



# Chrysalis

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The time has come to lower our voices, to cease imposing our mechanistic patterns on the biological processes of the earth, to resist the impulse to control, to command, to force, to oppress, to begin quite humbly to follow the guidance of the larger community on which all life depends. Our fulfillment is not in our isolated human grandeur, but in our intimacy with the larger earth community, for this is also the larger dimension of our being.<sup>1</sup>

~ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*

Dear Reader,

At this moment, we have lost our way in a world of hype and human hubris and estrangement from the larger dimension of our being. In simple moments of intimacy with the larger earth community, like a moment when a child from The Newcomers School finds fulfillment in the water of life during one of the Center's Awakening to Nature programs, we remember who we are.

Thomas Berry reminds us that "in the Chinese world, *jen*, a term translated as love, benevolence or affection, is not only an emotional-moral term, it is also a cosmic force... In India, the term *bhakti*, devotional love, was a cosmological as well as a spiritual force. In Buddhist tradition the term *karuna*, compassion, is a supreme cosmic power. Thus we find a pervasive intimacy and compassionate quality in the very structure of the universe and of the earth itself."<sup>2</sup>

Every day in our work with the children, we bring this intimacy and compassionate quality of the universe to life through our eco-contemplative practices of being, beholding and belonging to the world around us. This year, we will offer 30 all-day programs for public and independent schools where the day ends in a circle of gratitude for the gift of life - programs like Awakening to Nature, Empathetic Listening and The Poetry of Nature, in addition to our Thomas Berry Summer Programs for Children.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), *xin*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



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In *Evening Thoughts*, Thomas Berry cautions us that  
“while the numinous, awe-inspiring world cannot  
substitute for the world of political activities...the  
numinous world is a much-needed presence in all  
human affairs, lest the world of time and its con-  
cerns become empty of any final human meaning  
and eventually dissolve in a process of inflation or  
trivialization.”<sup>3</sup>

We sense that we are close to this emptiness in the  
culture now and the professionalization of those  
who work with children has not been spared with  
its standards and merits, its objectifications and  
labels. Our programs for adults are formed to  
re-invite the numinous, awe-inspiring world back  
in as a much needed presence in any work with  
children.

Thomas spoke of the twenty-first century as the  
communion phase of the universe – an intercom-  
munion, a communion of subjects. Out of that  
image the Center's “Inner Life of the Child In  
Nature: Presence and Practice” program was born  
for adults with children in their care.

Now in its 8<sup>th</sup> class, this two-year program involves  
a deep transformation of the soul, a deep psychic  
shift from a world of separation to an experience  
of communion, an “I and Thou” experience with  
the world. In the second year of the program,  
each participant engages in a practice to further  
deepen his or her unique work and bring it forth.

This year, Inner Life graduates are presenters  
in Center programs, including “Re-Imagining  
Montessori's Great Lessons in the Light of Thomas  
Berry,” “Presence to Living Earth in Autumn,  
Winter and Spring,” and our “Enlivenment  
Series,” based on the resonance between the work  
of German biologist and writer, Andreas Weber  
(*The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling and the  
Metamorphosis of Science*) and the work of Thomas  
Berry.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred  
Community* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), 132.

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We are especially pleased to announce that Inner Life graduate and Educator Council Board member, Dr. Andrew Levitt, has received the Greensboro Public Library's 2016 Thomas Berry Award in recognition of his performance piece, *The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry*, and his book, *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante's Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry*, published by the Center in the Fall of 2015.

Also this year, we have been blessed by an invitation from Inner Life graduate, Eric McDuffie, to mentor him in a Learning Domain on "Foundations in Contemplative Ecology" for his PhD program in Environmental Studies at Antioch University, New England. The Learning Domain evolved in two parts:

Part 1: A study of contemplative ecology through a close reading of the work of selected authors on the Center's reading list for The Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program:

David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*  
Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* and *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*.  
Douglas Christie's *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*  
Robert Sardello's *Silence and Heartfulness*  
Andreas Weber's *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*  
Arthur Zajonc's *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*

Part 2: An apprenticeship in the eco-contemplative practices of the Center

Through these deep encounters with Abram, Berry, Christie, Sardello, Weber and Zajonc, we entered a stream of consciousness that is flowing at this time. Many are feeling the call to a communion consciousness, which becomes ever more evident when it emerges from so many diverse perspectives. And through the Center's eco-contemplative practices for children and young adults, Eric was able to see this communion consciousness come to life.

Eric completed "Foundations in Contemplative Ecology" with his passion intact, his moral imagination fired, his thoughts clear, and his soul humbled as he leans toward grace. It has been an honor to be his companions along the way. In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we take you inside Eric's journey through his final papers for this course of study and practice.

In Peace,



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

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# Foundations in Contemplative Ecology

by  
Eric McDuffie

## Part I

### Contemplative Ecological Essences Harmonized within the Sacred Art of Fly Fishing

I now know my true calling in this life God gave me. I must give to the children what my grandfather lovingly gifted to me and what I know best, fly fishing. As an environmental scientist, middle and high school science teacher, environmental educator and passionate fly fisherman, I have thoroughly enjoyed studying our blue planet and experiencing fly fishing for the last 47 years of my life while happily and lovingly connecting with its watery inhabitants. I realize I must now work with all my might to help protect them as I experientially and lovingly connect as many children and their families as I can to the sacred art of fly fishing. The sacredness of fly fishing has been practiced now for many centuries by untold numbers of fly fishers who have faithfully and lovingly expressed their experiences through the awesome beauty of an intergenerational transfer of knowledge through the power of story-telling. We receive these stories from the Earth and we owe it to our current and future generations to give those stories back to the Earth through a mutually enhancing presence of reciprocity. This learning domain began grounding me on my path to understand more fully how contemplative ecological presence is harmonized through a 'Communion of Subjects' within the Sacred Art of Fly Fishing, which in turn serves as an experiential portal for us to connect more intimately, mutually, and inter-subjectively with the natural world.

Throughout the course of his writings and lectures, the most influential writer I have ever known, cultural historian, Thomas Berry, spoke of the Earth and universe as 'a Communion of Subjects':

*...qualities that we identify with the human are also qualities that we observe throughout the natural world. Even at the level of the elements we observe self-organizing capacities, also the capacity for intimate relationships. These reveal astounding psychic abilities. These are so impressive that we must consider that modes of consciousness exist throughout the universe in a vast number of qualitatively diverse manifestations. Above all we discover that every being has its own spontaneities that arise from the depths of its own being. These spontaneities express the inner value of each being in such a manner that we must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.*

*Precisely in this intimate relationship with the entire universe we overcome the mental fixation of our times expressed in the radical division we make between the human and the other-than-human. This fixation that I have described as the unfeeling relation of the human to the natural world is healed at its deepest roots as soon as we perceive that the entire universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not primarily objects to be exploited. This communion experience is, I believe, universal. It can be observed in the immediate reaction of almost anyone who simply looks at the ocean at dawn or sunset or at the heavens at night with all the stars ablaze, or who enters a wilderness area with its foreboding as well as its entrancing aspects.*

*In every phase of our imaginative, aesthetic, and emotional lives we are profoundly dependent on this larger context of the surrounding world. There is no inner life without outer experience. The tragedy in the elimination of the primordial forests is not the economic but the soul-loss that is involved. For we are depriving our imagination, our emotions, and even our intellect of that overwhelming experience communicated by the wilderness. For children to live only in contact with concrete and steel and wires and wheels and machines and computers and plastics, to seldom experience any primordial reality or even to see the stars at night, is a soul deprivation that diminishes the deepest of their human experiences.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 82.

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As a child I was blessed with this inter-subjective communion experience through the sacred art of fly fishing with my grandfather. This living experience of a ‘communion of subjects’ between myself, my grandfather, and the piscatorial subjects dwelling in the watery world affirms what Thomas Berry said: “The unfeeling relation of the human to the natural world is healed at its deepest roots as soon as we perceive that the entire universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not primarily objects to be exploited.”<sup>2</sup> From my own life experiences, I recognize the sacred art of fly fishing as a pathway to healing “the unfeeling relation of the human to the natural world.”<sup>3</sup>

First authored in 1653 by the Englishman Sir Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler – or the Contemplative Man’s Recreation* (the second-most published book in the English speaking language behind The Holy Bible), was one of the earliest literary sources to usher in a contemplative fly fishing ethic within the watery world. Now, as an environmental educator interested in experientially and lovingly connecting as many children as I can to the sacred art of fly fishing in nature, and working to resurge Walton’s fly fishing ethic into today’s contemporary fly fishing world, I ask a central question for my dissertation: “What is the connection between contemplative ecology and people’s lived fly fishing experiences?” In order to answer this question, which will eventually inform the proper establishment of an eco-contemplative fly fishing practice for children and their families, I must first understand the realm of contemplative ecology as understood by others coming before me. As I continue to deeply immerse myself into the eco-contemplative domain of knowledge, my ultimate goal will be to eventually propose that the process of intergenerational fly fishing as a healthy, healing, and sacred activity can encourage all of its participants to perceive the natural world around them more inter-subjectively through a mutually enhancing contemplative ecological presence.

