



Chrysalis

Volume 5 Spring 2008

*Newsletter of
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
at
Timberlake Farm*

Dear Reader,

As we write this, our ninth opening letter for *Chrysalis*, the earth is greening in an ever-renewing cycle of life. Against the cold and darkness of winter, spring arrives in warmth and light. Our thoughts turn to Thomas Berry, bringer of warmth and light, who inspires us every time we contemplate his life. We could think of no better way to begin this issue of *Chrysalis*, dedicated to a “Sense of the Sacred,” than to share with you excerpts from the words of Ann Berry Somers, spoken on March 17, 2008 as she accepted an honorary doctorate from Elon University on behalf of her uncle:

If you have ever had the chance to talk with Thomas you know that he is incapable of small talk. He has a ready humor but is always thinking with a piercing intensity and is ready to take on the world.

Throughout his lifetime, Thomas’ concern has been for the future course of human affairs. It took long years of study here and abroad, much brooding, and the course of historical events to develop his understanding of what has led to the present situation and to see that the difficulty we are experiencing is more than economic or political. It is, indeed, a loss of understanding deep in the human mind and heart along with a loss of meaning in life itself. The losses we are experiencing are soul-losses.

He believes that the Universe is now calling us into this new century, its wonder, its grandeur, and its revitalized sense of meaning. The destiny of humans cannot be separated from the destiny of the Earth. Thomas has come to understand that the recovery of the sense of the sacred is an integral part of this destiny toward which we must dedicate ourselves. Indeed, people everywhere are awakening once again to this ancient bonding of the human community with the full range of Earth, its splendor, and its sense of personal fulfillment.

Our challenge now is to turn our perils into opportunities and to bring about an intensification of life rather than turning on life itself.¹

At this time of loss of understanding and meaning, the Center joins with Thomas Berry in affirming the need to recover a sense of the natural world as a sacred presence in our lives.

¹ sections adapted from Thomas’ Greeting to Passionists (April 25, 2007)



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As we emerge from a scientific/technological phase of earthly evolution, a new mode of consciousness is on the horizon. Not only may we *understand* the world objectively after the manner of the scientist, but also we begin to enter into this understanding with our life of *feeling*, to enter into the external world with love, endowing it with soul-warmth.

In our inherited spectator role, we looked out the window at the natural world, but did not enter the natural world with inner experience. We became distant and removed. The natural world began to be experienced as a collection of objects. Now, however, we are called upon to open the door and carry our inner experience out into the world, to participate in nature with our full being, to enter into it, to become one with it, to experience the world as a sacred reality.

This suggests a radically new mode of consciousness . . . a mode of consciousness that calls for the development of inner capacities for a compassionate human presence to the natural world . . . a mode of consciousness that moves us from a mind sharpened by critical inquiry toward a mind warmed by a loving heart and stimulated by the soul's imaginative power . . . a mode of consciousness that embraces a sense of the natural world as a sacred reality unfolding in time.

We have dedicated our work at the Center to nurturing the inner soul capacities needed for this shift to take place. The education of children takes a different form from this perspective. In Thomas' words, this approach to education is more oriented to the development of "contemplative skills or imaginative capacities for dealing with numinous presence or with the aesthetic insight into the inner structure of reality."²

This form of education seeks to develop a soul mood of reverence, validates feelings of awe and wonder, acknowledges the spiritual dimension of the universe and the spiritual life of the human being, re-envisioning what it means to know the world, and asks the question: How do I awaken to the spirit in myself and to the spirit in the world?

² Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 94.

We engage in this work at a time when the spiritual dimension of the universe story and the spiritual dimension of the child are marginalized, particularly in schools. In his book, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, psychologist Tobin Hart writes that “most people, in particular psychologists, educators, and religious leaders, assume that children are not able to be “spiritual” their capacity for wonder and wisdom, for compassion and deep questioning, and for seeing beneath the surface of the physical world is largely unacknowledged.”³ He goes on to say that “if we look in nearly any textbook on child development or psychology, there is nothing on children’s spirituality. *Nothing.*”⁴

The same could be said about textbooks on the universe and the earth. If we look in nearly any textbook on the universe or the earth, there is nothing on the spiritual dimension of the natural world. *Nothing.*

At the Center, we are dedicated to making a space for a meeting of the spirit in the human with the spirit in the universe. Over the years, we have developed practices that allow educators, children and young adults to enter into a deep, personal relationship with the natural world to become re-enchanted with the earth as a living reality.


In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we introduce you to these practices through the children and educators who have taken part in them. We begin with a piece written by Alina Gabitov when she was in the sixth grade. In a remarkable counterpoint of two voices, Alina alternates from an experience of the physical world to an experience of the innermost nature of things as she journeys through the earth sanctuary during one of the Center’s programs.

In our “Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program, we ask the educators to awaken to the landscapes where they work with the children and young adults in their care; to write a description of these special places while staying in the mode of loving attentiveness rather than objective description of the schoolyards, backyards, preserves, and urban streets that they and the children call home. In response to this assignment, Anne-Barton Carter, Director of Children’s Ministries at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Greensboro, NC, wrote a beautiful piece entitled “Courtyard,” included here.

During the second year of the Inner Life program, educators are asked to create a practice that brings to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child/young adult and the natural world. We include here the practice of John Shackelton, class of 2008, who is devoting himself to writing a book entitled “Pedagogy of the Sacred.”

Our hope is that Center programs might link the souls of children, young adults and educators with all that lives and breathes in the universe. We are deeply grateful to Alina, Anne-Barton and John for making these connections visible.

Warm regards,



Carolyn Toben, Founder



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

³ Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* (Makawao Maui, HI: Inner Ocean, 2003), p. 3.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 4.



My Thoughts in Timberlake

by
Alina Gabatov

In the spring of 2006, Alina Gabatov traveled with her sixth grade class to the Center for a program. What follows is her remarkable reflection on that day, told in two voices. Alina is now a seventh grade student at B'Nai Shalom Day School in Greensboro, NC.

“These words came floating up from the deepest part of the lake in my heart”

Why do you weep? You have much. Or do you not know of the beauty of nature all around? Do you not love and respect it? Feel inside the comfort and calmness of everything around. You are one with all the animals and plants you see, and the ones you don't. Open your eyes to the smallest things' every detail.

Here I heard the trees rustle, as to give me a sign.

As the trees rustle and bend in the wind so do you. As the animals crawl, soar and leap, you are with them.

Here I saw the muddy bottom of the creek and the cloudy sky, as Carolyn told us to observe our surroundings.

Even if the sky isn't fair and the creek may be muddy, your heart is as clear and pure as the air we are breathing.

Now I saw the different patterns of the trees surrounding me.

The patterns of life are different for everyone, yet everything is the same. Though nature isn't yours, you can be it, you are part of it. Everyone. Everything around is helping you. You might not even know it.

Here a bunch of people in front of me stepped on some leaves and scared a blue jay away.

Tread silently not to scare them away.

Now we stopped at the Wishing Rock. As I made my wish, for Nature always to be like in Timberlake at least somewhere, gentle waves showed up on the surface of the lake.

