



Chrysalis

Volume 5 Fall 2008

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

Dear Reader,

Since its beginnings in 2000, the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has worked closely with ecotheologian Thomas Berry to re-imagine the relationship between the inner life of the child and the natural world. Now entering its ninth year of a work devoted to educators and children, the Center is in the process of bringing the Thomas Berry Hermitage to the earth sanctuary at Timberlake Farm. From 1995-2004, the Hermitage provided a quiet place in the woods where Thomas wrote *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* and his latest book, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*.

When asked to share his thoughts on the move of the Hermitage to the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, Thomas provided the following reflections on the project:

Today, in this crucial moment of 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 Thomas Berry Hermitage at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World will be dedicated to the recovery of the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature. Nestled within a 165-acre earth sanctuary, 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.

The Center is a perfect context for the continuity of this work with children and the sacred. It has brought joy in the last years of my life, for the children have always been closest to my heart.



The Center for Education, Imagination
and the Natural World

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Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director
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What is particularly striking about these words from Thomas is his emphasis on the phrase *inner vision*. He says we are “called to recover the *inner vision* of a society in harmony with nature” that *rests* on our “experience of its wonder, beauty, and call to intimacy.”

When we are able to preserve these inner responses, we enter ever more deeply into a recognition of the role we play as the consciousness of the world. This role is more than our commonly held paternalistic view that we are here to offer protection and stewardship of the Earth. On the contrary, as the consciousness of the world, we are called “to revere Earth . . . as the primary means of our recognition of and communication with the divine.”

In the culture at large, what is generally offered to us is either practical advice about sustainability with no real feeling for the deep realities of the world, or a spirituality divorced from the Earth. Thomas’s vision moves beyond this dualism to a vision of Earth as integral and sacred society.

From this perspective, we might think of our gesture toward the natural world as one of a “begging bowl,” in which we say inwardly to the phenomena of the world, “Let yourself be seen.”¹

This *newly recognized relationship* with the natural world, as Thomas refers to it, is a call to depth. In order to hold out the begging bowl before the world, we must evolve beyond the externality and materialism of our time toward a deeper association with reality.

We have all experienced moments where we have felt at one with the world: An almost full moon illuminates the clouds as they move swiftly across the sky – there is a drama to the night and we feel part of it; a ring of light around the rim of a lake illuminates the tall grasses and shrubs that grow close to the water’s edge - we feel embraced by golden arms of love; at dawn, the sky is transformed from the darkness of night to a slowly rising light in grays and rose – the heart expands with awe as the light grows.

But now, we are called to take up these “moments of grace” more seriously and fully as a path of inner development in relationship to the natural world. A new inner strengthening is called for to meet the forces of the modern world at this crucial moment of Earth history.

¹ Georg Kuhlwind, *Feeling Knowing: Collected Essays*. Trans. Friedemann Schwarzkopf (Fair Oaks, CA: Rudolf Steiner College Press, 1994).

For the past eight years, the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has devoted itself to developing practices for educators and children that preserve and augment experiences of the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world.

In this issue of *Chrysalis*, you will read entries from five educators who have participated in our “Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” Program. The Inner Life Program is a new social form for working with educators based on the assumption that a shift in consciousness within the educational realm will come only with a deep inner transformation of the educator, with an honoring of the soul/spirit of the educator as a core value, and with the creation of a community of educators who support and inspire one another on the threshold of a new consciousness for our time.

If we are truly to enter into a new relationship with the natural world in the realm of education, the whole way we approach educational research must reflect the change we wish to see. In “Research: Mother Nature Has Some Ideas About This, Too,” Colette Segalla brings the reader inside the world of the Inner Life co-research process as a research that embodies the principle of reciprocity. She also explores the non-dualistic nature of a new relational approach to the spiritual development of children rooted in capacities, experiences or states of being, and qualities or ways of being.

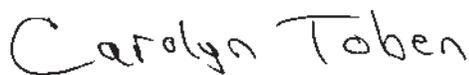
In “I Would Give You a Sense of the Morning,” Andrew Levitt re-invents the genre of the high school commencement address. Departing from traditional counsel about a future in the humanly-constructed world, he gives the members of the class of 2008 an enlarged sense of “the world” they are about to enter: “There are moments outside under the planets, moon and stars when I know that one may find one’s place in the magnificence and come to rest at home in the universe within the embrace of the holy.”

In “Aurora Borealis,” Corie Davis shares her daughter’s experience of this luminous phenomenon of the northern skies as a communion of subjects. And in “Horseshoe Crab,” Cathy Simon Cord gives an account of the reciprocity of care between a four-year old boy and these ancient sea creatures.

Finally, in “I am a We star,” Marie Nordgren interweaves her own intentions “to be present in the presence of the universe” with timeless moments in the lives of her pre-schoolers when the separation between self and the natural world dissolves into Earth as sacred community.

In all of this work, the recovery of an *inner vision* of a society in harmony with nature is close at hand.

Warm regards,



Carolyn Toben, Founder



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

Research: Mother Nature Has Some Ideas About This, Too

by

Colette Segalla

After ten years as an educator both in public schools and in a private Montessori school, I found myself wanting to deepen my work with people and children. I had an interest in the spiritual development of the child and how this plays into the overall picture of human development that people go through throughout the process of a lifetime. To this end, I began to make a transition to the field of depth psychology.