### **The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World**

For this LD Project, I turned to The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World (CEINW) for guidance. My LD Project Advisor and member of my dissertation committee, Dr. Peggy Whalen-Levitt, is the Center’s Director. Mentored by Thomas Berry from 2000 until his death in 2009, the Center embraces the following vision statement:

*The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a leading advocate and model of a view of educational practice in which intuitive, imaginal and contemplative ways of knowing, in all their unifying capacities, are seen as central to the development of a mutually enhancing relationship between the human being and the natural world. Such a view, if practiced at all levels of learning, can begin to change our understanding of the role we play within this life-bearing process we know as “nature.” Through its programs for educators and children, the Center is a national resource - a remarkable gestating environment - for reflection and practice that is leading to practical outcomes affecting the child, the natural world, and the culture at large.<sup>4</sup>*

In her article, “Thomas Berry’s ‘Communion of Subjects’: Awakening the Heart of the Universe,” Dr. Whalen-Levitt explored Thomas Berry’s concept of a ‘Communion of Subjects’ and concluded that “there is now considerable psychic energy emerging to move beyond the subject/object duality we inherited from Descartes into the communion consciousness that Thomas Berry calls us to, particularly in the realm of contemplative ways of knowing.”<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Whalen-Levitt describes the work of Douglas Christie, Arthur Zajonc, Robert Sardello and Cynthia Bourgeault and concludes that they collectively create a considerable field of psychic energy today for actualizing the universe as a communion of subjects. Through contemplative practice, they provide a tangible pathway for the deep psychic shift that Thomas Berry called for deep within the human soul, an everyday pathway that moves us from the dividing, separating

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Vision Statement, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org).

<sup>5</sup> Peggy Whalen-Levitt, “Thomas Berry’s ‘Communion of Subjects’: Awakening the Heart of the Universe,” *The Ecozoic*, 4, forthcoming.



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mind to an awakening of “the heart of the universe.”<sup>6</sup> Christie, Zajonc, and Sardello, as well as Thomas Berry, David Abram, and Adreas Weber are the eco-contemplative authors I explored with Dr. Whalen-Levitt in this LD Project.

Dr. Whalen-Levitt continues to speak of the eco-contemplative practices that have been cultivated at The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World:

*In our programs for children, we offer eco-contemplative practices that bring children into a deep inner relationship with the natural world. Over the past fourteen years, we have cultivated ways of working that:*

- ~ Foster a deep awareness of sacred presence within each reality of the universe.*
- ~ Nurture an attitude of awe, wonder and reverence.*
- ~ Nurture a capacity for inner presence to other modes of being.*
- ~ Cultivate a soul-attitude of loving attention.*
- ~ Develop the imaginal capacity to feel a bond of intimacy with the world.*<sup>7</sup>

Stepping back in time for a moment, I became deeply attached to the CEINW in 2014, the year I was first accepted to Antioch University New England. Based on my deep belief and a need for further understanding of Thomas Berry’s philosophy of a ‘Communion of Subjects’, in the autumn of 2014, I embarked on a two-year “Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” Program for adult educators. Through personal fulfillment, I wanted to come closer and understand Thomas Berry’s eco-contemplative vision in the best way I knew how by completing this two-year program. Through the beautifully guided wisdom of Dr. Peggy Whalen-Levitt and Ms. Sandy Bisdee, I was able to successfully complete the requirements for “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” on June 26, 2016 at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary in Whitsett, North Carolina. During those two years, I was able to begin engaging in a soulful practice of eco-contemplative presence with the natural world at the Timberlake Sanctuary through deeply listening, receptivity, and personal practice. Here, I became more intimately meshed with the spirit of Thomas Berry who said:

*Today, in this crucial moment in history, we are called to recover the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature, and the urgency of reciprocity of care between ourselves and our environment.*

*This newly recognized relationship between us and the surrounding natural world rests on our experience of its wonder, beauty, and call to intimacy. In preserving and augmenting these responses, we realize, perhaps never before so vividly, that, as the consciousness of that world, we have an indispensable role to play. More than just protection against pollution and extinction of life forms, that role calls us, further, to revere Earth as that community of which we are a part, the source of our life and livelihood, and, above all, the primary means of our recognition of and communication with the divine.*

*The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is dedicated to the recovery of the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature. The Center restores a relationship with the natural world based, not on a view of other beings as objects to be used, but as subjects to be communed with in an integral and sacred society.*<sup>8</sup>

I now have a crystal clear vision of my purpose God gave me in this world. On June 29, 2015, right at the halfway point of completing this Inner Life Program, the vision became manifested clearly unto me through God’s divine presence. I know this statement is completely true because the exact moment I first knew I had fully entered the meditative Silence for the first time in my life on that Monday morning, I was quietly meditating beside a pond in the Timberlake Earth Sanctuary. I had just returned home from my first tiring week intensive at Antioch University in Keene, New

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Direct Quote from Thomas Berry, 2008. Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Editor, *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice, 2014-2016* (Greensboro, NC: CEINW, 2016), i.

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Hampshire. I took away with me that week a profound message I received from Dr. Jimmy Karlan. In our first class with him early in the morning on the first day, he told us all to find the passion in our PhD work, as we would be working on this for several years. I took this to heart. I knew I wanted to continue connecting children to nature. I also knew I wanted to continue honoring Thomas Berry, my favorite author. For, when I read his words, I literally read many of my own thoughts. I have never known and believed in a writer like him before. When trying to find my passion that week in Keene, New Hampshire, I knew the most passionate thing to ever enter my life was my true love of fly fishing first gifted to me by my grandfather. I wanted to find a way to link this passion Jimmy asked us to find along with connecting children to nature within Thomas Berry's philosophy of being in this world as a 'communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.' My testimony was literally born on this day, which unbeknownst to me at that moment, happened to coincide with All St. Peters Day. God's presence gifted this new-found knowledge to me at the moment I prayed for a sign from His Holy Grace to help comfort and secure my thoughts to build an eco-contemplative fly fishing practice for children and their families. Right at that moment, I witnessed a largemouth bass suddenly break the silent surface of the water right in front of me, engulfing a beautiful dragonfly. I looked up to heaven, smiled, and thanked God for this confirmation. Suddenly, a bright light entered my soul showing me a clear vision of Jesus Christ walking across the Sea of Galilee and along the side of a boat; talking with Peter and Andrew while they were fishing. I remembered him saying to them after instructing them to cast their nets to the other side of the boat catching a net full of fish, "And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>9</sup> An instinctual thought overwhelmed me at that moment. I came out of the Silence knowing I had to know more about Peter. I quickly typed his name into my smartphone. At that moment I found out it was All St. Peters Day, all day, celebrated at the Vatican in Rome at the very moment God's grace was manifested unto me. In the Silence, this moment solidified my personal understanding of the purpose of my life's fulfillment to serve the children, their families and all the beautiful fishes of this watery world. I now understand how the Silence is one of the most beautiful gifts bestowed within our souls. I believe I have been living this purpose ever since I was born; ever since my grandfather gifted me a fly rod on my third birthday and took me fly fishing during my entire childhood, keeping me safe and sane through a world wrecked in divorces with my mother. The Silence lived within me during those sad days of confusion and those happy days with granddaddy on the quiet waters of my youth. The Silence lives within me now and will forever.

I know I must follow the holy words of Jesus Christ who said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."<sup>10</sup> I must also follow the prophetic words of Thomas Berry who said: "Recover the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature."<sup>11</sup> So, it is what I know best; through contemplative ecological presence harmonized through a 'Communion of Subjects' within the sacred art of fly fishing, my dissertation work begins.

### **A Foundation in Contemplative Ecology**

In Part 1 of this Foundations of Contemplative Ecology LD, I looked at contemplative ecology from the vantage point of six different human constructs and asked three guiding questions;

1. How might the perspective provided by each author representing a particular human construct provide a certain set of transdisciplinary features that will merge and allow me to create a centralized definition of "contemplative ecology" based on its centrality of purpose?
2. How might the perspective provided by each author inform the creation of a holistic meaning of "contemplative ecology"?

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<sup>9</sup> St. Matthew, 4:19.

<sup>10</sup> St. Matthew, 22:37-39.

<sup>11</sup> Direct Quote from Thomas Berry, 2008. Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Editor. *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice Graduation Publication* (2014-2016).

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3. How might each of these six eco-contemplative perspectives assist in creating a contemporary philosophy and practice for eco-contemplative fly fishing to serve children and their families?

Under the direction of Dr. Whalen-Levitt, I read eight books following 6 eco-contemplative perspectives in the human constructivist realm, looking for perspectives provided by each author representing a particular human construct where a certain set of transdisciplinary features emerged and allowed me to create 8 centralized essences of “contemplative ecology” based on each book’s centrality of purpose. As I began to read, I quickly realized that contemplative ecology cannot be compartmentalized into a central definition, because of the way the transformative nature of the discipline affects the hearts and souls of humanity. I abandoned the goal of trying to create a holistic meaning of contemplative ecology. Instead, I began to discover a set of transdisciplinary features within each body of text that emerged and allowed me to create a set of centralized essences of “contemplative ecology” based on the authors’ centrality of purpose that their perceptions brought into the eco-contemplative realm. The 8 books were read in the following order, each over a two-week reading and writing period:

1. A Biologist’s Perspective: Weber, Andreas. *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2016.
2. A Cultural Historian’s Perspective: Berry, Thomas. *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Random House, Inc., 1988.
3. A Cultural Historian’s Perspective: Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. New York: Bell Tower, 1999.
4. A Philosopher’s Perspective: Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1996.
5. A Theologian’s Perspective: Christie, Douglas E. *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
6. A Psychologist’s Perspective: Sardello, Robert. *Heartfulness*. Gainesville, TX: Goldenstone Press, 2015.
7. A Psychologist’s Perspective: Sardello, Robert. *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2008.
8. A Physicist’s Perspective: Zajonc, Arthur. *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009.

Thomas Berry’s notion of a “Communion of Subjects” became a guiding umbrella image that allowed me to move into the realm of moral imagination within the sacred art of eco-contemplative fly fishing practices. Considering the eco-contemplative approaches of Weber, Abram, Christie, Sardello, and Zajonc, who also work toward a “communion of subjects” in their own subjective ways, led me through a literary portal that blended a well-rounded representation of contemplative ecological essences represented scientifically, spiritually, and cogitatively. I read each book with an open and clear mind and through the construction of a reflective literature reflection of each book, and wrote a series of contemplative ecological essences now situated in the experiential epistemology of the sacred art of fly fishing. I will now synthesize these 8 eco-contemplative essences provided by these authors within Thomas Berry’s universe story of a ‘Communion of Subjects’ and provide the rationale to propose another pathway forward and advance a new category for contemplative ecology to exist within the realm of fly fishing’s sacred art, where it all began through the life and authorship of Sir Izaak Walton.