As the lake ripples with the wind, you bend and sway along. All wishes for nature shall be held together by the bond of life. The sun will smile its benevolent warming smile.

As I looked across the lake I noticed a white fallen tree.

For those who have fallen many have grown.

The tree next to the wishing rock had a carved figure hung on its bark, so I thought of this:

The spirits of life are all around, they encircle you in a caring grasp. Back and forth, back and forth. You walk with the wind, you learn to fly.

As we arrived at the circle of pines, Carolyn explained that they had been moved during a very harsh winter. She was afraid they would not survive.

If you have been moved you shall live on, with strong spirit and energy from others. During spring the young will grow, flourish, and give everything they can.

Now we went to different places to draw or write.

Pick a special place, for only you and nature. Give your heart to nature, without her you would die. So be thankful, and learn to know.

Now at my special place, I had a song stuck in my head, that I forgot the words to, so I made them up.

Everything that is around all depends on its environment, and it never really is the same. Like the river and the fire ever changing every second. You can never step in the same river twice. But the old Sequoia trees, they may look to be the same, every year they change a little more.

Here I thought of a book we had read a year ago, *Tuck Everlasting*, and its connection to nature. As Tuck had said, they were left behind, like rocks on the side of the river of life.

Life may be a little hard, but you must move along, never to be left behind. Let your heart lead the way. In the center of nature is a heart like yours, but no one knows where. It can be anywhere in nature. Park, valley, mountain, hill, prairie, desert, and ravine, nature resides in them all. Nature is much stronger than you think it is. It may be slow like a river through a canyon.

We are now in a circle, at the treehouse. I see the trees slowly swaying in the breeze.

The roots stay far in the ground while the tops bend and sway in the wind. Some things live long, some short, and they all have a part in the circle of life.

Now we went to go across the marsh bridge.

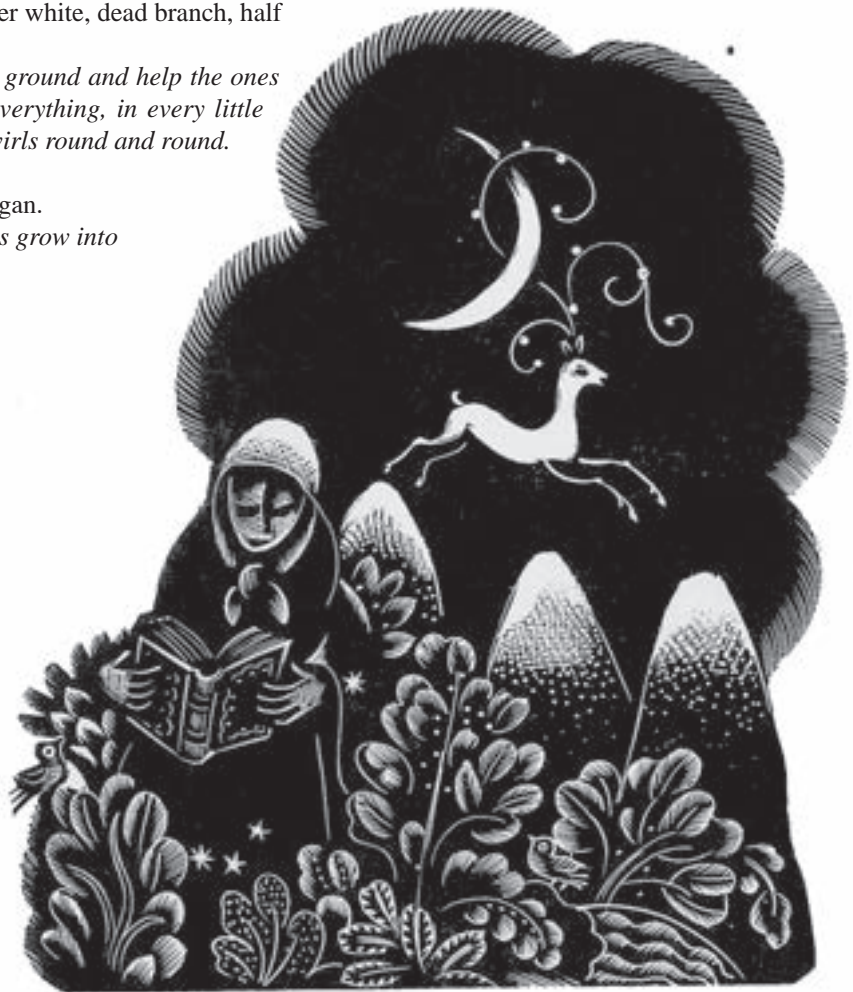
Feel nature closing in around you, leaving no space for the honking and hammering of civilization. Let it bring you into slow time. Relax, calm down, return to nature. Cross from civilization to calm, beautiful nature. The whistle of the wind, the rustle of trees, all belong to nature.

As I crossed the marsh bridge, I saw another white, dead branch, half hidden in the ground.

Those who have fallen go back to the ground and help the ones growing. Can't you see a circle in everything, in every little plant? The vine loves the tree for it twirls round and round.

As I finished the next phrase the drizzle began.

The rain refreshes nature. It helps seeds grow into huge trees.



Wood engravings by Ilya Schor
(The Hebrew letter "heh" is associated with the breath of creation.)

The Courtyard

by
Ann Barton Carter

Each year, we ask the educators in our “Inner Life of the Child in Nature” program to awaken to the landscapes where they work with the children and young adults in their care; to write a description of these special places while staying in the mode of loving attentiveness rather than objective description of the schoolyards, backyards, preserves, and urban streets that they and the children call home. In response to this request, Anne-Barton Carter, Director of Children’s Ministries, wrote the following description of the courtyard at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Greensboro, NC.

You enter this cloistered retreat off a covered breezeway. Take steps along a stone path. Two huge, old pin oaks stand as sentries on either side. They provide shelter and shade. Their imposing solidity a reminder of all that they have seen. The purifying cedars rise up to make this place clean. There are large rosemary bushes for remembrance. Remember the earth, remember the reason we gather, remember those who have gone before, remember those who will need this place somewhere down the line. Descend now, down steps into a safe haven so close but yet so far from the street. In this recession the traffic noises fade a little. The bubbling oasis of a fountain can be heard - that magical lulling sound of water over rocks. The stone walls make a fortress declaring this a secret. Stacked stones in grays, roses, whites-so many hues await the eye. All around are variegated greens: laurels, ferns down low, boxwoods, camellias, dogwoods, and rhododendron. Many bloom in their own time guaranteeing color in all seasons. The patches of lawn are lush with grass and clovers. Distracted, your eye follows the busy path of a parade of ants moving to and fro with great purpose. A squirrel scampers by. Some birds converse, their voices carrying a rapid fire sense of urgency. Are you perceived as a threat? Climbing ivy and other vines draw the eye up to the open clear view of sky. Gaze upward, the clouds and changing light mark the day and weather. The slate roof slopes down and below the brilliant colors of stained glass merge the cathedral inside with the one present in this outdoor space. Acorns crunch and leaves crackle underfoot as you take advantage of a hospitably placed bench. In the center is the labyrinth. This age old pilgrimage borrows its spiral shape from nature. The entrance beckons, inviting you in to walk and begin the unraveling of self, the letting go, the silencing to move round towards the center where the listening is all. The columbarium occupants keep company lest one grow lonely. A Celtic cross stands tall yet unimposing to remind us of Creator, creation, our part of a whole, a promise of thin places. Circles underfoot, moss green and growing undeterred by footfall above, wind round and round and suddenly find yourself on the way back out. The impulse is to stop and bow; to turn your face to the sun and feel the wind’s caress fare thee well. Clarity restored, energy renewed, it’s time to depart. For now.