My first step in this transition was to find a graduate program that integrated spirituality as an aspect of the study of psychology. I explored the options and eventually found a program that suited me. Just as I was about to begin the program I received a phone call from someone I had recently met through a mutual friend. This person, Carolyn Toben, explained to me that her organization, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World (CEINW) had recently been awarded a grant to conduct a program for educators called, "The Inner Life of the Child in Nature." She encouraged me to apply for a place in the program. Although I explained to her that I was just about to begin my graduate studies, she assured me that I would be able to participate in this program simultaneously.

My initial meeting with Carolyn had been a chance meeting through a mutual friend but we had connected immediately. At the time, I didn't even know anything about CEINW, but when she told me over the phone about this program for educators I felt honored to be invited to apply for it. The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program fit in extremely well with my interest in children's spirituality and spiritual development, which I had hoped to explore more deeply in graduate school. After I began my graduate coursework I found that the work with CEINW was like a bridge connecting my work as a Montessori teacher of young children and my studies in psychology. Before long, I found myself involved in a co-research process with the Center that could not have been more relevant to my work in graduate school. Thus, my practice as a participant in the Inner Life of the Child program has been the integration of the work of CEINW with my work in graduate school.

The co-research process at CEINW enabled me to engage with my work, both there and in graduate school, on a soul-level. This was not strictly academic research with purely intellectual outcomes. This research embodied the principle of *reciprocity* that is key to so many aspects of the work of the Center. Not only did we give ourselves to the research process through readings, discussions, experiences and journaling, putting our time and energy into it and thereby moving it forward, but the research process itself also gave back to us through its direct impact on our own personal and professional lives. There has been a spiritual evolution through this process that does not necessarily occur when research is seen and approached as an objective process with informational outcomes.

At CEINW, the co-research process gave us, as participants, opportunities to experience ourselves in communion with the natural world. This is qualitatively and substantively different from being outdoors, not in communion with nature but as human beings "outside" of our usual place indoors. When one communes, one is a part of nature, whereas when one "goes outside" one is separate from nature, one is visiting a place not usual to our daily lives. The opportunities to experience ourselves in communion with nature contributed to the dynamic of reciprocity between the researcher and the research. Opportunities for both collective and solitary silence also contributed to this reciprocity, as did the time that was given to reflection, to creative discussion, and to creative expression. The format of our gatherings, which followed the "rhythm of the day" as opposed to an agenda, and an open space for comments rather than a linear progression from one person to the next, grew out of the intention for these gatherings to be more like creative play than "workshops." In play, not only is there potential for creative outcomes, there is also potential for enrichment and enjoyment of the players. All of these, in addition to the reading, writing, listening to and communing with knowledgeable people, contributed to a research process that gave back (and continues to give back) to the co-researchers through its direct impact on our own personal and professional lives. I've found that I've experienced my own spiritual evolution through this process. Such growth does not necessarily occur when research is seen and approached as an objective process with informational outcomes.

This orientation to this co-research at CEINW, which includes use of the less measurable of human faculties such as intuition and co-creation, grows (from my observations) organically out of an awareness of the nature of our relationship to the natural world. We are not separate from the natural world but an integral part of it; in the co-research process at CEINW likewise, the participants are not separate from the research, but an integral part of it. The outcome of research such as this is not one-dimensional, statistical data or information, but is various and multi-dimensional since it resides within each one of the participants as potential, like seeds sewn in fertile ground. These seeds may then develop into a multitude of outcomes, in the form of, for example, productive relationships, informed new or revised curricula, published texts, perhaps new Centers formed and certainly the possibility for many other outcomes. The most important outcome however is probably the internal inspiration in the heart of each individual that would give birth to all of these potentials and more.

For myself, being a participant in the Inner Life of the Child program while also being a graduate student in psychology allowed me to interweave the teachings from each into the other. Before long, I had opportunities to do research in graduate school that made use not only of the readings from the Inner Life program, but that was also aided by a clarification of questions and observations from my participation in the program. For one of my classes I had an opportunity to do a qualitative research paper on the spiritual life of the child. What I soon found out was that this was an area that was in need of further research not only in the field of education, but also in the field of psychology.

Qualitative Research



“Windflower” by Sandy Bisdee

I began this research project because I wanted to explore the ways in which children’s spirituality and the spiritual development of children are addressed within education and psychology. I was interested in conceptualizing educational and therapeutic processes in a way that is mindful of the spiritual nature of children and actually engenders spiritual growth in children, rather than impedes it. But the point was not to develop a new form of religious or spiritual education. The point was to find ways to expand our notion of the nature and developmental process of children such that nurturance of the child’s spiritual evolution would be a natural part of the educational and/or therapeutic process. This of course is not possible within a traditional, industrial educational model, which concerns itself not with the nature of the child so much as with the child’s preparation for engagement in an industrialized society.