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## Andreas Weber

I first explored contemplative ecology interpreted through a Biologist's perspective. In *The Biology of Wonder – Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*, Andreas Weber describes “Biology of the Feeling Self, a biology that has now discovered subjective feeling as the fundamental moving force in all life, from the cellular level up to the complexity of the human organism.”<sup>12</sup> Here, subjectivity becomes the essential nature of our continued existence and places values and feelings at the center of a physics of living organisms—not as one of many interpretive approaches, but as an indispensable element of a scientific description of life.

Weber also proposes a “Poetic Ecology,” “‘poetic’ because it regards feeling and expression as necessary dimensions of the existential reality of organisms; [...] ‘ecology’ because all life builds on relations and unfolds through mutual transformations.”<sup>13</sup> A “Poetic Ecology” allows us to find our place in the grand whole again through experience and expression. Here, feelings and emotions of all sentient beings drive their basic understanding of interpreting their natural surroundings. All organisms value everything they encounter according to their meaning for existence through the further coherence of their embodied self. Finally, Weber describes “A New Science of the Heart”<sup>14</sup> where “Being alive is a constant unfolding of creative imagination that arises from the continuous entanglement of matter and inward experience.”<sup>15</sup>

From these three inter-subjective qualities Weber describes within a Biologist's human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **“Seeking a Poetic Ecology through Inter-Subjectivity.”**

## Thomas Berry

Moving forward, I studied contemplative ecology interpreted through a Cultural Historian's perspective. In *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry proposed “A New Cultural Coding”<sup>16</sup> to be established within human society as a new way for people to perceive the world with more intimate awareness. This occurs when deeper personal relationships are established within the surrounding diversity of landscapes he called “Bioregions.”<sup>17</sup> Berry believed humanity must develop a deeper reciprocity through “Mutual Presence”<sup>18</sup> with the natural world through increased physical and spiritual bonding with other subjects existing there, as an increased capacity for personal identity is inseparable from this capacity for mutual presence within these ‘Bioregions.’

Berry also believed a “Subjective Communion”<sup>19</sup> exists by being present to Earth and its living forms in a mutually enhancing manner. Establishing a personal bond of intimacy with Earth and the universe becomes immeasurable. Through “The Great Work...an intimacy between humans and the other components of the planet is the fulfillment of each in the other and all within the single Earth community. A spiritual fulfillment as well as a mutual support must be established as the next generations need a truly inspiring vision of the wonder and grandeur of life.”<sup>20</sup> Within “The Universe Story,” “children need a story that will bring personal meaning together with the grandeur and meaning of the universe.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder – Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2016), 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 120.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

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From these five inter-subjective qualities Berry described within a Cultural Historian's human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **"Seeking a Story of the Universe that Brings Mutual Reciprocity."**

In Thomas Berry's second book, *The Great Work – Our Way into the Future*, I discovered four inter-subjective qualities from this Cultural Historian's perspective. The first quality was connected to his first book I just synthesized. As "The Universe Story, we find within ourselves that the universe is revealed to itself as we become revealed in the universe."<sup>22</sup> Eco-contemplative presence rests within this space as we ponder our eternal connections within the natural world. Here, "the music and poetry of the universe flows into the student...that this orientation toward the natural world should be understood in relation to all human activities...The Earth becomes our primary teacher."<sup>23</sup>

Berry believed in 'A Communion of Subjects', as "the future can exist only when we understand the universe as composed of subjects to be communed with, not as objects to be exploited."<sup>24</sup> Through "Knowing as Communion," we establish a deep intimacy through a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth. "Nourishment of both the outer body and the inner spirit is achieved in intimate association with each other or not at all."<sup>25</sup> This intimate relationship with Earth transforms into a mutually enhancing healthy being where all of Earth's communal subjects find solace, gratitude, reverence, and healing.

Berry gave us a wonderful example of 'A Communion of Subjects' when he described a revelatory moment he experienced in his childhood when he moved into a new setting in Greensboro, North Carolina. Through a "moment of grace," Berry became part of a magic moment in "The Meadow Across the Creek"<sup>26</sup> near his new dwelling where he found a deep spiritual connection with the surrounding landscape that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Berry said, "This experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember."<sup>27</sup> This type of revelatory experience we all experience provides us with a touchstone for what is real and worthwhile in life. 'A Moment of Grace' gives us a moral compass to follow like it did for Berry: "Whatever preserves and enhances the meadow is good; whatever opposes the meadow or negates it is not good."<sup>28</sup>

From these four inter-subjective qualities Berry described within a Cultural Historian's human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **"Seeking A Communion of Subjects, Not a Collection of Objects."**

### David Abram

As I began to study contemplative ecology interpreted through a Philosopher's perspective, I turned to David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. After studying this book, I came away with seven inter-subjective qualities to help create a name for this eco-contemplative essence. The first quality was borrowed from the famous phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is called "Participatory Nature of Perception."<sup>29</sup> Here, "the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives enters eco-contemplative presence."<sup>30</sup> It is here where contemplative ecological presence takes place, "prior to all our verbal reflec-

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work – Our Way into the Future* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, x-xi.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in More-Than-A-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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tions, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us.”<sup>31</sup> It is there in those moments where “we are all animists.”<sup>32</sup> Those eco-contemplative moments allow us to renew and rejuvenate one’s felt awareness of the world as our senses wake up to where they are. Through our “Lived Experience”<sup>33</sup> within eco-contemplative presence, the life world is the world of our immediately lived experience, as we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. This becomes the source for a new kind of living story, inextricably embedded in the land.

Abram believes “A New Language for the Landscape” is needed where our inward thoughts and images experienced within our sensual world come forth outwardly into the present and inform the creation of our stories. He believes through nature’s voice we have the ability to write language back into the land.

“Time” and “Space” become two important inter-subjective qualities within the realm of contemplative ecology. Abram discovers time as the past comes from within, time in the present comes from the immediate presence, and time in the future is situated through the landscape just beyond the horizon. Abram goes further to say there is a deeper sense of the present as the “presence”; even going further to “dissolve the ‘past’ and the ‘future’ as conventionally experienced, thereby locating ourselves in a vast and open present...which...has determined itself as presence only by taking on the precise contours of the visible landscape that enfolds us.”<sup>34</sup> “Space” connects with “Time” as “the sensuous presence of the visible open landscape”<sup>35</sup> within which all elements of time make themselves felt. Therefore, “only when space and time are reconciled into a single, unified field of phenomena does the encompassing Earth become evident, once again, in all its power and its depth, as the very ground and horizon of all our knowing.”<sup>36</sup> Now, here in this time and space is where eco-contemplative presence can be found to exist within the present realm of our perceptual immediacy.

Finally, Abram gives us his last inter-subjective quality within the realm of contemplative ecology known as “Inter-subjectivity as Reciprocity.” Within this quality, there is an “ongoing exchange between my body and the entities that surround it where a sort of silent conversation occurs as I carry on with things.”<sup>37</sup> Here, “a continuous dialogue unfolds far below my verbal awareness”<sup>38</sup> as contemplative ecological presence manifests itself within me.

From these seven inter-subjective qualities Abram described within a Philosopher’s human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **“Seeking a New Perceptual Language for the Landscape.”**

### Douglas E. Christie

I then began to study contemplative ecology interpreted through a Theologian’s perspective by reading *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind – Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* by Douglas E. Christie. Nine inter-subjective qualities emerged from this profound literary source to provide another eco-contemplative essence. First of all, Christie provides what I believe to be the closest definition for contemplative ecology to be described. Dr. Douglas Christie writes:

*Contemplative ecology has two distinct but related meanings. First, it refers to a particular way of thinking about and engaging ecological concerns, rooted in a distinctive form of contemplative spiritual practice. Second, it refers to a particular way of thinking about spiritual practice, one that understands the work of transforming awareness as leading toward and including a deepened understanding of the intricate relationships among and between all living beings.*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Gretchen B. Rossman & Sharon F. Rallis, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research – Learning in the Field* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2017), 85.

<sup>34</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 209.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

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*The underlying concern is to find new ways of thinking about the meaning and significance of the relationship between ecological concern and contemplative spiritual practice, which can help to ground sustained care for the environment in a deep feeling for the living world.*<sup>39</sup>

I believe Christie's definition of contemplative ecology should not be tinkered with in any way, as it properly describes its essential nuances.

Christie provides us with nine inter-subjective qualities that helped me create a name for the eco-contemplative essence found within his literary source. The first quality referenced from Edith Cobb's *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* is "Wonder, displayed as surprise and joy."<sup>40</sup> Wonder becomes "aroused as a response to the mystery of some external stimulus that promises 'more to come', or better still, 'more to do.'"<sup>41</sup> The power of perceptual participation in the known and the unknown creates Wonder. Christie also describes Wonder as "a technique and an essential instrument in the word of the poet, the artist, the creative thinker,"<sup>42</sup> and "in the work of the contemplative."<sup>43</sup>

Christie then describes "A Changing of the Mind," when "it has put off the old self and put on the one born of grace."<sup>44</sup> In order for our mind to become renewed again, it must transcend through a series of eco-contemplative stages where it becomes cleansed and prepared to become fully born of grace. The first stage is called "Penthos: The Gift of Tears."<sup>45</sup> This transcendent stage of the mind occurs when a sense of grief and sorrow (penthos) can be used to help heal ourselves and our surroundings. Here, we begin to face our problems, mourn them through tears, and use them to help find our way back to a more beautiful world we wish to live. We also get to know more intimately how we eternally connect with the beauty of our natural world, mourn the losses already incurred there, and gain the power to help regenerate those for future generations. Thus, we allow nature's beauty to replenish our mournful heartfelt souls.