Children of the Mystery: Why We Need a Pedagogy of the Sacred

by
John Shackelton

The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human—at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience.¹

~ Thomas Berry



hen I was ten, Pittsburgh was blessed with a major snowstorm. My neighborhood in the city was covered in two feet of wonderful white stillness. The trolley tracks were buried, no traffic moved, no engines roared, no one pumped gasoline in the Mobil station across the street. When I stepped outside, I felt I was in some other world—a tiny, frozen, and strangely quiet planet. Nature saturated the air. I could taste the sacred.

Behind the Mobil station was a vacant lot, and behind that acres of woods where I loved to play. Suited up like an Antarctic explorer, I made my way very slowly across the snow-covered road to the snow-covered vacant lot, leaving behind the deep grooves of my passing. There were no other marks in the snow, and I felt the wonder of being alone with the elemental white and the cold, crisp air. Eventually, I reached the woods and entered a place such as I had never seen. The trees were covered with rime ice and snow; the paths were white; the woods were alive with magic, and I half expected to see Tumnus appear from behind a tree.

Somewhere in the middle of those woods, I stopped, or perhaps I was halted by the Presence I sensed but could not name. It was the quality of the silence that stilled me, that touched something ancient within me. I felt, but could not articulate, that the quiet was not just the absence of sound; it was a Presence, the echo in time of the Big Silence, and it conjured within me an expectation. I remained still, waiting for whatever was coming. What came was a hushed reverence I had never experienced in church. I felt very small, but that felt very right, and I felt embraced, loved, seen.

I felt a stirring inside for which I had no words then. I was experiencing the revealing of my true self, the me that school and home had layered over with a socially-constructed identity. For a few minutes in the eleventh year of my life, I felt the wonder of my authentic self, the freedom of me. I was being searched out, seen, known. Something was revealing me to me. My eyes watered up. No Christmas gift had ever been so welcome. I sat in the snow and stared at the blurring trees and felt my breath mingle with the white world “outside” and wanted nothing more than to be rocked in the arms of that vast, compassionate Silence.

It would be nearly forty years before the Silence got through to me again.

~

The reason it took so long (as will shortly be seen) has everything to do with the global need for Thomas Berry’s proposed mission. To carry out such a mission will certainly require a different way of educating our young. Educators will have to abandon their perennial quest for yet more effective methods of doing what they’ve always done. We will have to change our approach to schooling; we will need what the late John O’Donohue, in his last interview in America, called a “pedagogy of interiority.”

¹ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), p. 159.

Part I

A Culture of Control

*The difficulty is that with the rise of modern science we began to think of the universe as a collection of objects rather than as a communion of subjects.*²

~ Thomas Berry

Pedagogy as Pressure



When I was a boy, kindergarten was about play of all types. We sang and marched in circles; we listened to stories and acted them out; we colored and cut and pasted and made “things” out of whatever materials were at hand; we dressed up as adults and dramatized our perceptions of grown-ups; we painted pictures and formed clay into shapes from our imaginations and painted the clay; our teacher told us fairy tales and read us myths; and we took a lot of time outside playing imaginatively and running like colts as though there were no better way to celebrate life.

If we look around now, we can still find kindergartens like that here and there, but they are becoming fewer. The new trend is for kindergartens with desks aligned in rows like grade-school classrooms. Day after day, five-year-olds sit completing worksheets so they can form their letters earlier and read and write well before entering first grade. Outside time is often seen as a reward for hard work at those desks instead of an integral part of the curriculum and one of the developmental needs of kindergarteners. Not far from where I live is a kindergarten with a three-word name, the last two words of which are *Preparatory Academy*. Kindergartens are often designed to give the very young a “competitive edge” by placing upon their small shoulders the success anxieties of a zero-sum culture. The early years of schooling are no longer about the wonder of the vast world or about the joy of discovery; they are about starting the journey to Harvard.

But what lies behind that approach is something that has been with us for a long time, and I will claim that it is a terrible mistake that we must correct if we are to survive.

Knowledge as Power



My high school physics teacher had his personal motto engraved on a brass plate mounted on his desk. It read, “Knowledge is Power.” Even as a teenager, I felt curiously uncomfortable with that statement as a human value.

In contrast to this, my father used to tell me from time to time, through wispy clouds of pipe smoke, that *a little knowledge is a dangerous thing*. He meant, of course, that if one jumps into a situation with less knowledge than is needed, the results are likely to be disheartening if not disastrous.

As I grew older, I began to see that the word *little* as my father used it is actually a relative term. For example, compared to the multiple trillions of gigabytes of knowledge held by the human race today, our predecessors who produced the Enlightenment had *little* knowledge—perhaps it could all have fit on one new, high-tech personal computer. Yet it looked very large to them, and upon what now appears as relatively little knowledge, they erected a superstructure of conclusions, of governmental, societal, and scientific programs that literally shoved Western civilization in a definite direction.

Knowledge did, indeed, facilitate a kind of power. It brought certain understandings of the mechanisms of the universe, and these are good to have and can be helpful, and who of us would want to return to Dark Age ignorance? In addition, the scientific revolution brought medical advancements and saved many lives, gains we would not want to be without and for which we are thankful. Yet this explosion of knowledge also brought fierce wars with previously unthinkable weapons and levels of destruction and death that exceeded medicine’s list of the saved. The new knowledge made life more comfortable for many people, but less comfortable for many others, and brought our species and our planet to the brink of final destruction.

² Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower 1999), p. 16.

Similarly, one can easily argue that when compared with all the knowledge not yet ours (in the depths of the Earth and the depths of our humanness and in the vast reaches of the universe and of ultimate truth), the knowledge we hold today, multiple trillions of gigabytes though it may be, is still *little*. Unlike the Enlightenment's little knowledge, will our somewhat bigger little knowledge become a benign power in our hands, or will it once again prove to be a dangerous thing?

Going back to my youth, I now reflect that the words that floated in smoke seem to have passed the test of history better than those that were stamped on brass. We are where we are, historically and ecologically, because we have treated knowledge as a commodity—the same way we treat the Natural World—as a major resource to serve our human projects. We have not approached knowledge respectfully or revered its sacred nature; we have probed for it as a means of controlling our destiny; we have treated knowledge as servant to our purposes, and now we are in a dangerous place.