Given that humanity faces the most dire of consequences in human history for our behavior toward and relationship with the planet in which we live, it is clear that this is the time to break out of ineffective or destructive ingrained habits and practices of contemporary society, and adapt ourselves to a new way of being amongst one another and with the living organism of planet Earth (Berry, 1988). This will require nothing less than a transformation of industrialized society toward an “ecologized” society, or one that recognizes and cares for the interdependencies and interrelationships amongst not only people but animals, plants and all inanimate but critical elements in the planet (Berry, 1988). To this end, my aim is to contribute to the necessary shift in consciousness already underway by dedicating myself to discovering better ways to conceptualize and initiate human beings into the experience of life as part of a matrix of interdependent participants. Education is one of the most important aspects of this long initiation process and offers beautiful opportunities for the genesis of a more fully aware collective humanity.

The current status of education reflects the same symptoms of our misaligned notion of ourselves in relationship to one another and the planet as the environmental catastrophes now upon us. A key to both of these is, in my view, a deepening of consciousness such that the spiritual nature of the human being and the sacred nature of our environment become as much a part of our understanding and experience as our understanding and experience that the earth is round and not flat (Berry, 1988). These were the conceptual underpinnings of my exploration of the current literature on the spirituality of children and their spiritual development.

For this project, although there is (happily) a vast and increasing amount of literature on the topic, I limited my investigation to a sampling of journal articles and books from the fields of education, psychology, theology and nursing. I compared these sources with a focus on extracting a clear definition of the spiritual aspect of being human. Since, in education and the social sciences, there is not a comprehensive and universally accepted definition of the term beyond religious context, I looked for concepts that could be categorized into a multi-faceted or multi-dimensional definition of spirituality. Again the purpose was to expand the notion of being human to include the spiritual dimension without the usual conjoined religious connotation. I found that spirituality could be defined in terms of:

- ~ capacities
- ~ experiences or states of being
- ~ qualities or ways of being

I also found that the literature addressing this topic could be categorized based on its purpose as follows:

- ~ to conceptualize the spiritual nature of the child
- ~ to identify methods or approaches that foster the spiritual development of the child
- ~ to identify the qualities necessary for the adult to have in order to work with the child on a spiritual level

The significance of this categorization of the literature is that it points to a critical component of the investigation of this topic, which is the relational nature of spirituality; when considering the spiritual development of children, the spiritual preparation of the adult is an integral part of the equation (Hyde 2005, Montessori 1912, Smith & McSherry 2003, Steiner 1922).

Although some of the concepts identified as part of the definition of spirituality are clearly already understood as aspects of human nature, the combination of these concepts and their identification as spiritual is where a change in perspective or understanding may occur. For example, one of the categories that surfaced in this exploration was *spirituality as a set of capacities*. These capacities include an innate faculty that allows for imagination, contemplation, wonder, reflection, insight, engaged observation, meaning making, and intuition (Hart 2003, Hyde 2005, Montessori 1912, Webster 2005). None of these, considered as an isolated concept, would necessarily be considered a “spiritual” capacity in common parlance, however when combined and identified as such, they become part of a cohesive picture of our spiritual nature that invites careful nurturance of these capacities, rather than incidental acknowledgement. If parents and teachers understand the capacity to wonder as an important part of growth and development, then a sensitivity to moments of wonder and an allowance for the opportunity to wonder might take the place of providing answers, or of expecting pat answers from the child to questions based on prescribed information. There is opportunity for a qualitative difference in interaction between adult and child when a capacity such as wonder is beheld as a unique and spiritual aspect of being human.

In addition to the capacities to wonder, reflect, contemplate, imagine, gain insight, make meaning, observe, and intuit, spirituality includes the capacity to have a sense of connection or oneness with other people, nature, or the transcendent (Hart 2003, Erricker 2005). In short, our spiritual nature gives us the capacity to love. A sense of connection or togetherness is perhaps one of the most important aspects of spirituality because it addresses not just what exists within an individual but what might exist between individuals. This sense of connection has long been discussed within the realm of psychology (albeit perhaps in somewhat different terms) but when it is cast as a spiritual capacity it may denote a continuum of experience that extends to a capacity for connection with the Transcendent (Hart 2003). (As an aside, since the idea is to steer clear of religious connotation, rather than God, “the Transcendent” is used to mean the feeling or belief in something more powerful or greater than oneself.) The notion of a connection with the Transcendent differentiates the spiritual definition from the strictly psychological definition of this capacity for connection (although *transpersonal* psychology does in fact include the spiritual dimension (ATP 2007).) In this way, an integration of the spiritual aspect is an expansion on the idea of connection, rather than a whole separate concept. In educational or therapeutic settings, if an understanding of the capacity to experience connection and the reality of

our interconnectedness were a natural part of the adult mindset, once again this could be nurtured rather than discouraged and an understanding of our interdependence could be fostered rather than denied.

When spiritual capacities are actually developed and utilized, spiritual experiences or states of being can then result. When the capacity to wonder finds expression in wonderment or a sense of deep mystery, this is then a spiritual experience. It is spiritual because it takes us beyond ourselves and can engender an expansion of consciousness. When intuition is nurtured and finds expression through its usage in perception, decision-making, and discernment, this also is an experience of utilizing and integrating the spiritual dimension of oneself. Or when a person makes use of imagination to press beyond the bounds of fact and logic either for play or for intellectual inquiry, this also can be a spiritual experience (Hyde 2005). Perhaps most significantly, when one engages the capacity for a sense of connection, one may experience a deep sense of belonging and togetherness on a spiritual level that can, in turn, facilitate an exploration of some of the existential questions of humanity (Webster 2005, Steiner 1922).