In "Topos: At Home Always a Stranger,"<sup>46</sup> we become attuned to a sense of place that has the power to change our universe by conjuring up storytelling and allowing us to reconnect to the landscape. Stories emanating outward from the imaginal realm after eco-contemplative presence enrapture our souls and help us find our way home. This is how indigenous people preserve their cultures through the oral stories generated about each place forming their particular culture.

Christie then describes "Prosoche: The Art of Attention"<sup>47</sup> as an inter-subjective quality found within contemplative ecology. Our natural world gives us what we all long to see. By paying attention, we find ways to become more intentional with our surroundings. We then begin to feel and understand our eternal connections more deeply within the natural world through the gift of reverence.

Next comes "Logos: The Song of the World."<sup>48</sup> We all have the ability to rehabilitate our imaginations by learning how to listen for the Word as a sense of the holy found in the landscape. We can sit in silence and hear the world sing

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas Christie, "Douglas Christie on contemplative ecology," Oxford University Press, last modified January 15, 2013. <http://blog.oup.com/2013/01/douglas-christie-on-contemplative-ecology/>

<sup>40</sup> Edith Cobb, *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*, (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1998), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind – Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Evagrius (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), *On Thoughts 39: Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinke-wicz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>45</sup> Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, 70.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 179.

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again, even through our own literary wilderness experiences no matter where we are. Through deep attentive listening, we begin to hear a place through its natural rhythmic patterns.

Christie describes “Eros: Exchange, Intimacy, Reciprocity,”<sup>49</sup> which allows for a natural healing to take place through intimate connections in nature. Through deep intimacy, we begin to realize everything belongs to everything else through profound cohesiveness.

At some point, everyone experiences tragedy in their lives. Through “Kenosis: Empty, Emptied”<sup>50</sup> we can address loss and suffering as a way to move forward in the world. Having faith in this lonely process allows us to come out of the darkness by trusting God as well as the world around us. If we all pay attention to our dark experiences, they can also allow us to create positive change for the natural world which in return nourishes our souls.

Finally, Christie gives us “Telos: Practicing Paradise”<sup>51</sup> as a final inter-subjective quality to describe contemplative ecology. He brings out a term called “Apokatastais panton,”<sup>52</sup> as the renewal of all things appears. At this point we can begin to “live free from care”<sup>53</sup> as well as live in a world full of grace in which we have the power to shape. We begin to seek a deeper identity of who we are as well as understand how and why we are connected with everything else through deeper meaning.

From these nine inter-subjective qualities Christie described within a Theologian’s human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **“Seeking a Healing of the Mind towards One Born of Grace.”**

### Robert Sardello

Next, I turned to contemplative ecology interpreted through a Psychologist’s Perspective. I read two books by Robert Sardello, a world-renowned spiritual psychologist. The first was titled *Heartfulness*. From this reading, I found eleven inter-subjective qualities that helped determine the next eco-contemplative essence. The first was based on “Imagination.”<sup>54</sup> Through this portal of consciousness, we come to understand that “whatever we notice also notices us.”<sup>55</sup> Sardello introduces us to “creative presence,”<sup>56</sup> as our perceptual awareness shows how “a distinction between ourselves and what we notice folds into a complex and beautiful singularity in which the center, the periphery, and all between exists simultaneously as bodily feeling, knowing, and act.”<sup>57</sup>

Sardello discusses Earth-unity as “becoming what we are present with – through the rhythms of our body, intensified most completely within the heart.”<sup>58</sup> We begin to “know by communion rather than by the distance of mental-ness.”<sup>59</sup> He also describes “the Cosmos-Earth Rhythm that takes us into the primary rhythm of existence, the ongoing creation of spirit-matter-soul, and true individuality.”<sup>60</sup> Our individual-body-heart-world starts in the actual lived presence of the heart where awareness shifts away from “thinking about”<sup>61</sup> and into attentive “presence with.”<sup>62</sup> Through a rhythmic

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Sardello, *Heartfulness* (Gainesville: Goldenstone Press, 2015) n.p.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



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practice as prayer, we experience “intimacy with the primordial holy body”<sup>63</sup> while developing an inter-subjective relationship with everything comprising the Earth. Our souls mesh with matter as “the action of that union is Feeling.”<sup>64</sup>

Sardello believes “an unfolding of the livingness of all things”<sup>65</sup> emerges from our heartfulness. We come to behold whatever we come into contact with, embrace whatever we come into contact with, and enliven whatever we come into contact with. He discusses perceiving after contemplation and shows how “the immediate world now appears different – more real, a feeling of unity with the surroundings,”<sup>66</sup> as well as “the felt experience of the interiority of all that surrounds us.”<sup>67</sup> Sardello indicates that, “the livingness of everything...everything as its own awareness in unity with our awareness...opens a second unfolding towards heartfulness.”<sup>68</sup>

The “Primordial Silence”<sup>69</sup> becomes the next discovered inter-subjective quality describing contemplative ecology. The Silence is where our initial contemplation increases and where “the rhythmic character of aligning occurs.”<sup>70</sup> The Silence allows our receptiveness of heart-presence to be fully encountered and “felt as a palpable presence.”<sup>71</sup> The Primordial Silence becomes “experienced as living, bodied, and in unity with the particularity of every human world-soul-and-spirit-presence”<sup>72</sup> and offers a healing sensation, especially when experienced more spontaneously within nature. Deeply “compelling and illusive,”<sup>73</sup> everything contained in the Earthly realm “comes out of the ‘sounding’ of Silence.”<sup>74</sup>

We feel “completeness...exactly and precisely, complete – as precious and whole individuals in ongoing intimate presence with the world, given also as precious and whole.”<sup>75</sup> Through “Sensory Heart-Awareness”<sup>76</sup> we become more attuned with the landscape through our felt senses. “Heart-Listening within Nature”<sup>77</sup> also shows us how to begin experiencing ourselves within the Silence of nature, “seeing, walking, touching, hearing, smelling, being within the plethora of seeing and being within the heart – all are modes of listening with Nature.”<sup>78</sup>

Within *Heartfulness*, time gets lost. A flow, or being-in-the-zone, comes in and mingles with our receptive inter-subjective experiences. Our “heart inherently acts within us and the world simultaneously as heart contemplation unites being and doing.”<sup>79</sup> Everything “becomes sensed, noticed, and perceived in the world through mutual receptivity.”<sup>80</sup>

From these eleven inter-subjective qualities Sardello described within a Psychologist’s human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **“Seeking a Heart Awareness through a Creative and Imaginative Earth Unity.”**

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

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Sardello wrote another book called *Silence – The Mystery of Wholeness*. The Silence was discussed at length throughout the entire book. In the full embodiment of the Silence, love is offered as intimacy, reverence, truth, beauty, goodness and healing. Within the Silence, contemplative ecology lives and breathes completely within each of us and allows us all to see more clearly and steadfastly. It allows us to form a deeply intimate relationship within its eternal interiority. As “the purest element of the soul,”<sup>81</sup> the Silence fully envelops us as we travel within our hearts to explore its worlds. Through the Silence “we discover the power of re-creation as if everything comes alive again for the first time.”<sup>82</sup> “Happiness”<sup>83</sup> belongs in the Silence as “we find that the center of the universe shifts from our self-interests, even our spiritual self-interests, to the larger world, even to the cosmos which we begin to perceive as a spiritual reality.”<sup>84</sup> Because the Silence is “filled with currents of activity, we do not enter it as a sense of loneliness or isolation, but as the deepest feeling of communing.”<sup>85</sup> We never enter the Silence for our own self-serving needs, but through a sensing nature. We must be actively present to it in our sensing as it “keeps us intimately bound with the truth of our being.”<sup>86</sup> The Silence allows us to begin working in the service of others instead of for ourselves. At that point, reverence enters the Silence while Grace enters the feeling realm of our soulful heart, “filling it with divine love.”<sup>87</sup> As grace fills our hearts, the Silence “shines within us like the reflected image of the sun on a lake.”<sup>88</sup> This liberating power “brings renewal to the world”<sup>89</sup> and “opens the door to our heart.”<sup>90</sup>

From these inter-subjective qualities found in the Silence that Sardello described within a Psychologist’s human construct, I named this eco-contemplative essence **“Seeking Soulful Reverence in the Silence through our Sensing Nature.”**

### Arthur Zajonc

Lastly, in this LD, I concluded my study of contemplative ecology interpreted through a Physicist’s perspective by reading *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry – When Knowing Becomes Love* by Arthur Zajonc. Twelve inter-subjective qualities emerged from this profound literary source and provided the last eco-contemplative essence for this study. Zajonc first describes awakening ourselves, which requires “a steadiness of mind, a largeness of heart, and a deep equanimity in the face of new and significant experiences.”<sup>91</sup> There are times in our lives where we must face our fears and doubts. Negative feelings such as “hatred, desire, confusion, pride, and jealousy”<sup>92</sup> become cleansed as we begin to acknowledge these fears and doubts that have the innate ability to control our lives. Once we accept our weaknesses, we begin to enable our inner well-being to travel further towards the eternal light of love and allow our souls to experience “an inner hygiene.”<sup>93</sup> This soul cleansing certainly becomes life-changing, as suddenly our hearts open up to willingly accomplish selfless acts of service. We begin to “dedicate our meditative fruits to benefit all sentient beings that they may be free from suffering.”<sup>94</sup> In my current academic life, through eco-contemplative meditation practices, I have the ability to allow “meditation on a particular content or a research issue/question”<sup>95</sup> to enter my interior presence.