~



nowledge as power has been accompanied by a shadow companion, a form of ignorance we tend not to notice. The following will illustrate:

Cave paintings were first discovered in Spain in 1879, but because they did not fit the “hard” data that defined early Paleolithic humans as *homo faber* (tool user) rather than symbolist, anthropologists insisted the paintings must be a hoax. We now understand from those who have lived among 19th- and 20th century indigenous peoples that “primitive” humans were much more aware of their embodied knowing and their participation in the animate Earth than we are, and they expressed their understanding in dance, ritual, song, story, and picture (languages kindergarteners easily appreciate). The dances, the rituals, the masks, the songs and stories held no concrete, long-survival quality of the kind science looks for, such as an arrowhead or axe would have. Hand tools survived thousands of years and thereby became grist for the data mills of analysis, but the rich expressive culture of body-knowing and intimacy with Earth remained invisible to such probing.

This phenomenon of *methodological invisibility* is illustrated in the following example from Morris Berman in *Coming to Our Senses*.³ A researcher in Medieval sainthood approached his project with a very modern research tool—the computer database. He listed a number of well-known saints and collected data about them such as country of origin, social class, if they had a spiritual ecstatic experience and age at the time of it, whether they were credited with miracles and the classification of those, etc., etc. The researcher entered his data, crunched the numbers, and, *ipso facto*, he had a picture of the typical Medieval saint with which to enlighten the understanding of other scholars. Dr. Berman knew this researcher and assures us that he had no trouble attracting grant money.

Let's consider a different approach to the same topic. A young researcher goes to a convent and isolates herself in a monastic cell for three months. She prays; she fasts; she goes outside just before sunset each evening and meditates alone in the garden under a great oak and watches the cosmic drama of the sun surrendering the day. At night, she prays and sits in silence for hours. When she sleeps, dreams come to her with secret insights to which she could not have reasoned her way.

Of the two researchers, which one will come closer to truly knowing Medieval sainthood? What, then, does to know mean? Really. Truly. Ontologically.

~



he work of Benjamin Whorf in the early 20th century and the later work of Russia's Vygotsky (*Thought and Language*, 1962) shed light on how determinate culture can be in forming our understanding of almost anything. They both argued that even our thought processes are extensively influenced by the conceptual categories communicated through the *language* of our culture. The very vocabulary we learn as members of modern society directly affects how we think because it encodes how earlier members of our culture thought and conclusions they came to about some very crucial aspects of human life. This means that the Enlightenment affected our thinking about knowledge not only through the scientific revolution but also by embedding beliefs into our culture linguistically. It is almost impossible to think without these beliefs directly affecting our thinking. The instance of the database formulation of sainthood reveals a perception of knowledge deeply rooted in this dual effect. If Whorf and Vygotsky are correct, we have a responsibility (given what our Western view of knowledge and its use has done to our world) to revisit what we accept as a given, i.e., how to think about knowledge.

³ Morris Berman, *Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 114.

So I pose this question: Is the knowledge gained from objectification and analysis really knowledge? Is it ontologically real—knowledge that is—or is it merely called knowledge because it works, which means we find it useful to our purposes?

We often hear a distinction made between knowledge and wisdom as though the legitimacy of the one should not be questioned in the absence of the other. However, can “knowledge” that leaves us foolish be properly called *knowledge*? Perhaps it would be more accurate (and even useful?) to say that what we’ve been calling knowledge—no matter how sophisticated, empirical, or abstractly conceptualized—is really more like information. I suggest that this thought brings us closer to the truth. The database on sainthood was information, accurate as far as it went; one might even argue that the facts in it were not merely culturally based but actual. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the data and its use for such a purpose was deeply culturally based. I suggest that the kind of “knowledge” that does not bring wisdom requires quotation marks because only one species operates as though this kind of “knowledge,” and it alone, is really knowledge. Our doing so has not made us superior, only more dangerous.

Returning to Whorf and Vygotsky (one could add Gregory Bateson, C.A. Bowers and others), when we define what is taught in classrooms and pursued in laboratories as what we mean by knowledge, we forget that we make that judgment from the confines of human purpose. Our academic, scientific, technological voices do not speak for the planet, let alone the cosmos, let alone the Mystery. And this humanly-derived and humanly-controlled “knowledge” has so empowered our Narcissism as a species that we no longer sense the Mystery or hear the Voices of Earth. Small wonder that we are ignorant of the Other ways of knowing.

So then, what kind of knowledge would not need quotation marks?

Part II

A Communion of Learning

For it is likely that the inner world of our Western psychological experience . . . originates in the loss of our ancestral reciprocity with the animate earth.⁴

~ David Abram

How does David Abram know this? How large is his database? Was he around when our forebears enjoyed reciprocity with the living Earth? It appears you must read his statement and . . . well, I’m going to offer you the word *recognize*, and let’s see a bit later where it takes us. In preparation for that, let’s review a remarkable story that will help us understand the phrase *reciprocity with the animate earth*.

A Story from Modern Science (with a bit of embellishment)



f all the wonderful gifts science has brought us, perhaps the greatest one and the closest to a knowledge that offers wisdom is the story of Evolution. I retell it in brief here and with a prologue that peeks behind the Big Bang (the point where science begins).

Before the Big Bang was the Big Silence.
The fecund Full-ness of *What-could-be*—dark, unfathomable
womb of all that was to unfold, pregnant with Possibility—
began to turn inward toward a singular focus of the Possible,
toward a *Mysterious Realization*: Mystery, First Emanation of the Silence.

⁴ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 10.

Then the *Realization of What Could Be* exploded,
Second Emanation of the Silence,
filling the Void with sound and motion, matter and energy
hurling in all directions, the beginning of all Becoming,
all forms from no form, all things from no thing.
The beginning of space, the beginning of time, the Beginning

After Age upon Age, in the outstretched arm of a spiral galaxy,
far, far from the Center of the Universe where the Big Banged,
in the planetary system of a long-settled star,
A small planet writhed in upheavals of gases and molten rock and
Eons of fire and thunderbolts, until its chaos became form,

And a Great Diversity of forms appeared; land masses rose
With spewing mountains upon them, oceans and land separated and
After Age upon Age, hills and plains and mountains came to be
And lakes and rivers as the Planet settled
And saw Herself—Who she was becoming.
Her Long Learning she etched in the layers of her land,
The primitive mechanics of energies and forces
that made form and Beauty. And it was Good.

Ages upon Ages passed again, haphazardly,
like the mechanical forces of chaos finding their way to Form,
and she learned a New Kind of Form, crown of all Others:

New molecules appeared from older ones, heirs of Silence and Rest,
Chaos and form, fire and water.
They bonded in the water's warmth in fecund embrace
Increasing in complexity of form until a mass of them became One
And began to feed
And divide
And multiply.

The Big Unfolding followed as Earth learned wondrous things from the Mystery
And the Living Forms spread throughout her climates and topographies
And responded to other forms to learn diversity
And increased in complexity and grandeur
Until Earth breathed the rhythms of life forms learning
and knew the wonders of her Living Self
In a Complexity of Patterns and Patterns of Patterns
That knew each other and themselves as One.