Other examples of spiritual states of being include the experience of being in a “felt space” of mystery (Hyde 2005). This comes about when the capacity for wonder and contemplation lead one to a phenomenological experience of being in a different place than the “reality” of the empirical here and now. The coalescence of wonder, contemplation and imagination enables the child to enter into and feel the mystery of some of life’s unanswered questions, be they existential questions or the mystery of the sphinx. This state of being is akin to being in a “felt space” of the sacred, where awe and reverence blossom within the child, setting the stage for an experience of reciprocity between the child and the sacred environ.

It is quite clear that without opportunities to experience spiritual states of being, an individual must function in a much dryer and more limited way than when encouraged to give expression to this broader aspect of being human. But when children are indeed provided with opportunities to experience and gain an appreciation for their own spiritual nature and their connectedness with all of life, then spiritual qualities or ways of being in the world become part of their self-concept and part of their orientation to life (Erricker 2005, Webster 2005).

A spiritually imbued orientation to life is an outcome of the nurturance of the child’s spiritual capacities. The spiritual developmental process, rather than stages, is more like having access to a soul-nourishing source that grows like a plant, with more deeply embedded roots and more sun-seeking foliage above the ground. With so much wonderful information already available about the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, neurological and moral development of children, at this stage in our evolution, these can all be complemented by the new and growing body of wisdom about the spiritual development of children. Not only does the wisdom we acquire about this topic inform us as to our treatment of children, but also the quest for wisdom and the application of that wisdom in our interactions with children actually nurtures the adult in his or her own spiritual development. The relational nature of spirituality means that there is no way to engage with the material without it affecting the adult. It is for this reason that this is such a rich and important field of inquiry and one that has potential to contribute to global transformation.

I made a point at the beginning of this essay to note the way in which I became involved with CEINW because I believe it represents a principle at work in the type of co-research and the creative process of education that the Center brings to light. That principle is that this work serves a larger purpose that has its own ways of ordering things which may at times be beyond our conscious awareness. As mentioned, my meeting with Carolyn, and therefore with the work of CEINW, was a “chance” meeting through a mutual friend. But even the chance meeting with Carolyn came after a “chance” meeting with our mutual friend at a public event following at least a couple of years without contact between us. So these multiple layers of “chance” that led to a fruitful connection and the furthering of my life’s work were not random events but are acknowledged as events that line up with the perhaps even unspoken intentions of the participants and the unseen design of a work that is much larger than any of the participants. One might say this type of thing happens all the time and yes, it does, but when the principle behind it is acknowledged, even if it’s not completely understood, and embraced as being at play in the larger work, that’s when a space is created for things to unfold a little bit differently, perhaps bringing to this space a little bit more potential for unexpected but certainly fully hoped for fruitful results. Although Carolyn never knew, before she called me, that I was even considering entering a graduate school whose motto is “tending the soul of the world,” I can certainly see how this larger purpose was influencing events in my life and gracing me with the good fortune to be put in touch with people who were so carefully nurturing this same purpose in the lives of our children and the natural world. I am, indeed, filled with gratitude.

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Colette Segalla is a full time graduate student of clinical psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California. Colette entered graduate school with the intention of furthering her work with both children and adults, after ten years as a teacher and several years working with adults in the corporate sector. She taught her first three years in a public middle school in Durham County before seeking a teaching philosophy and methodology that was more in line with her view of life. She then found out about Maria Montessori and fell in love with her philosophy and approach to education. Montessori’s respect for the uniqueness and potential in each individual, in addition to her belief in the importance of developing a sense of interdependence within the child, resonated deeply with Colette. It was with this same love of the uniqueness and potential within each individual that she entered graduate school in order to further her work with both children and adults.

I Would Give You a Sense of the Morning

by

Andrew Levitt

On June 7, 2008, Andrew Levitt gave the following Commencement Speech to the Class of 2008 of the Emerson Waldorf High School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina



Artwork by Liz Levitt

Well, class of 2008, at the end let's talk about teachers. One of my greatest teachers in life has been my dog, Sasha. Like Dante, who had the constant companionship of Virgil on his journey through the Inferno and Purgatoria, I have traveled a distance beside my dog. To many in Greensboro, I am known only as the man who walks the big white dog.

Sasha and I have had a daily habit of going out in the morning in the darkness or half-light just before the sun comes up. We have seen the morning star, moonsets, sunrises, changes of the seasons, clear days and storms, and hundreds of other transitions. One day early in our walks together, I realized that I was not only walking with my dog, I was beginning to become enlightened through our daily companionship because I was present for all these moments of transition in the time between night and morning. As I grew aware of this, an intention developed in me to seek in these moments to find a way to harmonize my rhythms with the rhythms of the earth.

Let me give you the picture. On the first morning I realized that I was entering into a kind of initiation, I recorded my experience in words you have heard from me before. Since you may not remember them, let me refresh your memory.