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Sardello, *Silence – The Mystery of Wholeness* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2006), 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Arthur Zajonc: *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry – When Knowing Becomes Love* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2009), 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

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Through these meditative practices, I can “find myself caught up in the presence that is far beyond me yet feels like my true nature – here I practice gratitude.”<sup>96</sup>

Through meditative practicing in solitude, experienced most profoundly in nature, we begin to experience a more poetic and divine life. Here, compassion, wisdom, and love are obtained. The reality of this interconnectedness within the natural world becomes a lived experience, and we begin to reimagine “how a small child looks at another person – open, tender, trusting, and non-judgmental.”<sup>97</sup> We “stay mindful in the present”<sup>98</sup> and begin to “recall the past and the future that is enlivening, clear, and insightful.”<sup>99</sup> Successfully reaching this meditative presence requires us to secure a routinely prescriptive time period away from the day-to-day distractions, “set aside our self-interests and cultivate our fundamental attitudes around humility leading to reverence.”<sup>100</sup> Zajonc believes the magnificence of nature conjures up devotion and virtue as we follow along the path of reverence. Within nature, we find ourselves in the stillness, full of peace and wonder. This open, transcendent presence “allows us to move beyond our physical and psychological struggles and enter into a vaster universal rhythm and current that embraces us always.”<sup>101</sup> Our open imagination “develops subtle faculties that can open up otherwise invisible aspects of the world and us.”<sup>102</sup> This wonderfully magical realm of the natural world allows me to feel my senses awoken to the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of her delights. My sensuous meditative soul begins to fill with an eternal love and inspires me to continue serving other sentient beings. I feel a satisfying sense of gratification, “humility as an entry portal... and...reverence as an exit portal.”<sup>103</sup>

Deeply attaching ourselves and trusting nature, we devote ourselves to meditative practices which fill our emotions and senses with inter-subjective experiences. Nature becomes our teacher. We trust her as “we confidently take her mysteries into ourselves as templates for our new humanity.”<sup>104</sup> Her guiding light fills us with warmth and gratitude. More clearly, we begin to notice Earth’s elements: “Earth, water, air, fire, light, love and life, a sequence that reaches from the solid Earth to purposeful life.”<sup>105</sup> Our trusting and lived spiritual relationship with the natural world gives us the capacity to bring these elements into our souls and live a more intentional life for the sake of others instead of ourselves.

We also have the profound ability to connect with “Great Literature”<sup>106</sup> such as The Holy Bible, or in the fly fisher’s case, Sir Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler – or the Contemplative Man’s Recreation*; the second-most published book in the English speaking language only behind The Holy Bible. “Words, images, and human encounters”<sup>107</sup> become meditative subjects that are filled with deep layers of multiple meaning. The words focus our attention on their sacred depth and purpose. These profound texts lead us to vast literary mysteries and lovingly connect us with Earth’s ‘Communion of Subjects.’ We must first start slowly by reading short sentences; then slowly build our way up through the practice of words to deep meaning of the text. Our hearts become transformed with imagination as our souls become enlightened

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

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toward an “expanding horizon.”<sup>108</sup> Through inward meditative practice, we continue to grow outward by “reaching out to their larger meanings,”<sup>109</sup> such that the “I-It transforms into the I-Thou.”<sup>110</sup>

After reading *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry – When Knowing Becomes Love*, I learned the central characteristics in which Zajonc teaches us “An Epistemology of Love.” He shows us nine qualities incorporating this epistemology:

***Respect** for the intrinsic nature of the other,<sup>111</sup> ... **Gentleness** unlike the scientific method that tends to squeeze the life out of earthly subjects,<sup>112</sup> ... **Intimacy** as we maintain close relationships with others,<sup>113</sup> ... **Participation** by becoming one with the living interior,<sup>114</sup> ... **Vulnerability** to the ambiguous nature of other’s thoughts and feelings,<sup>115</sup> ... **Transformation** as the flow of moving thoughts that animate everything now pass through us,<sup>116</sup> ... **Organ Formation** which comes from the transformation.<sup>117</sup> With every repetition, the cycle of attention and formation is at work fashioning the organs required for contemplative knowing. **Insight** grows, as the light within our minds become dependent on its level of light intensity.<sup>118</sup> This transcends to **Illumination** as contemplative knowing gets illuminated while perceiving holistic phenomena.<sup>119</sup>*

The sacred art of fly fishing has been practiced by a multitude of fly fishers over the centuries. Eco-contemplative presence does exist wholly within the sacred fly fishing realm. This will be revealed as I begin to build an eco-contemplative epistemology within the fly fishing domain through phenomenological studies with fly fishers. This eighth eco-contemplative essence is built around the meditative thoughts of Arthur Zajonc. Calling it **Seeking an Epistemology of Love through Meditative Awakening within Nature’s Splendor**, this eco-contemplative essence becomes the final footing I need to begin building a foundation of contemplative ecology as it exists within the lived experiences of fly fishers. My own autobiographical phenomenology of perception (this subject will be studied fully through Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*) through 47 years of fly fishing experience will couple with others in this piscatorial realm. This contemplative ecological epistemology now becomes the central mission that eventually builds an eco-contemplative fly fishing practice for children and their families to lovingly connect with the natural world while creating an intergenerational and inter-subjective exchange between a ‘Communion of Subjects’ in our watery world.

### **Eight Eco-Contemplative Essences**

Visually, I created a cardinal directionality through the light spectrum (ROYG-Cyan-BIV) for this Summary of Eight Eco-Contemplative Essences that become harmonized within the sacred art of fly fishing epistemology. They are illustrated and written out as follows:

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 184.



1. *Essence from the North – Seeking a Poetic Ecology through Inter-Subjectivity*
2. *Essence from the Northeast – Seeking a Story of the Universe that Brings Mutual Reciprocity*
3. *Essence from the East – Seeking a Communion of Subjects, Not a Collection of Objects*
4. *Essence from the Southeast – Seeking a New Perceptual Language for the Landscape*
5. *Essence from the South – Seeking a Healing of the Mind towards One Born of Grace*
6. *Essence from the Southwest – Seeking a Heart Awareness through a Creative and Imaginative Earth Unity*
7. *Essence from the West - Seeking Soulful Reverence in the Silence through our Sensing Nature*
8. *Essence from the Northwest – Seeking an Epistemology of Love through Meditative Awakening within Nature's Splendor*

Through this Foundations of Contemplative Ecology Learning Domain, I chose to work closely with the Center for Education, Imagination and that Natural World because of its unique role in exploring contemplative ecology through the guiding vision of Father Thomas Berry, Founder Carolyn Toben, Dr. Peggy Whalen-Levitt, and Ms. Sandy Bisdee since 2000. Their vision for connecting children and adults to nature exactly fits my passion and need to work in this capacity and also connect children and their families to nature through the conduit in which I am most experienced; through my 47 years of lived fly fishing experience. The Center's Vision Statement matches my own vision for developing an eco-contemplative fly fishing practice as it states the following:

*The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a leading advocate and model of a view of educational practice in which intuitive, imaginal and contemplative ways of knowing, in all their unifying capacities, are seen as central to the development of a mutually enhancing relationship between the human being and the natural world. Such a view, if practiced at all levels of learning, can begin to change our understanding of the role we play within this life-bearing process we know as "nature."*



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*Through its programs for educators and children, the Center is a national resource - a remarkable gestating environment - for reflection and practice that is leading to practical outcomes affecting the child, the natural world, and the culture at large.*<sup>120</sup>

The purpose of this learning domain enabled me to explore the eco-contemplative realm much more deeply and build a foundation for a more specific exploration of fly fishing's sacred art as a context for an "embodied ecological ethic"<sup>121</sup> within this epistemological framework. I am so grateful to Peggy and Sandy for their guiding wisdom and beautiful expressions to me during this fascinating course of study in which I have discovered my true calling within God's glorious universe.

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<sup>120</sup> Vision Statement, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org)

<sup>121</sup> Weber, *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science*.

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# Foundations in Contemplative Ecology

by  
Eric McDuffie

## Part II

### Being, Beholding, and Belonging – An Earth Guide Apprenticeship through Eco-Contemplative Presence with the Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World

#### Introduction

In the fall of 2016, I participated in four eco-contemplative programs offered by The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, a 165-acre nature preserve in Whitsett, NC. My guides were Sandy Bisdee, Director of Children's Programs, and Earth Guides Marnie Weigel and Rosemary McCarthy-Mareka. My intention was to participate in the practices of three of the Center's signature programs: The Poetry of Nature, Awakening to Nature and Empathetic Listening. The Center offers programs for a wide range of schools, both public and private, and tailors its programs to the ethos of each learning community. The following four journal entries represent programs where I was a participant observer: Partnership Academy, an alternative public high school in Hillsborough, NC; Sedalia Elementary School, a public school in Sedalia, NC; and Our Lady of Grace, a Catholic school in Greensboro, NC.

#### Poetry of Nature Reflection – October, 5, 2016

Today was a truly magical day filled with an enormous amount of creative imagination emanating from all of the 9 Partnership Academy students, 5 Partnership Academy teachers, and 3 Earth Guides. Sandy, our lead Earth Guide, welcomed us with open arms as a mother welcomes her children back home. Her gracious and loving spirit was contagious the whole day, which happened to be her birthday. I got to witness 9 adolescents connect more deeply with their natural surroundings than perhaps they ever have in their lives, although I do not know this for sure. Poetry was created by all involved. Everyone participated, even one of our students who was very reluctant to talk until close to the end of the day.