Age upon Age passed with deep Learnings
And Celebration of Life
Covering the Planet until . . .

Out of the African jungle, stepping uncertainly into new territory,
A small number of hominids moved onto the savannah
And, eventually, after a very long series of chancy adaptations (learning)
Experienced a Mysterious Realization
that no living being before them had known.

Like their Mother, they, alone among all her offspring,
Became Self Aware.
They became Beings-of-Story and danced the Long Learning of Earth
Resident in their bodies
And revered the Mystery of their knowing.

So it came to be
that learning filled the Earth
as the waters cover the sea.

Clearly, I am asking you to think of Earth's long history as a story of learning, of movement from chaos and primal mechanical forces to order and form and, eventually, life. Earth was "here" for all of it, experienced all of it, became aware through the processes of it. This movement from elemental material to self-aware complexity was a Cosmic Learning, a *coming-to-know*.

We moderns stand proudly upon our learning as evidenced in such things as our success in eliminating diseases like polio, crossing the vast ocean in a mere few hours, sending messages around the globe in fractions of seconds, placing steel-clad feet on the moon, and taking practice shots at the human genome. Yet, in the face of the grand Epoch of Cosmic Learning, we are as an oil lamp proclaiming its brilliance to the sun.

Nevertheless, the science of biology and the understandings we have gained from evolution have given us this wonderful story, a modern myth that allows us to hold onto the analytical blessing of science, which we must respect as a legitimate *part* of our knowing, while we are also blessed by myth, an ancient way of seeing truth that is transcendent of objective fact.

Lessons from the Learning Earth



The myth of Cosmic Learning stands as both the exemplar of, and the invitation to experience, ontological knowing—knowledge without quotation marks.

The story of Earth's learning holds certain implications and wisdoms for us now. For example: Earth's learning has been communally cumulative, that is, it generates new life forms within the communion of Life. This is the essence of evolutionary biology and the story of shared DNA. There are branches in that tree of learning, but each branch unfolds from and embodies what came before. So all life forms hold within them the learning (in essence if not detail) of earlier life forms. We have within us the learning—or essential echoes of it—of the tuber and the oak, of the worm and the gazelle, of the serpent and the hawk. Thus, in a very real and mysterious sense, we are connected to all life, have some of all life embodied in us. Each of us may truly say, *I am the fish; I am the turtle; I am the bison; I am the lily and the rose; I am the clouds and the rain; I am the breath of every living being.*

Our bodies are heirs to Earth's learning; they hold the wordless languages of our Mother's knowing. The human body speaks these languages, and their ways of knowing are incarnate in it, the primal and essential message-bearing dynamics of the living Earth. As a result, the human soul, our embodied self, does indeed know a great deal; we know as a gift of the Mystery, our connection to all that is. Our forebears knew this in their bodies, and in their bodies they danced it and sang it and storied it and painted it. Compared to that, arrowheads were a minor matter. But we moderns have forgotten. We have allowed the clouds of a limited "knowing" to block out the Gift of the Mystery, the Long Knowing to which we are heirs, which opens the gates of wisdom. We have lost the sacred communion of Life.

Part III

A Sacred Mirror

*If human identity . . . is so heavily shaped by the phenomenon of mirroring, it becomes obvious how different a culture that has a non-human mirror available is going to be from one that does not.*⁵

~ Morris Berman



he dominant culture holds up to every one of us a mirror in which we see ourselves falling short in comparison to what it tells us we should be—slim, smart, stylish, in control, and having lots of money. What most people see in that mirror makes them anxious, fretful, insecure (Is this the real “invisible hand” of the market?). Our culture sets our children up for this, focuses on them even more intensely in their teen years, and finishes its work in fearful and compliant adults who then pass on to their children . . .

But the Mystery offers the mirror of the Natural World, the reciprocity with Earth that opens to us our authentic self and embraces us in communion with the Other. Young children—like fresh air, clean water, and opening flowers—are naturally accessible to the Sacred Mirror until we teach them not to be. And we do that in school.

Children of the Market



fter the big snow experience, I lingered in the snowy woods for a long time. Eventually, I had to return home. Eventually, also, the snow melted, and I returned to school. But my teachers apparently knew nothing of the Sacred Mirror; they held out for me only the mirror of human “knowledge.” I was a good student of that “knowledge,” but none of it knew me, reached out to touch that resonating chord within my true self. After a while, the feeling of that encounter with the Mystery melted away like the snow. The most important learning I had ever experienced lay dormant for decades. Why?

In school, we teach our children to turn away from their natural connection to the Other. But we do so without noticing because it’s not written in any curriculum. *The student will learn to deny the sacred, view knowledge as a commodity, and pursue a life of personal control and material gain.* No curriculum would dare articulate such a thing, but this is a huge life-lesson that nearly every child who does well in school learns thoroughly, and most children who don’t do so well in school also learn (hopefully, not as thoroughly). In graduate schools of education, students discuss the existence of a “hidden” curriculum but are not encouraged to do anything about such unanticipated, unlisted learnings, and perhaps especially (on an unconscious level) not this one.

If the above is true, then how did we get here? Thomas Berry says we’ve lost communion with creation. David Abram suggests our pathologies are rooted in loss of reciprocity with the living Earth. Morris Berman helps us see that we’re looking in the wrong mirror. They are all quite right, and no matter how we word the thing, it all comes down to this: we’ve wanted to be in control, so we chose a way of knowing that we thought would serve that desire, and we cut off both our natural connections and inner Witness to the Other ways of knowing that won’t serve our purposes.

However, just getting “back to nature” will not reverse the trend. If we use nature merely as therapy, as a place to escape and recharge our consumer batteries so that we can go on making life decisions as before (only more respectful of the ozone layer, more consistent in recycling, and committed to a life without Styrofoam), we have been touched only by the cultural co-opting of undeniable ecological facts, and not yet by the sacred. “Back to nature” in this sense, and political expressions of ecology are both examples of how we have been educated to “know” in a way that actually hides from us the knowledge we need. The relationship between true knowing and the sacred is so intimate as to be almost congruent.

⁵ Morris Berman, *Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 66.

Children of the Mystery



he humans closest to Earth's Knowing are young children. They have a low center of gravity in more ways than one. They are "in their bodies" rather than their heads, i.e., they are naturally in touch with that biological inner repository of the Long Learning and, therefore, the Ancient Ways of Knowing. Like their ancestral parents in all the forms of Evolution-as-Learning, they know by intimacy, by what might be termed empathetic knowing, connecting to the Other from that within them which is *like* the Other. It is, in essence, a *recognition* which rises from instructions in their bodies, their evolutionarily-embodied learning. True knowing is graced by this element of recognition, what some spiritual teachers call *remembering*. No need for databases.