*It was still in the gray of the dawn
a good twenty minutes yet before
the sentinel crows would call through the light
As usual Sasha and I stopped on the road
above the creek and I looked down
to the unmarked glass surface
of the heron's favorite fishing site
Suddenly there was a flutter of gray
in the gray field the gray on gray
set off only by a noticeable grace
Then there he was standing in that
or any other reflection the signal
most alert figure of the hour
And despite the shadow in which we stood I knew
for that impenetrable moment I was awake*

These many years later, I have learned many things from the liminal realm in which Sasha and I have traveled. Among the many things I have learned at Sasha's side, one of the first was to sniff things out each day. Sasha never assumes that a single blade of grass just outside our door today is the same grass he sniffed yesterday. He checks each bush and tree and blade of grass with enthusiasm to discover what's new.

He also knows each and every blade of grass is unique. He may not know that the Talmud says there is an angel above each blade of grass whispering, "Grow, grow!" but he acts as if he does.

Sasha can see things I cannot. From him I have learned to look to see. On another morning beside the creek, he stopped. I stopped with him, but, though I knew there was something to be seen, as I looked I saw nothing. Then I got down to focus my gaze where he looked. Still I saw nothing. Then in the grass across the creek, an ear twitched. Suddenly a red fox leapt straight up into the air, came down completely visible, and looked across the creek at us. We three acknowledged each other for awhile. The communion was palpable.

In great transitions, Sasha and I have read portents and signs. While an owl soared over head and my thoughts westered on his wings to time beyond the brief imperial moment of a life, we watched the auspicious arrival of a new century after a total lunar eclipse. We grew in respect for nature's power to rejuvenate as we saw her heal the scarred landscape devastated by a storm with tornado force that had torn up one-hundred-and-fifty-year-old oaks and thrown them at homes, over roads, yards, and fields.

We stopped to read the signs in lesser transitions, too, like the day a titmouse cried in a dogwood tree mourning the death of his mate who lay at his feet and one could feel domesticity and wildness in the moment. We saw the terror of beauty when we passed through the tightening of nature's fist as crystalline ice on encrusted branches maimed trees. When we saw a trail of bird prints end abruptly, we were reminded that the trajectory of life can never be fully recorded.

As the years passed, I learned distinctions, like how to tell the difference between a shag bark oak, a hickory, and an ash in winter, just because we visited the trees regularly and I had been paying attention. I learned to distinguish markers in nature of times of passage through the day, seasons and year. And through life's longer stretches of time. Now that he is old, Sasha has shown me how to take on graciously the burden of one's own dying.

At his side, I have learned about the world and I have learned deeply personal things. It has been a practice of taking the sage's stance of reverence, as Abraham Joshua Heschel describes it:

Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal.

The great lesson in it all has been to realize there is a direct line between the wilderness that is all around us and our home in the holy. There are messages sent both ways. In the wild and ever-changing world outside the door where foxes, deer, raccoons, otters, muskrats, herons, hawks, and song birds still hold authority in the principality of nature, we are all pilgrims passing through. And yet there are moments outside under the planets, moon and stars when I know that one may find one's place in the magnificence and come to rest at home in the universe within the embrace of the holy.

You know I do not believe in giving advice. So this is the only advice the man who walks the big white dog will dare to give: *Find a good teacher and go out into the new morning every day of your life.*

Now let me offer you one last gleaning from reflections on walks with Sasha, something I wrote with you in mind on a morning this fall as Sasha and I went out to see what kind of a day the world had laid at our feet.

*If I could give you something
I would give you a sense of the morning
when the silence seems more silent
for the song of the cicada
and the darkness darker
under the illumining full moon
I would send you out
in the suspended hour just before the dawn
when nature renews her ancient possibilities
and out of the momentary balance in the unity of all
there stirs an impulse for new being
in the morning of the world
when tension of creation
forms itself within the soul
and the I expands within the grandeur
of the vision it beholds*



"Morning Light" by Sandy Bisdee

Andrew Levitt has been teaching high school Humanities at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC for the last 6 years. He is a poet, mime and maskmaker, folklorist, and teacher by trade. Andrew expected to be a writer, but after a short stint in journalism at the *World, Telegram and Sun* in New York, he was diverted by the times and took a Peace Corps offer to teach in Thailand. He returned to earn a Ph.D. in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania and at the same time trained as a mime under Paul J. Curtis, director of The American Mime Theatre, and then later with world-renowned artist, Marcel Marceau. The magic of the silent art of gesture that makes the visible invisible and the invisible visible drew him in. For over 25 years he performed and taught mime, four of those years as Assistant Professor of Theatre at UNCG and the rest as a freelance artist and artist-in-residence in Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia. When he rediscovered language on his morning walks, enjoyment of words and young people led him to the teaching of literature and back to his early love of the writer's craft.

Aurora Borealis

by

Corie Davis

It is a June evening, the likes of which we have all known, when the air is still and fresh. Your skin feels as though it were simply a part of the gaseous make up of the earth's atmosphere. It is as if the world is new and your presence in it begs no question. There is a calm unlike any other. There is a sense that you are suspended in the balance of the universal blend. You are one with all of the elements and all of the organisms in your midst. Your 15-year-old daughter is no exception as she stands beside you and you gaze at the dancing lights of the aurora on the horizon. Rapture!

