christianity, particularly within the contemplative tradition. Moreover, this concept echoes in contemporary self-help literature. (Schaffner, 2021). The inclination for self-cultivation has been notably prominent in ancient Hellenistic philosophies like Stoicism, characterized by a plethora of self-techniques: ranging from self-distancing and mental imagery to journaling and meditation (Robertson, 2019).

The intricate relationship between creativity, wisdom, and self-education, as well as their dynamic interplay, is elucidated through the perspective of the "Positive Disintegration" model formulated by Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1902–1980). A pivotal concept in his work, resonating with specific wisdom traditions, asserts that personality is not bestowed as a gift, but rather it's a culmination achieved through a transformative process (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015). Dąbrowski's viewpoint posits that

one's personality can only be developed through their active engagement and participation in the transformative journey. In a Dąbrowskian context, self-awareness entails not just understanding one's history but also grasping one's existence as an embodied and dynamic entity within the self-environment interaction. This encompasses recognizing the boundaries between oneself and the surrounding environment, including personal values and objectives, cognitive-emotional processes, and the capacity to purposefully engage with the external milieu (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015, 1964/2016). The seeds for autonomous and creative action are inherent in these individuals during early childhood, and these tendencies are nurtured throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

In Dąbrowski's perspective (1967/2015, 1964/2016), the presence of inner conflict signifies the potential for development, albeit the culmination of that potential has not yet been attained. Contrarily, an absence of hardship and challenges in life, according to him, indicates a form of pathology. Consequently, if we guide individuals toward an existence devoid of internal tension, we inadvertently provide misguided support and treatment.

Within Dąbrowski's body of work, there exists a prominent emphasis on self-education and the notion of "autotherapy," reiterated consistently. Dąbrowski does not advocate for individualism or negate the importance of seeking assistance or relying on others. Instead, he proposes that others can participate in the process of personal growth as 'advisers' (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015, p. xxiv). This terminology is deliberately chosen to shift focus away from the notion of 'disease' and foster a context of educational interaction. Such interaction highlights the importance of addressing ignorance and recognizing the areas of our lives where external education, guidance, and counsel are required. In Dąbrowski's framework, self-education involves the partitioning of the personality into a subject-object relationship, wherein these roles interact within oneself (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015, pp. 135–140, 95–97). For Dąbrowski, self-education represents the culmination of psychological and moral character development. It commences when the individual experiences changes that grant them partial independence from the biological factors as well as social influences of the surrounding environment (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015, 1964/2016).

Final Conclusions

As proposed by the OECD (Stevenson, 2022), the objective or aspiration of all education is the flourishing of both individuals and systems, *eudaimonia*. The term "well-being" could be considered the most suitable modern counterpart for this age-old concept, originating from Hellenistic philosophy traditions.

We have delineated two pedagogical approaches capable of fostering transformative creativity, consequently nurturing wisdom as well. We presented an illustration from childhood education as well as a proposition for potential of self-education in adulthood. Both strategies presuppose a holistic understanding of human nature.

In the context of self-education, we draw from a tradition rooted in ancient Greece: “*Gnothi seauton*,” or “Know thyself,” a directive that has also echoed across various cultures globally. Self-comprehension, particularly comprehending one’s own motivations for action, is pivotal, albeit a challenging endeavor in adulthood. Surprisingly, altering one’s relationship with external systems might be less challenging than changing oneself. While political decisions can’t shape our self-understanding or reflective practices leading to wisdom, it’s noteworthy that enduring wisdom traditions advocate for patient techniques to gain self-insight. These traditions assert that the journey is boundless, devoid of a “final solution.” As Lao Tzu aptly stated, “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”

Transitioning from a dualistic perspective of human beings to a holistic viewpoint aligns with the paradigm shift in scientific discourse from reductionism to holism (Mascolo & Bidell, 2020; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). Paradoxes and contradictions are integral components of the dynamical systems perspective, intrinsic to various natural and societal phenomena. These aspects are also pivotal in adult integrative thinking (Kallio, 2011, 2020), and they are playing a crucial role in transformational creativity. The dynamical systems approach embraces nature and evolution as integral to the creative process. This perspective might contribute to the ongoing environmental crisis, as we failed to perceive ourselves as co-creators alongside nature (Montuori, 2017). Instead of being detached observers, we are interconnected elements within the same unfolding tapestry, participants in a creative ecology spanning biosphere, economics, and culture.

However, if we neglect to include human self-education within the framework of systemic change, we inadvertently fall back into the very dualistic trap we strive to transcend.

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