To form each group, we divided up into three sections of three students, one to two teachers, and an Earth Guide. The opening was led by Sandy on the back deck of the Treehouse. She began with an expression of gratitude for all life, of gratitude for the sun, moon, stars, the sanctuary and each one of the people with us that day. She invited us to breathe deeply, relax and to become present to the area surrounding us. We were asked to begin to notice deeply, hear deeply, and smell deeply. The students are asked to simply notice what is around them, to become present to the place and moment in time. As we became closer to that awakening presence, in a counter clockwise fashion, we all got to make and say an observation connecting us to the life forces on all sides. Many talked about the wind moving the trees and touching their skin. Some commented on the birds and cricket sounds entering our minds. Others became present to the water within seeing distance. We listened to a few Mary Oliver poems as we warmed our hearts into the written word of life others had experienced. We were given guidance on how to go about writing our own poetic reflections. These included haikus, rhymes, freeform, acrostic, simply writing what you see, and stick methods.

We took a quick break, gathered by the fire pit, formed three groups, and walked off in three separate directions with our Earth Guides leading the way. My group had Carly, Matthew, and Brenda. We walked down to the pond behold-

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ing the beauty passing by, listened to another poem, and found our personal sit spot. The students are asked to begin their sit spot writing time with being present to where they are and to practice deep noticing and sensing the particular landscape before they begin writing. It was a magical and creative time during those few moments we worked to create our poems through the surrounding presence in nature. Here is where I felt the deepest eco-contemplative connections unfolding within myself and the natural world. I also imagine this was happening to others in my group as I got to hear their inward experiences through their written words a few minutes later. We then walked to the pond, listened to another poem, and got to find a second sit spot where we became intentional with the surrounding Earth Sanctuary opening its loving arms to embrace our soulful expressions through another created outward flowing of heartfelt poetic words.

We then had lunch back on the Treehouse deck, shared our poems with one another in a clockwise fashion, giving thanks to the written words, and finished with a group poem, spoken in a round robin fashion of questions written earlier in the day; questions about anything. For instance, Fernandez asked “Why do people want to shine light in dark places?” As mentioned earlier, the day passed away as our inward thoughts melted into the surrounding landscape.



### Poetry of Nature Reflection – October 6, 2016

This morning, we arrived as a group of 12 students and me, Lisa, Jessica, Mike, Stan, and Beth. We rode a smaller white activity bus that held up to 20 people. We arrived at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary at 9:30 AM on the nose. We gave everyone their nametags, set the rules for no cell phones or ear buds, gave out water bottles, journals and pens, and unloaded from the bus. The morning was very cool and felt like a crisp fall day. Some of the students were already cold. We convened on the deck and went through the same routine as yesterday. The kids began relaxing into their natural surroundings. My first observation was how fast the clouds were moving in the sky, which I first noticed earlier in the morning standing with Mike and Deputy McVey in front of Partnership Academy. Other students noticed the cool air on their skin, the sounds of the birds, the movement of the trees, and how chilly the morning air was overall. Sandy was cold too. She got up to get her jacket. The flute music was a pleasure to hear and breathe within our hearts. We broke up into 3 groups like the day before after Rosemary gave a beautiful poetry reading. This time, I went with Earth Guide Marnie, Lisa, Chris, Amber, and Tommy. We started out on the moss trail and had a short meditation to invite the students into presence, into being present to that moment and place with Marnie, who was a true gem the entire time. I went to my sit spot around the corner on the path along the bank of the pond across from the farmhouse. I wrote about the birch tree I sat beside. We came back together, shared our poems and moved on to the Timberlake Trail leading to the sanctuary deck overlooking Lake MacIntosh. The day was spectacular. I was having some anxiety flashbacks on the way there,

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but got through my breathing difficulties by working it out peacefully in my mind. We all got to write another poem and I wrote about how nature heard my need to let go of my anxiety. I eventually read this poem back on the Treehouse deck. I am not sure how it was received. Sandy asked that there be no clapping or outward expression after each person reads, just a respectful silence. I was blown away by the poetry spoken by the students, particularly Chris's incredible poem about the spider web.

**By: Chris - Spider Webs**

Like a diamond necklace in the morning,  
Like a trap set in the night,  
They don't give any caution to the bugs that are mid-flight.

From way up high in the tree tops,  
To down upon the ground,  
The sticky, silky tombs wait for prey without a sound.

Strong as steel,  
But can fall apart at the slightest little touch,  
These faint white, yet clear, nets can actually hold quite much.

A little insect has landed in its final resting place,  
It can do nothing, yes nothing, except for sit and wait,  
It waits and waits and waits and waits for its terrible, terrible fate.

As the bug was waiting, it became cocooned within its grave.  
After just a couple minutes, the bug has heard a CRUNCH!  
The bug has realized that an eight-eyed beast is eating it for lunch.

Amazingly, Kiara volunteered to share the poetry reading first. She started out sleeping when we arrived and ended up wanting to stay there forever as we departed. The natural world took her in and she opened up so beautifully. Even Mike wrote some great poetry along with his crazy limericks shared with us back at Partnership Academy. Stan also blew me away with his written poetic words. I cannot wait to get the students' poems worked into a book and gift it to CEINW.

**Awakening to Nature Reflection – October 13, 2016**

This morning, I got to observe a group of 21 4<sup>th</sup> grade students from Sedalia Elementary School in Greensboro, NC. All of us got to spend time "Awakening to Nature" through beholding practices. The first beholding practice involved picking a leaf out of a stack, beholding and noticing our chosen leaves, beholding in great detail and then sharing what was noticed with a partner. It never ceases to amaze me that when we behold something with deep affection, we enter into an open heart appreciative relationship with it. This eco-contemplative work centers around developing deeply held relationships of love with everything sacred in the world. We all become very relational through loving attention within a 'Community of Subjects' as we find our places in the circle of life and travel into our internal selves with each another.

We first walked as a group into the back room of the Treehouse and all sat in a circle around a lit candle on a nature table laden with earthly treasures like feathers, pinecones, stones, and things that the children have found over the years. Wonderful memories from past visits were shared among the group, with Sedalia now coming to the Sanctuary for the past 10 years. Sandy gave thanks for all the life we behold and played her joyous flute. Memories were spoken as some of the students had been coming there since the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade; some up to 4 years in a row. Chase remembered going on a nature walk and seeing a green mushroom. Woody the woodborer bee had not been seen. Persimmons in the garden were remembered. Some remembered Ms. Marbles, the spider near the bathhouse. Aiden remembered



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seeing Ms. Marble's babies. Throwing a leaf from the wishing bridge over the small creek was remembered. The raccoon hotel was recalled. Someone talked about seeing open and closed clams and mussels around the lake. Michael remembered making a tree sculpture with twigs. Some remembered the wishing rock and playing music with rain sticks. Other memories were spoken within the circle: climbing the bamboo, fuzzy seed pods of trumpet vines, walking on the moss trail without shoes, the wild dwarfed irises in the spring, tadpoles and Beary the walking stick, crayfish under the bridge – big, old and gray egg cases of a praying mantis, a worm crawling out of the ground, all wonderful and detailed memories from their visit one year ago.

The group then discussed what an Earth Sanctuary was; a protected place for all people to come to, a place that would be safe forever; a safe and protected place for animals to come to and stay if they wanted; a place where mother nature can rest; a co-evolved place where nature and humans work together; a place where nothing is harmed on purpose; accidents do happen sometimes, but we all do try to protect everything.

Suddenly, Jocelyn came up to me and started talking about her favorite memory going back to pre-K where she remembered the maze of bamboo trees. I smiled back at her and said I hoped we would go there so she could show me the way through the maze.

We then all walked outside to the fire circle and engaged in the beholding leaf practice. Rosa and I were paired up and we both looked at each other's chosen leaves, taking in the intricate details of their individuality. We closed our eyes, placed them in our heartfulness, then opened our eyes and saw them anew as we had not seen before. All of the leaves were put in a circle on the ground and everyone was invited to find his or her own particular leaf through deep beholding recognition.



At 11:00 AM, Marnie and I headed out into Timberlake Earth Sanctuary with the children, 4 girls and 3 boys for an hour and a half of deep nature connection.

To begin the morning practices, the children were paired with one another and silently walked down the Trail of Beauty that wrapped around the other side of the pond and towards a flowing creek, with a footbridge crossing it, that fed out of the pond towards Lake McIntosh. The creek was surrounded by an old growth stand of mixed hardwoods and pines, white and red oaks, scarlet red and yellow sugar maples, giant tulip poplars, stately short leaf Virginia pines and tall straight loblolly pines. These particular Presencing Practices involved no talking, but only quiet observations with each other's partner while walking down the Trail of Beauty towards the creek. Two of the boys and Marnie walked forward quietly on the trail first. Each pair had to wait their turn to begin walking forward when the group in front could no longer be seen. I was paired with Nicholas. We were the last pair to walk down the trail together. As we walked in silence for the next 20 minutes, I could hear the leaves shaking on the tree branches all around me as a light northeast wind fluttered their petioles. The air felt crisp as it whispered against my face. I was glad to be wearing my barn coat



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on this chilly bright and sunny morning, which made my eyes squint. Nicholas and I noticed many joys along the trail as we invited each other's attention by pointing to the subjects we wanted each other to see. Nicholas was infatuated with twisty stems and knurly branches. I became entranced with the colorful red, yellow, brown and gray mushrooms living among the intense green mosses.