It was that event that leapt into my mind when pondering the requested anecdotes for the Inner Life retreat. While I have had numerous experiences in the natural world with children, very young through adolescence, none marked the spirituality of this event in quite the same way. While I knew and understood the moment's tranquil and centering effect on my own spirit, I never fully recognized how powerful it had been for her until a few years later when she related the story in her own words for an English assignment.

Her essay follows. She embellished a bit (based upon true and actual experiences) to add interest to her essay, but the spirit of the moment is genuinely captured in words that I could not hope to do justice to should I attempt it on my own:

The crackling fire spread a warm glow over our circle of friends. In the distance the cries and laughter of children's last few minutes of play reminded me of the pure joy of innocence. As the music of their play gave way, the orchestra of night rose to a steady beat. Crickets sang. Frogs peeped. Owls called. The gathering dusk enveloped us in a blanket of serenity. The moon would not rise tonight. Darkness would be all encompassing.

The reflection of the fire set our eyes ablaze, providing confirmation that they are indeed windows into our depths. The sense of our bond became rekindled on that chilled evening. As the smoke feathered through our hair and clung to our clothing, an invisible line was drawn, connecting us to each other. As our ancestors had been drawn together around the fire for its warmth and light, we too gathered with a kinship and an inner flame we shared.

An unspoken understanding of what hovered above us moved through the circle. I raised my gaze to the sky. There I saw dancing shadows sparkling across the firmament. At my gasp, the others tilted their heads skyward to join me in witnessing this spectacular performance. I stood in awe. The silence from my companions and the extraordinary hush that fell over the woods indicated to me that the world had somehow changed.

The glow in the sky seemed to be pulling me in, away from my body; I could move and change with the lights. The colors swept, and leapt, and licked the ink-black canvas like the stroke of a master's brush. With the shimmering shades of color, it was as if they announced the coming of God.

With the wind's rustling of leaves my trance was broken. I returned to my body, my feet on the ground. I was alone. Friends surrounded me but I was alone. They were still gone, twinkling in the stars, tumbling in the colors, frolicking in the wisps of Aurora Borealis. Their expressions fixed in amazement. A haze of innocence covered their faces; children receiving a gift they never imagined they could have.

With the grace from which the lights first appeared they began to fade into infinity, to a place beyond our earthly reach. As my friends and I began our descent from the heights of sensory awareness, a realization set in. Nothing could compare to this moment. The shimmers proved our vulnerability. With not even a flinch, they had taken us away with such ease and then gently dropped us home again.

We were small. We were small but essential to the expanse of the universe. Our presence is undeniable. Each of us has our place, dependent on one another. We are each a quivering glimmer, pulsating in the universe and all that moves the universe, stirs within us. We are one. ~ Jael Jaffe

Corie Davis is an early childhood educator in Shaker Heights, Ohio

Horseshoe Crab

by

Cathy Simon Cord

It was the last field trip of the year. The class was well prepared, but not really sure what to expect once we reached the bay. Many of the children and parents thought we were spending a day at the beach, when actually we would be spending a day saving horseshoe crabs from exposure. Horseshoe crabs come out of the water to lay their eggs. They rely on the tides to take them in and out of the deeper waters, and if stranded about the tide line, can become flipped. Once flipped on their backs, they are defenseless against the sun and shore birds. The children all knew this, but I don't think they were prepared for the hundreds of crabs that had been left stranded the night before. We had learned throughout our study of horseshoe crabs that you never flip a crab over by its tail or telson. That could damage the crab's only means of defending itself. You had to pick the crabs up by the sides of the shell and flip them gently, set them back down and let them go on their way back to the sea. This information is difficult to digest for small children and adults alike. The crabs, although harmless, have the look of something that could hurt you. They have sharp spines on their shells and tails to protect them from predators. The myths abound about how they pinch or sting, but they do neither, and we told the children this over and over again. This would be their first encounter with live crabs; up until this point we had only seen molts or models. What would happen? I wasn't sure.

The day was perfect weather wise, not too hot and the humidity was bearable - something that is not always true of May in Delaware. We arrived at the protected beach after being on the bus for 45 minutes, a long bus ride for 3, 4, 5 and 6 year olds. Once in the parking lot, we disbanded and walked toward the beach. The tide was low; so many crabs had been stranded. Some of the children were disturbed by the amount of crabs and the smell. The flies were buzzing and the shore birds were calling in the swampy section beyond the dunes. We got right to work. I had only flipped crabs once before and now I was the example for my own twenty children. Some children found the water's edge too muddy, a mix of marsh and bay, you sunk straight down, and shoes of any sort were not possible.

One of my youngest boys was there with his dad; he was so excited to be the "super-hero" to the crabs - a term we had been using to entice their interest. He flipped crabs and bravely walked through the muck to place them in the brackish water. Throughout the morning, I heard him call my name as another crab was found and brought back to the water's edge. Most of the other children had flipped a few crabs and then went off to scavenge the beach for treasures. They were tired of the hard work and the messy business of flipping heavy crabs and walking them back toward the water. Not this one little guy. He must have flipped fifty crabs. Even his dad tired before he did. He was so focused on his task, that even as everyone else was packing up for our next stop, he was still flipping crabs. He was sun-kissed and sweaty, muddy from head to toe, but smiling for his efforts. He wasn't doing it for me, or for his dad, he was doing it because he knew he was doing something important for nature.

