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# Holistic Professional Military Development

*Growing strategic artists*

**Murray Simons**

Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.

-Socrates



**Holistic Professional Military Development:  
Growing strategic artists**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Abstract

*Professional military education is a well-established system in most modern militaries. Like all things though, incremental and ad hoc improvements to legacy approaches typically lead to reduced quality. It is therefore, essential to periodically review the entire system for holistic effectiveness. For military education, this need is particularly important when the global security environment is experiencing such rapid change. Added to this is the emerging understanding of the 'new sciences' that provides a unique opportunity to improve cognitive agility when confronting complex adaptive systems. There is also an urgent need to acknowledge and enhance the intangible dimension of professional military education beyond mere content-centric subject expertise. From the literature on hidden learning and constructivism, there are a number of opportunities available for modernizing the legacy paradigm of professional military education.*

*This study investigated the role of holistic learning (formal, non-formal, informal, self-directed, and incidental learning) in the professional development of 29 mid-career military officers. It involved detailed study of their participation on the seven-month staff course at the New Zealand Defence College from May to December 2008. Mixed methodology data collection included observations, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis. Analytic procedures ranged from statistical comparisons through to qualitative theme constructs. The study found a number of dimensions (sources and influences) contributing to holistic learning. It also identified a number of opportunities to improve the learning experience.*

*The findings identify a number of important factors in developing strategic artists. Of these, the greatest need is for a strategic plan to extend the current content-centric syllabus into a full curriculum with intangible traits clearly linked to formal and informal learning activities. Specific components required in this strategic plan include an academic philosophy and a cross-referencing matrix. The study also recommends reviewing time allocated to cross-discipline learning of the profession and cognitive agility focused on deep learning. There is also a need to re-examine the directing staff requirements, management of learner stress, and shaping practical-value motivation strategies through cultural artefacts. Collectively, the findings recommend shifting from the traditional vessel-filling paradigm of formal courses to a sociological approach of growing strategic leaders.*

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### Ethics approval

This study was conducted in accordance with Massey University Human Ethics Committee approval 07/64. Additional approval to conduct the study was granted by the Assistant Chief of Defence (Personnel), New Zealand Defence Force in accordance with Defence Force Order 21/2002.

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