We constantly smiled at each other's Earthly discoveries. At one point along the trail, Nicholas frantically pulled on my coat sleeve and pointed down at a giant wolf spider crossing the trail in front of us. We were both stunned and amazed at its beautiful brown hairy legs and black and white striped thorax. It stopped in the middle of the trail on a tree root and stretched out like a snake across the path. We looked at it while it looked back at us. Its small beady eyes were attached to its head by two tiny brown stalks. We slowly leaned down to take in its beauty more closely, watching it breathe. I imagined it talking to us, saying, "What do you think you are looking at?" I imagined myself simply saying back to him, "A beautiful gift from the Earth." The wolf spider quickly scampered forward to the other side of the trail, disappearing into the brown decaying leaves. We smiled at each other again and continued to walk on in silence. Suddenly, the most intense red mushroom with a small snail crawling on its top stood proudly among a furry carpet of bright green moss. The sun's rays were lighting it up as I imagined myself standing in a field of green grass in Ireland on a bright and clear sunny morning. I quietly breathed in the fresh smell of the earthen air thanking all the life surrounding me in this woody place. After about 20 minutes, we finally saw the bridge at the creek where everyone except Rosa was quietly standing waiting for our arrival. Instead, she was happily wrapped around and swinging from a crooked tree rooted on our side of the bridge just off the trail that Nicholas pointed to in quiet wide-eyed amazement. He quickly ran to Rosa and burst out laughing with her once he got there beside her. Everyone then burst out laughing too, as nature's happiness enraptured our presence, listening to our joyous reunion.

Towards the end of the day, after lunchtime, the children had a chance to go down to the green grassy meadow beside the pond to run and play before heading back to school. I stayed back alone on the Treehouse deck to begin writing my reflections of the wonderful experiences I had with the Awakening to Nature program and the fourth graders from Sedalia Elementary School. After about ten minutes of free time, I heard Sandy ask the children to gather together in a circle and hold hands. I listened in on their conversation as the sound of a chirping cardinal played over my left shoulder. I quickly began to write the words of a song that I heard them sing in unison. It went something like this:

*I am a tree blowing in the wind. My roots go down, down into the Earth, my roots go down. I am a flower, growing in the field. My roots go down, down into the Earth. I am a cactus, growing in the sand. My roots go down, down into the sand. I am a child, growing toward the light. My roots go down, down into the Earth. My roots go down.*

After the song, I heard Sandy ask each child what they remembered best from the day. I heard each child take a turn around the circle saying:

*I love the mushrooms! I love the garden! I miss my snail! Tiny orange mushrooms! That is a cool stick! Seeing all the rocks! Walking through the creek! Walking around the pond! Big mushrooms! Throwing leaves in the water! Big trees! Check out the snake! We saw a snake! Why is the grass white? Look at the Rhino tree! Big round mushrooms! Little black rat snake in the pot! I found my rock! Wolf spider, wolf spider! Don't step on him! Making guns out of sticks! Seeing all the seeds! Everything! The rock!*

From these happy bellowing sounds coming out of these children's mouths, I knew each one of them had imaginatively awakened to nature on this glorious day. I did too.



### **Empathetic Listening Reflection - October 26, 2016**

On this particular morning, a group of 21 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Greensboro, NC came to partake in the Empathetic Listening Program. Some of the students had been coming to Timberlake Earth Sanctuary many times before, and knew its beauty so very well. All of the students were well-mannered. The day began with a Lighting of the Candle Ceremony and giving a prayer through Sandy's beautiful flute music. A prayer of gratitude for the sun, moon, stars, sanctuary, and all of God's Earthly creatures was given. We all looked downward, seeing the Earth as a prayer of gratitude for everything in the universe. No words were said, but we heard with our hearts. I learned that this group of students made a beautiful quilt for the Sanctuary as they prepared for their First Communion when they were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, incorporating symbols of the Eucharist and nature into mandalas which they compiled into the quilt. The mandalas included symbols such as the Cross, a sun and the element of water, the body of Christ as a circle and cup, candles to represent light, and a dove to represent the Holy Spirit. Then in the fourth grade, the students returned for a program titled Stewards of God's Creation where they noticed and reflected on God's Presence. Through engaging in eco-contemplative practices with this Catholic school, the children are asked where they see and feel God in the universe. They ended the day by walking across the Marsh Bridge and asked, "What can I do to be a good steward of God's creation?" We all have a connecting relationship with one another. We all ask to bring to this world peace and harmony with each other. We must all come to recognize the shoots of goodness resting in our hearts. It takes time for us to fully recognize what they are. In order to do this, we must take the time to know the life connected to us all, as we are all stewards of God's sublime sanctuary.

Sandy told the children a story. St. Francis of Assisi began to hear the word of God in his heart. He got out of the military, gave up his belongings, and went to rebuild God's church. He went out with faith and trust and took care of the Lepers, who in return gave him love and compassion allowing him to release all of his fears. The birds sensed this love and compassion and would come to him. St. Francis believed we are all one family and we must take care of each other.

After Break, all of the children went outside and gathered around the fire circle. Marnie began playing her beautiful handmade drum. Interestingly, all the boys sat on one side while all the girls sat on the other side. Sandy began to invite us into the practice of Empathetic Listening. One student asked, "What is it?" She told us that it is a way of listening to other humans very carefully and consciously, completely listening and being present to that person. Then the listener reflects back to the other person what he or she said. This practice becomes a deeper listening to the feelings resonating

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from the heart of the speaker. For example, like my grandfather, I can still hear a deep and joyous voice emanating from his spiritual presence as he tells me fly fishing stories within my soulful memory. Today we live in a world of constant partial attention, as our attention is called in so many different directions. There are lots of ways we do not like to listen to each other. Sometimes, our body language says I don't care. Also, sometimes, people may not be listening as they rush from one place to the next, always in a hurry to get some task completed. To become a truly good listener, we must learn to listen with compassion. Empathetic Listening brings us into deep relationship, a capacity needed as a foundation for caring for the natural world.

We practiced the art of reflective listening by working in pairs. Each partner thought of an experience that happened anytime, anywhere in nature, and told his or her story to the other person. The listener practiced empathetic listening with mind, body, senses, and heart. The listener then retold the story to the original storyteller. A reflective storytelling dialogue ensued with one another. I went with Katie and Sandy beside a sunny bank at the pond and listened in the background as a quiet observer to around 5 pairs of students practicing reflective listening with one another. The stories I overheard were amazing and heartfelt. I came away from this learning experience with a much deeper appreciation of the depth of importance empathetic listening has for each of us as we are eternally connected to one another in so many conscious and unconscious modes of being. One interesting observation I made was that when I listened to their stories and focused on the grass in front of me, I could hear their conversation even better than if I did not focus on the grass.

We then broke up into 3 larger groups and went to sit and listen to nature, where the voice of God resides throughout creation. This eco-contemplative experience would be different for everyone, as we all would hear different things coming from our natural surroundings. But I knew we were all present to learn how to listen more deeply and more empathetically. What I believe we can learn from this eco-contemplative practice is how to learn in deeper, more conscious ways that serve our needs while we serve the needs of others dependent on us. To listen in nature, we must become very still, both outside and inside ourselves while becoming present to our surroundings.

I walked across the Marsh Bridge with the children working on quieting my thoughts and balancing my attention. The following thoughts emanated from my empathetic listening experience held within the eco-contemplative presence:

*I sit here among the children and my elders. My elders are holding me in this place. The crickets are telling me I am not alone. The birds are reminding me to keep moving forward. This valley of ferns reminds me of the love I share with my family, as they exist beside one another, just as I exist beside and within my own family, reaching out to one another and sharing for one another. The pond water's tension holds my breath in place as I look out on it feeling its tug against my soul. The wind is now touching the leaves to remind them that it is okay to let go. Their sit spot is reaching out to them with open arms along the valley of ferns. The crow in the distance reminds me of a long time ago when I was a child out in the woods, mesmerized by the multitude of deer tracks crisscrossing each other in the white snowy ground. His 'caw caw caw' told me he was happy to be keeping company with me as the sun's bright light dripped the melting snow off of the branched tips. I now look down and see a shed deer antler, signaling another year of life for that buck I saw crossing in front of me earlier in the morning; his fur much darker now than a month ago. He seemed happy and safe as he crossed into the meadow. Hearing me, he also knew I saw him. So nature came calling back to me to say it's okay to feel like you are all alone. But really, you are not alone. You are right here with us. We all hold on to each other even when we feel like we don't. We make sure you are never alone. We know you don't want to be alone. Can't you hear us beside you? Yes, even though I rest beside you as my own life withers away, this place has a much deeper meaning than you can even realize. The depth of this place always holds you, keeps you safe, and without loneliness.*

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## Final Thoughts

As a participant observer practicing a threefold practice of Being, Beholding and Belonging over this Fall, 2016 Semester with Ms. Sandy Bisdee, lead Earth Guide and Program Director of the Children's Programs at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, I believe I was able to effectively bring myself into the stillness and engage in meaningful eco-contemplative practices with the children and adults within the programs I attended. As I become more eco-contemplative and relational in my presence with others and the natural world, I feel a deeper sense of eternal connection with the source of my own being. Through these practices, a feeling of connection to all living things deepened my awareness of the service I must continue to give outwardly in this world by serving children and their parents within a developing eco-contemplative fly fishing practice. I came away from first shadowing others and then moved into the light where my depth of knowledge became strengthened of the purpose God put me on this Earth for, to work for the children and their families. The Poetry of Nature, Awakening to Nature, and Empathetic Listening Programs broadened my perspective on how I can adopt practices like these and enhance the connectivity of children and their parents within the fly fishing domain of their watery world.

The sacred art of fly fishing already exists within a very eco-contemplative, solitary domain. Its sacred art form allows participants to spiritually bond with the piscatorial subjects of the watery world. Beholding a fish landed on a fly rod enables the fly fisher to carefully hold and see the beauty of God's most precious gifts given to humanity in ways that bring mutual reciprocity and humility, which ultimately teaches us how to shepherd our own living nature. I look forward to an ongoing deepening relationship with Sandy as she begins her quest to find internal peace within the sacred world of fly fishing. That sunny afternoon, it was a pure joy to see her cast her discovered fly rod for the first time on the pond. Soon, I believe she will begin to understand where eco-contemplative presence exists within each threaded moment of her own lived fly fishing experiences. Her fly fishing stories will soon become sparkling jewels reflecting from their watery depths. I can't wait to hear them.