One last crab, a huge female that was dug down low in the mud, had probably just laid her eggs. He saw the wave toss her up and he went in to get her. We were all waiting on the beach, watching this just turned four-year-old boy do what he had been doing all day. When he flipped her she jack-knifed and the telson caught him in the face, scratching a long red mark down the side of his face. I went to help and so did his dad, both assuming he would drop the crab, but he didn't. He placed her down in the water and looked at the adults standing there watching him. He smiled and you could tell he was being brave, not wanting to cry from the scratch that had to hurt. He said, "I must have held her too close to me, or she would never have scratched me". We were all so surprised. He didn't blame the crab, he knew she was defending herself, and we all knew he was wise beyond his four years. He will be five when we go back this year, and he is already talking about saving more crabs this year. I think we have instilled in this child a sense of respect for nature that may have not been there before. Anyone who comes to our classroom to talk about horseshoe crabs is grilled by him, he is the expert, and this has given him both a boost in his self esteem but also a sense of the greater good. One child, one special day, a lifetime of memories of doing what was right.

Cathy Simon Cord is a Montessori teacher in Wilmington, Delaware.

“I am a We star”

by

Marie Nordgren

Owen is a three-year-old boy whose entire being was captivated by searching for earthworms. Prancing on tiptoes and beaming with anticipation, he repeated over and over “look for worms, look for worms.” So with shovel and bucket in hand we went to look for worms in the layers of composting leaves under the oak tree. In no time we were delighted by an abundance of fat earthworms and Owen shouted “worm jackpot, worm jackpot”. Undeterred by grime and goo, he carefully pulled worms out of the earth, adjusting the tension of each tug so that each one was extracted whole. He gently placed them one by one in his cupped palm until it was full of squiggling moist movement. Then gently closing his fingers around them he ran off to play. When lunch arrived and hand washing was required, Owen opened his fist to reveal a lifeless blob of twisted worms and dirt. Disappointment and confusion washed across his face.

My intention for the Inner Life of the Child in Nature project was to deepen my own relationship with the natural world and form communion with the larger universe. My practice was to include a daily opportunity for experiences in the natural world, journaling about the relationships that developed, and discovery about how that relationship might radiate into my work with young children, my family and my own sense of being. I intended to begin this journey with the practices of beholding, solo walks and bringing my questions to the natural world.

My practice began with an enthusiasm that captured my whole being. I organized my day to include an early morning nature walk and after school stroll around the pond to “bring my day to the natural world” and listen for what the natural world may have to say to me. I was inspired, engaged in the project and expectant. I was going to be in communion with nature. I would know Mother Earth and she would know me and this relationship would inform my entire life - teaching, parenting, relationships and my inner being.

Joy, mystery, amazement and awe characterized my early practice. I was disciplined in my walking and pond reflection. I collected an image everyday in a beholding exercise: An alpaca lying on its side in the sun being held by the earth and blanketed with warmth and light, mushrooms and wheat grass sprouting from an old wheat straw bale, the moon cradled in the branches of a tree. I asked questions of the natural world and sat in silence expectantly. I contemplated the images and questions and made efforts to integrate these experienced into my stories for the children and conversations with family and friends. For a time, this held my interest and inspired my days. But in this grasping mood of acquisition and use of images and experiences as product of my efforts, my “cupped palm” became full. With my collection of images in hand and held tightly, I became less disciplined in my walks and journaling. General busyness became my focus along with teaching, house hunting, moving, grieving, and worrying. Something about my practice or intention was not working.

Golden haired, blue-eyed Nora, just four, dreamily strolls through the vegetable garden. She comes to stillness in front of a broccoli plant that has blossomed into yellow flowers. She stands in her dreamy state gazing at the plant. Silently they stand, golden haired girl facing a golden flowering plant. Minutes pass with no movement. Then, Nora takes a long deep breath, sighs and the spell is broken. She turns and skips off to the holly tree, climbs its branches and perches on a limb 10 feet above the ground. There she sits in the tree for the remainder of playtime, happy as a lark.

“The Earth is a communion of subjects to be revered, not a collection of objects to be exploited”. These words, from eco-theologian Thomas Berry, were repeated in some context at each gathering we had at the Center. They are foundational to this work. A communion of subjects, a communion, communion.... I had been looking outside myself for something to bring into myself, to have and to hold, to share and perhaps “exploit”. A communion of subjects, a communion, communion...?

*In the universe
Wafts man's essential being.
In the heart of man
Wafts a mirror-picture of the universe.
The ego connects the two
And so fashions
The true meaning of existence.*

Notebook entry by Rudolf Steiner, 1918¹

In our preschool circle time, we do a little hand game. With fingers spread out wide like a star, a child will turn to his neighbor, who is also holding out his hand as a star, and pressing their hands together speak the words, "my star meets your star, and now I'm a WE star." From child to child the stars meet until we are all holding hands in a circle. We close by gently squeezing each other's hands and giving a joyful shout "I am a We Star!" One morning, Rose was playing under a small maple tree alone. She was taking the five pointed maple leaves and placing her hand on the leaves one by one. To each leaf she would whisper, "I am a We star!"