Young children approach the new without psychic distance, so for them, a *participation* with the Other is the essence of knowing. They perceive from a place of wonder (not usefulness), which is a particular kind of relationship between the child and her surroundings that gives easy access to the Sacred Mirror. The Mystery lies transparent before such wonder, so the young child perceives the utter particularity of whatever he focuses on as a *thou*, not an it. The young child can easily be present to an "object" in a way that adults rarely can. For young children, an encounter is a meeting—an *I/thou*, not an *I/it*. The *thou* and the *I* are non-intellectually known. The child experiences the *thou* as both known and unknown and, as Robert Sardello maintains, thinks *within* the thing itself.⁶ So a second characteristic of true knowing is *intimacy*, the work of the Sacred Mirror: the communion of knowing as one is known. When I met the Mystery in the snowstorm, it came through the Silence to show me myself.

The Road Not Yet Taken



crucial point here is that in true knowing, "we" are not the only active agency. I believe we come to know something external only as it, or the Mystery through it, comes to know us, reveals something of our self to our self. In this way, we can grow in both outer and inner knowledge, but ultimately these are one, and all efforts to separate them carry costly consequences. This unity seems to lie behind many of the ancient myths about hubris. Hubris, human pride of power and control, insists on knowing without being known. But this possibility is more imaginary than any fairy tale. Violation of the wisdom of knowing-as-being-known has resulted in our inability to foresee the dire consequences of our uses of "knowledge" so that only long after our foolish actions do we see that we have been destroying the planet and calling it progress. Our culture is sick for lack of the communion of *knowledge-as-intimacy*. And now, because we have been trying so long to control everything through our "knowledge," the planet is also sick.

If we continue to educate as we are, our children will not gain knowledge, but only "knowledge," so the sickness will continue until everything dies. The wonder of cosmic history to which we are all heir and which should be revered and celebrated, this we dismiss from our schools, from the very place where children should be learning. As Thomas Berry said, we reject the *communion of subjects* for a *collection of objects* and thereby reduce the Great Learning to the capabilities of the human head, and then only the left side of that head. We teach our children to turn away from what science calls (not being able to wrap its head around such a thing) their instincts, from all that makes them living heirs of their Mother and ontological knowing. We do this because such knowledge is foreign to most adults (and teachers in schools), and to many others it is a gray recollection like the dim feeling left from a forgotten dream or the buried wonder of a white forest of silence. Our dominant culture has separated knowledge from wisdom, so its "knowledge" keeps us foolish.

⁶ Robert Sardello, *Facing the World with Soul: The Reimagination of Modern Life* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1991), pp. 38-39.

But must things continue that way?

What if curriculum writers were to spend weeks facing the Sacred Mirror before they wrote what children must learn and how they must learn it?

Then, what if children did not learn in school that knowledge is a commodity, but experienced knowing as inseparable from being known? What if children in show-and-tell shared not just their latest material acquisition but that Visitation in the snow, and teachers were encouraged to recognize such experiences and celebrate them? What if the formal education of children valued the Natural World, revered Earth, and engaged the body's ancient knowing so that when children swayed in the breeze with the daffodils or communed with the dryad of a weeping willow or danced with the falling October leaves, these communions would count as learning?

To reinvent ourselves on the species level will require great wisdom, widely dispersed. I see no way toward that condition without first reinventing the education of our young. If we were to pass on to our children that what we know is very *little* and is not as much a basis for our existence as what we don't know, if we based education not on the pursuit of "knowledge" but on the ontological presence of Mystery, then we would have the basis for a pedagogy of the Sacred and very likely our first and greatest step toward a healthy world, toward a "communion of subjects."

John Shackelton has been an educator for over thirty years. He has taught every level from second grade to college freshmen and served as head of three alternative schools, most recently Rainbow Mountain Children's School in Asheville, N.C. He has one published novel, *The Lowly Papers*, a story of Appalachia, and he is currently writing a non-fiction work, *Pedagogy of the Sacred*. Several of his articles touching on the relationship between education and the mistreatment of the planet are available at www.rmcs.org, the Rainbow website.

Illuminated letters by Liz Levitt



Center Programs 2008

Programs for Children

Children of the Forest

An Afternoon Program in the Natural World for 6-9 year olds

3:45 – 5:30 pm

Spring: Wednesdays, March 19 - May 7, 2008

Fall: Wednesdays, September 24 - November 12, 2008

\$160

Once a week, rain or shine, a group of 8 children explores the forests, fields, creeks and organic garden of Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary. Unhurried by the pressures of time, they are guided in natural play and exploration by Sandy Bisdee, staff Naturalist/Educator, who brings over twenty years' experience with children and the earth to her work at the Center. The program is entirely outside in the fresh air, sunshine, wind, rain, fog and all kinds of weather! Parents may drop off their children or stay for solo time on woodland trails.

Make New Friends: A Nature Camp for 5-7 year olds

June 16 – 20, 2008

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Cost: \$175 a child (limited to 12 children)

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Scott Crews

In this magical week together, we will make new friends deep in the forest, bubbling in the brook, blossoming in the garden and living in the open meadows. Our days begin with music, natural play and sharing time, and continue with nature walks, where we experience “magical moments” on woodland trails. In the afternoons, we gather in the story circle, make time for artistic expression, and go creek exploring off the Creeping Cedar Trail. The week will close with a joyful “Children of the Forest Festival” on Friday. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

Exploring Secret Places: A Nature Camp for 8-10 year olds

June 23 – 27, 2008

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Cost: \$175 a child (limited to 12 children)

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Scott Crews.

In this week of adventure and imagination, we will explore woodland trails, but also venture off the beaten path into the wilder areas of the natural world. Join us as we share in the wonder of these experiences together! Each day we make new connections to secret places in the natural world, and new friendships with each other. The week includes poems, stories, songs, rhythm games, music making, and exuberant sharing in the feeling of community with the natural world. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

Earth, Air, Fire, Water: A Nature Camp for 11-13 year-olds

July 7 – 11, 2008

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Cost: \$175 a child (limited to 12 children)

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Carolyn Toben

Join us in exploring the elements of earth, air, fire and water with new eyes. Each day begins with stories and songs from many cultures followed by expeditions into the mysteries of the magical garden, woods, creeks and rocks of our earth sanctuary. Together we will discover an inner relationship to the elements. In the afternoons we give imaginative expression to our individual experiences of the morning through poetry, art and journaling. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

Programs for Schools & Groups

Awakening to Nature

Grades pre-school – K, 9:30 am –12:00 noon, \$200

Grades 1-5, 9:30 am - 1:30 pm, \$250

Number of Children: maximum 24

“Awakening to Nature “ brings the inner lives of children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world. Throughout the changing seasons, children are invited to slow down and experience the fullness of each moment at the earth sanctuary; to take in the sounds, the smells, the feel of the air, the colors and movements of forest, creek, pond, garden and meadow. Through story, music, movement and visual image, inner experiences are deepened and shared. The day ends with a heartwarming circle of reflection. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades pre-K-5.

The Poetry of Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Grades 6-12

Cost: \$250

Number of Students: maximum 24

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things” ~ Mary Oliver
Students are led along earth sanctuary trails on a journey that deepens their connection to the natural world through silent practices and poetry readings at special sites. While taking in the images of each new place, students are called to write their own poetry of nature. The day culminates in a poetry reading after lunch where each contribution is deeply connected to their experiences of the earth sanctuary and to their inner life. They read poems, ask questions, and share reflections on the day and their sense of belonging to the natural world. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of students in grades 6-12.