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## Enlivenment Series

Dates: Sunday Afternoons

January 29, 2017, February 19, 2017, March 5, 2017 and March 19, 2017

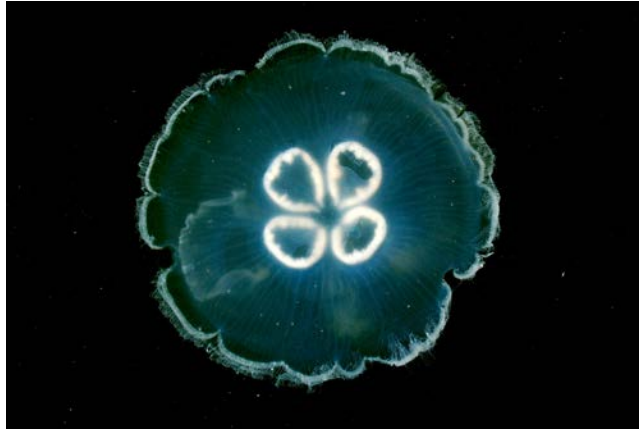
Time: 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Place: The Treehouse, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$50 per session



“Poetic ecology...reconciles the science of life with the experience of being alive, and therefore with what we see and what we love. From its viewpoint, as in gazing into the face of another human being, the whole of nature becomes a ‘Thou’.”

~ Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling and the Metamorphosis of Science*

At the Center this year, we have become aware of the work of German biologist, Andreas Weber, a leader in the emerging field of poetic ecology. We immediately recognized the deep resonance between Weber’s writings and the work of Thomas Berry, who mentored the work of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World from 2000 until his death in 2009. Weber’s book *Aliveness or Enlivenment* is now being translated from the German into English for the first time and is the forerunner of his book *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling and the Metamorphosis of Science* that was translated into English in 2016.

Andreas proposes a new living science – an invitation to welcome aliveness and feeling back into the scientific realm. He suggests that “the chill, abstract languages of the sciences place a barrier between us and the aboriginal feeling of life. Aliveness remains inaccessible and incomprehensible to “objective” science in the way it defines itself today.”

In our Enlivenment Series we will explore the resonance of Weber’s and Berry’s work through a series of conversations with science educators who are graduates of the Center’s Inner Life of the Child in Nature program and who will speak of their own work in restoring aliveness and feeling back into how we know the natural world:

Each session of the series will begin with an introduction that integrates the wisdom of Andreas Weber with the wisdom of Thomas Berry, led by Center Director Peggy Whalen-Levitt.



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In **Session 1** on January 29<sup>th</sup> we will explore contemplative ecology, poetic ecology and eco-contemplative practices that enable us to move beyond “objectivity” into an experience of ourselves as intimately united with the livingness of all things.

Session Facilitators: Peggy Whalen-Levitt and Eric McDuffie

In **Session 2** on February 19<sup>th</sup> we will consider the subjectivity of the teacher and remember the moments of enlivenment in our lives that brought us to our work as science educators. How might we nurture enlivenment within ourselves and bring it to our teaching?

Session Facilitators: Peggy Whalen-Levitt and Nicki Cagle

In **Session 3** on March 5<sup>th</sup> we will consider connectedness to nature and how we might include elements in our teaching that address children’s subjective and feeling responses to the natural world, such as time for reflection and free exploration.

Session Facilitators: Peggy Whalen-Levitt and Linda Tugurian

In **Session 4** on March 19<sup>th</sup> we will consider enlivenment on the middle school level. How might we move from experiencing ourselves as objective and distanced spectators of the natural world to feeling ourselves as intimate and enlivened participants within the natural world?

Session Facilitators: Peggy Whalen-Levitt and Sonja Younger

Presenter Bios:

**Nicki Cagle** holds a PhD in Ecology and is on the faculty of Duke University’s Nicholas School of the Environment where she teaches courses in natural history and environmental education. She also is the Director of the Duke Environmental Science Summer Program, a college-preparation and environmental science experience for talented, underserved local high school students.

**Eric McDuffie** is working on his PhD in Environmental Studies at Antioch University New England and teaches middle and high school science in Orange County. He holds a Master of Environmental Management degree from Duke University’s Leadership Program at the Nicholas School of the Environment. Eric is on the editorial staff of *Whole Terrain*.

**Linda Tugurian** holds a PhD in Science Education and is a District Science Specialist at Durham Public Schools. Linda’s dissertation, *An Exploratory Investigation of Children’s Connectedness with the Natural World*, includes research with children who experienced the Center’s Awakening to Nature Program. Linda’s article, “Children’s Environmental Identity and the Elementary Science Classroom,” is forthcoming in *The Journal of Environmental Education*.

**Peggy Whalen-Levitt**, PhD, serves as the Director of The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, where she has been deeply engaged in the formation of a work for adults and children based in Thomas Berry’s recognition that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. Peggy is the editor of *Chrysalis*, the Center’s journal, and *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*.

**Sonja Younger** is a veteran science educator whose experience with adolescents over the last 25 years continues to inspire her. Her work is rooted in an early relationship with the New England rocky intertidal ecology, and by particularly reverent teaching that created space for this relationship to flourish. Sonja has a vision for developing classroom community that honors and values a heart connection as integral to the study of life science.

Register online at <http://www.beholdnature.org/enlivenment.php>

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## Presence to Living Earth in Winter: Winter Mandalas

Date: Sunday, January 22, 2017

Time: 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: The Treehouse, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$60 (materials included)

Co-Led by Marnie Weigel & Margery Knott

Register online at [http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth\\_winter.php](http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth_winter.php)

The center of the mandala is everywhere  
Wherever the eye falls  
The mystery begins to unfold; it is there,  
The growing-point of love, the ever-opening rose  
Perceived as light on leaf or shadow under,  
And in the brooding heart the wings stir  
Of the bird whose flight is through a thousand skies....

Inspired by Kathleen Raine's poem "Mandala," we invite you to join us for a Winter afternoon of poetry and winter walks and the making of mandalas. At the beginning of a new year, we open to what is coming toward us from the future... we listen from that sacred place where our center and the world's center meet...we remember, with Raine, that "the center of the mandala is possibility of incarnation..."

## Presence to Living Earth in Spring: "A Record of My Love": Words from Henry David Thoreau

Date: Sunday, April 23, 2017

Time: 2:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Place: The Treehouse, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$50

Led by Andrew Levitt

Register online at [http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth\\_spring.php](http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth_spring.php)

In our "Presence to Living Earth in Spring" program, Andrew Levitt will take us on a journey into the world of Henry David Thoreau in celebration of the Thoreau Bicentennial. On November 16, 1850, Thoreau reached a turning point in his journal writing and his presence to living earth when he wrote: "My Journal should be a record of my love. I would write in it only the things I love, my affection for any aspect of the world, what I love to think of. I have no more distinctness or pointedness in my yearnings than an expanding bud, which does indeed point to flower and fruit, to summer and autumn, but is aware of the warm sun and spring influences only." Inspired by these and other words from Thoreau, we will go on guided solo walks on Timberlake Trails on a spring afternoon and return to share our experiences in a circle of hospitality and welcome.

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## Thomas Berry Summer Programs for Children

June 12-15, 2017: Ages 8-10

June 19-22, 2017: Ages 10-14

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

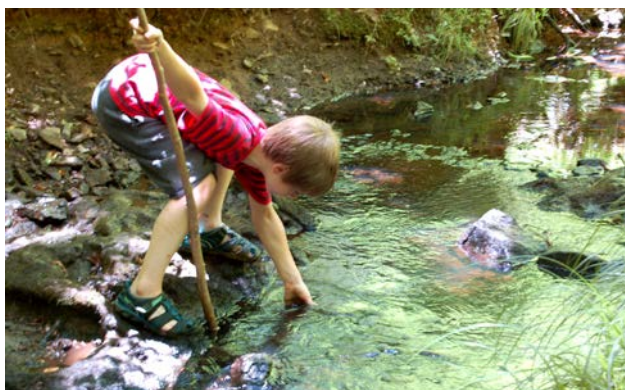
1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Group size: 12

Cost: \$250 per child

Register online at <http://www.beholdnature.org/thomasberrysummerprogram.php>

Inspired by the vision of Thomas Berry, our summer programs for children provide a unique opportunity for a small group of 12 children to make a deep personal connection to the natural world within the meadows, creeks, gardens and forests of a 165-acre earth sanctuary. Earth walks and creek walking are daily sources of joy and inspiration. Within the peace and beauty of Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, new eyes and ears awaken as the children create expressions out of their experiences with the earth. Clay, papermaking, nature journaling and Native American flute are some of the eco-contemplative arts that enliven the rhythm of our days.



We are touched by what we touch, shaped by what we shape,  
enhanced by what we enhance.

~Thomas Berry

Led by:

Director of Children's Programs, **Sandy Bisdee**, completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. A born naturalist and Native American flute player, Sandy has developed the Center's eco-contemplative practices for children since 2005. She completed her certification in the NC Environmental Education Certification Program in 2009. Sandy brings to her work a lifetime of loving children and of loving the earth and of finding ways to bring the two together!

**Marnie Weigel** is an eco-contemplative artist who enjoys knitting, making pottery, journals and jewelry. Her creations are inspired by her reflections in silence and beholding in the natural world. She received a BA in Environmental Studies from Warren Wilson College in the beautiful Swannanoa Valley in Western, NC and an AAS in Professional Crafts: Clay from Haywood Community College in 2000. Marnie taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade in public schools for six years before beginning her work with the Center in 2010 as a graduate of the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program.



**Please consider becoming a Friend of the Center** by making a donation today. All Friends of the Center receive two issues of our newsletter, *Chrysalis*, per year. To donate online, go to our website at [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org) or send your check, payable to CEINW, to:

CEINW  
P. O. Box 41108  
Greensboro, NC 27404

We deeply appreciate your support of our work!

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