Native American Journeys

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Grades K-5

Cost: \$250

Number of Children: maximum 24

“Native American Journeys” is a program about Native Americans that begins around the fire circle. Original and traditional stories, Native American poetry, songs in various tribal tongues, original and traditional flute music, artistic activities, guided earth walks in smaller groups, exposure to everyday artifacts, discussion about food, medicine, shelter, clothing, stewardship and spiritual beliefs can be woven into this day together. Our time together is centered around gratitude, respect for all creation, silence, giving and receiving, sensorial awareness and individual gifts. The children come away with an experience that is deeply connected to the natural world. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades K-5.

Special Design Programs

Since 2004, the Center has created a wide range of Special Design Programs for schools, churches, and universities that bring children, young adults and educators into a deep personal connection to the natural world. The Center welcomes inquiries from teachers and schools, pre-school through college. We offer many possibilities for educators to partner with the Center in creating a compassionate human presence to the Earth.

We are happy to set up an exploratory meeting with you to consider ways in which the Center might tailor a program to the particular needs and values of your learning community. If you are interested in exploring a Special Design Program with the Center, please contact Center Director Peggy Whalen-Levitt at (336) 449-0612 or e-mail her at beholdnature@aol.com.

Applications for Children’s Programs may be downloaded from our website at www.beholdnature.org or mailed to you at your request by calling Wendy Burkland Lombard at the Center Office at (336) 449-0612.

Site-based Educators' Programs

The Center offers an opportunity for educators who are familiar with the philosophy of the Center to offer their own programs for students at the earth sanctuary. Educators who have attended either the Seventh Generation Teachers' Program or The Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program are eligible for this opportunity. In keeping with the mission of the Center, we ask that participating educators design programs for children, young adults and college students that call upon their inner faculties of imagination and intuition and enable them to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world. The fee for a Site-Based Educator's Program is \$125 per day. If you are interested in this opportunity, please request an application from Center Director Peggy Whalen-Levitt at (336) 449-0612 or e-mail her at beholdnature@aol.com. Once we have reviewed your proposal, we will contact you within a week to confirm a date. Programs are limited to 30 students.

Programs for College Students

Garden Apprenticeship Program

The Center seeks college students who are interested in working in our organic garden under the direction of our garden volunteer coordinator, Sandy Bisdee. If you are interested in making a commitment to a weekly schedule of service during the Fall, Spring or Summer semester, please contact Sandy at sandybisdee@hotmail.com or e-mail the Center at beholdnature@aol.com.

Programs for Adults

Pedagogy of the Sacred: A Retreat with John Shackelton

Saturday, October 25, 2008

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$65 (lunch included)

When John Shackelton was ten years old, he experienced a profound moment of connection to the natural world that has served as a touchstone for his thoughts on education: "I sat in the snow and stared at the blurring trees and felt my breath mingle with the white world "outside" and wanted nothing more than to be rocked in the arms of that vast, compassionate Silence." Join us for an exploration of compassionate Silence, true self, and the meaning of knowledge itself that enlightens and informs our practices as educators. How might we move toward an imagination of a "sacred mirror" in our living and learning with children?

John Shackelton has been an educator for over thirty years. He has taught every level from second grade to college freshmen and served as head of three alternative schools, most recently Rainbow Mountain Children's School in Asheville, N.C. He has one published novel, *The Lowly Papers*, a story of Appalachia, and he is currently writing a non-fiction work, *Pedagogy of the Sacred*.

Thomas Berry's Sense of the Sacred: A Retreat with Carolyn Toben

Saturday, December 6, 2008

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$65 (lunch included)

Join us for a day of contemplating the life and work of Thomas Berry, centered in his deep understanding that a recovery of a sense of the sacred is the essential task of our time. This daylong retreat is intended to be an oasis in time within the frantic pace of contemporary life in which we may reconnect with our innate capacity to be fully aware in the present moment, with its transforming possibilities for the earth and for ourselves. Readings, silent solos on earth sanctuary trails, and time for reflection will be part of this quiet day away.

Carolyn Toben, Co-Founder of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, has been a personal friend and student of Thomas Berry for 30 years. She has taught in public and private schools and colleges with an emphasis on alternative and interdisciplinary education and served for 18 years as a seminar leader at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching in Cullowhee and at the Center for the Advancement for Renewal in Education in San Francisco. Carolyn has pursued post-graduate studies at The Jung Institute in Switzerland, The Institute of Creation Centered Spirituality in Chicago, The Guild for Psychological Studies in San Francisco and The School of Spiritual Psychology.

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice

A Two-Year Co-Research Program for Educators

9:00 am – 4:00 pm

October 18, 2008, February 7, April 18 and June 30 - July 1, 2009 (dates for 2009-10 TBA)

\$350 (\$200 - tuition, \$66 – books & materials, \$84 - meals)

Since its beginnings in 2000, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has worked closely with ecotheologian Thomas Berry to re-imagine the child's relationship with the natural world. Seminal to these conversations is the following quote from Thomas Berry:

There is a certain futility in the efforts being made – truly sincere, dedicated, and intelligent efforts – to remedy our environmental devastation simply by activating renewable sources of energy and by reducing the deleterious impact of the industrial world. The difficulty is that the natural world is seen primarily for human use, not as a mode of sacred presence primarily to be communed with in wonder, beauty and intimacy. In our present attitude the natural world remains a commodity to be bought and sold, not a sacred reality to be venerated. The deep psychic shift needed to withdraw us from the fascination of the industrial world and the deceptive gifts that it gives us is too difficult for simply the avoidance of its difficulties or the attractions of its benefits. Eventually, only our sense of the sacred will save us.¹

In considering the education of children and young adults in our culture, we have come to believe that this “deep psychic shift” that Thomas Berry refers to is the central task of our time. To what extent does the schooling of children contribute to their view of the natural world as a commodity? How might we create a context within which children awaken to the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the natural world? What might be done to restore a sense of the natural world as a sacred presence in the lives of children? These are the questions that have concerned us.

In response to these questions, the Center initiated a two-year program in the Autumn of 2006 entitled “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” designed to prepare educators to develop capacities to nurture the deep inner faculties of imagination and intuition in children and young adults, and to create contexts within which children and young adults are given the opportunity to develop a bond of intimacy with the natural world.

Each year, the Center accepts a new class of twenty educators into “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program. The group is comprised of teachers, parents, child psychologists, guidance counselors, religious educators, child care providers, naturalists, college professors, and others who are entrusted with the care of children or young adults and who indicate a deep interest in developing capacities for nurturing a relationship between the inner life of the child/young adult and the natural world.

Designed as a co-research among participants, the program unfolds over the course of two years. During the first year, participants come together for Saturday retreats in the Fall, Winter and Spring, as well as a two-day retreat in the summer. In the second year, participants develop a practice in consultation with Center staff and reunite for a retreat in the Summer during which practices are shared. The program is intended to be a meaningful sequence of experiences that build one upon the other. Therefore, we request that participants make a commitment to attend every session and complete readings and assignments prior to each retreat.

In the first year, we focus on “Presence” - the development of inner capacities, both in ourselves and in children and young adults that enable us to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world. In the second year, we focus on “Practice” – the development of new ways of working in the world.

At the Center, we try to create a meaningful context for our programs by paying close attention to the rhythm of the day. Retreats begin with a moment of silence intended to quiet the mind and create a field of receptivity for the group. Every retreat includes solo time in the natural world, time for reflection and sharing, the fellowship of shared meals at lunch, and presentations related to the theme at hand.

Applications can be downloaded at www.beholdnature.org or requested by contacting Peggy Whalen-Levitt at the Center at beholdnature@aol.com or (336) 449-0612.

¹ Thomas Berry, Foreword, *When Trees Say Nothing* by Thomas Merton, edited by Kathleen Diegnan, Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003, pp. 18-19.

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The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

A Brief History

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World was established as a non-profit organization in March 2000 in a public/private partnership with Timberlake Farm, a 165 acre earth sanctuary located in the foothills of North Carolina. The earth sanctuary was placed in a conservation easement with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina in 2001.

During the 2000-2001 academic year, the Center invited a group of educators to participate in a series of retreats with ecotheologian Thomas Berry (*The Dream of the Earth*) and writer/educator Richard Lewis (*Living by Wonder*) entitled “The Biological Imperative: Nature, Education and Imagination.” These retreats marked the beginning of our work with educators in which we considered the question “Can we establish a new form of dialogue between ourselves and the extraordinary phenomena that make up our living universe?”

From 2002-2006, the Center offered a yearlong intensive program for educators entitled “The Seventh Generation Teachers’ Program.” Through a series of three retreats, teachers shared their own ecostories, kept a nature journal, and transferred new ways of listening and responding to the natural world to their practice as teachers. Seventy-nine teachers participated in this program during its first four years.

During the Fall of 2006, our work with educators took the form of a new two-year program, “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” funded by a grant from the Compton Foundation. Now in its second year, this co-research program attracts educators from all over the country.

The Center’s Programs for children and young adults have served over 6,000 young people from more than 50 public and private schools in the foothills of North Carolina since the Center’s inception in the Fall of 2000. The Center’s approach to working “small and deep” with children and young adults is realized in our present offerings including “Awakening to Nature,” “The Poetry of Nature,” “Native American Journeys,” “Children of the Forest,” and our one-week nature camps in the summer.

In the Fall of 2004, the Center initiated Special Design programs for schools and groups. Through programs tailored to the needs of a particular learning community, the Center has created a wide range of Special Design Programs for schools, churches, and universities that bring children, young adults and educators into a deep personal connection to the natural world. These programs offer many possibilities for educators to partner with the Center in creating a compassionate human presence to the Earth.

The Center publishes a biannual newsletter, *Chrysalis*, which reaches an international audience. Published since the Fall of 2004, *Chrysalis* is a forum where thoughts on the relationship between the inner life of the child and the natural world are exchanged, as well as a vehicle for making Center programs visible to the general public.

Now in its eighth year of existence, the Center was invited to make a presentation about its “Inner Life of the Child in Nature” program at the Child/Spirit Conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee on November 8, 2007. In recognition of its distinguished service in carrying forward the work of Thomas Berry, the Center was awarded the Thomas Berry Award by the Greensboro Public Library on November 10, 2007.

In the summer of 2008, the Center will be featured in a North Carolina Public Television segment of Simple Living on the child’s relationship with the natural world that includes interviews with Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, and Joseph Cornell, author of *Sharing Nature with Children, Journey to the Heart of Nature*, and *Listening to Nature*.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC 27377

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is to bring to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child and the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the universe.

Presently, the natural world is viewed as a commodity to be used rather than as a sacred reality to be venerated. A shift in our way of relating to the natural world is essential if we hope to participate in nature's unfolding rather than in its demise. This shift is nowhere more crucial than within the field of education where the child's way of relating to the natural world is formed.

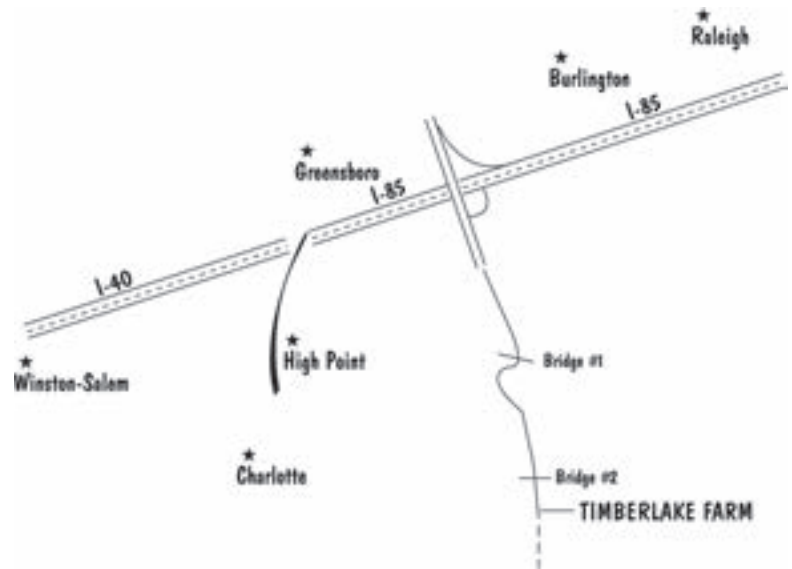
Located within the beauty of a 165 acre earth sanctuary, the Center's way of working is threefold: First, the Center offers a setting within which national presenters explore the relationship between the inner life of the child and nature from diverse perspectives. Second, the Center provides a context for teachers to deepen their own personal connection to the natural world and to be co-creators of ways to bring nature awareness to all paths of teaching. Third, the Center designs programs for children, young adults and college students which call upon their inner faculties of imagination and intuition and enable them to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world.

FROM WINSTON-SALEM/
GREENSBORO

Take I-40 East to I-85; continue about 13 miles beyond Greensboro towards Burlington. Exit at Rock Creek Dairy Road (Exit #135). You will go under the overpass and loop around. Turn left at the top of the exit and go just over two miles. The Timberlake Farm entrance is on the left at the top of the hill.

FROM RALEIGH/DURHAM/
CHAPEL HILL

Take I-85 South towards Greensboro. Continue on I-85 about 10 miles past Burlington. Exit on Rock Creek Dairy Road (Exit #135). Turn left at the top of the exit and go just over two miles. The Timberlake Farm entrance is on the left at the top of the hill.



The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a non-profit organization that champions inclusiveness and actively discourages discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or any other factors that deny the essential humanity of all people. Furthermore, the Center encourages a love and respect for the diversity of the natural world.

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at Timberlake Farm
1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road
Whitsett, North Carolina 27377

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