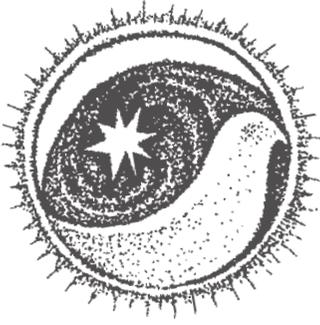
Today, my intentions remain the same: to deepen my relationship with the natural world and form communion with the larger universe. My practice is shifting however, and the expectations I had are shifting as well. Now my practice includes daily opportunities to be in the natural world. Being present in the presence of the universe is a large enough task for me. I am trying to uncup my hand and stretch it toward the WE.



"Morning Star" by Sandy Bisdee

Marie Nordgren is the founder, director and a teacher at The Children's Garden Preschool, a nature and play based early childhood program. Her training is in Waldorf early childhood education from Sunbridge College. Most recently she has been participating in The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program at The Center and studying with the Choreocosmos School of Cosmic and Sacred Dance. Her three grown daughters and husband of 28 years, Carl, are also a never ending source of new learning experiences.

¹ Urieli, B. L. and H. Muller-Wiedmann, *Learning to Experience the Etheric World* (London: Temple Lodge Publishing, 1998), p. 41.



Center Programs 2008

Programs for Children

Children of the Forest

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

3:45 – 5:30 pm

Fall: Wednesdays, September 24 - November 12, 2008

Spring: Wednesdays, March 18 - May 6, 2009

\$160

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

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

June 15 - 19, 2009

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

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

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Scott Crews

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

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

June 22 - 26, 2009

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

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

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Scott Crews

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

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

July 6 - 10, 2009

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

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

Staff: Sandy Bisdee and Carolyn Toben

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

Programs for Schools & Groups

Awakening to Nature

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

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

Number of Children: maximum 24

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

The Poetry of Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Grades 6-12

Cost: \$250

Number of Students: maximum 24

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things” ~ Mary Oliver

Students are led along earth sanctuary trails on a journey that deepens their connection to the natural world through silent practices and poetry readings at special sites. While taking in the images of each new place, students are called to write their own poetry of nature. The day culminates in a poetry reading after lunch where each contribution is deeply connected to their experiences of the earth sanctuary and to their inner life. They read poems, ask questions, and share reflections on the day and their sense of belonging to the natural world. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of students in grades 6-12.

Native American Journeys

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Grades K-5

Cost: \$250

Number of Children: maximum 24

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

Special Design Programs

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

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

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

Site-based Educators' Programs

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

Programs for College Students

Garden Apprenticeship Program

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

Programs for Adults

Pedagogy of the Sacred: A Retreat with John Shackelton

Saturday, October 25, 2008

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$65 (lunch included)

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

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

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

Saturday, December 6, 2008

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$65 (lunch included)

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

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

Natural Contemplatives: A Retreat with Toben Hart

Saturday, March 14, 2009

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$85 (lunch included)

“In the West . . . the dominance of a largely Aristotelian emphasis in logic, the natural sciences, and theology beginning at least by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries pushed the contemplative out of favor. Today we often discount the direct knowing that emerges as an inner sense or voice in favor of measurable observation or logical deduction that science and reason value. Essentially, adult society has grown a cataract on the eye of contemplation – we have made it cloudy with mistrust. But the direct sight of contemplation is alive and well in most children; they are natural contemplatives.”

~ Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, p. 39

You are invited to join us for a day with Tobin Hart dedicated to unveiling the eye of contemplation in contemporary culture, especially in the lives of children and young adults. Our day together includes silent solos on earth sanctuary trails.

Tobin Hart is a professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia. Founder of the ChildSpirit Institute and author of *From Information to Transformation: Education for the Evolution of Consciousness* and *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, Tobin is a leading spokesperson for the inner lives of children and young adults.

The Bird Whisperer: A Retreat with Randy Senzig

Saturday, May 2, 2009

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

\$65 (lunch included)

A shift in Randy Senzig’s understanding began when he realized that beyond the teaching of content, young people are drawn to you when you act in a way that says to them that you care about all life. A teacher of public high school science, Randy has taken to heart Thomas Berry’s recognition that “while we have more scientific knowledge of the universe than any people every had, it is not the type of knowledge that leads to an intimate presence with a meaningful universe.” His students call him the “Bird Whisperer. Join “The Bird Whisperer” for a journey through his story of bringing young people into an intimate presence with the natural world.

Randy Senzig has taught science for 31 years in North Carolina and Florida public schools. He holds a NC Science Teaching License as well as being a NC Certified Environmental Educator. Randy is a NCSU Kenan Fellow, the 2006 NC Environmental Educator of the Year, his high school’s Teacher of the Year, NCSTA District Science Teacher of the Year and has received many grants to promote outdoor education. He was the co-director of NCSU Summer Environmental Camp. His website, *Birds in the Schoolyard*, promotes outdoor education. He wrote the Wake County Environmental Science Curriculum. Randy has studied at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, pursued graduate studies in Conservation Biology at Florida International University and earned a Masters in Education at the University of North Florida.

Nurturing A Sense of Wonder

A Three-part program for Early Childhood Educators

Led by Sandy Bisdee

Thursdays: February 26, March 26 and April 23, 2009

3:00 – 5:00 pm at the Treehouse

\$125

In this three-part program, we will explore ways to bring the inner lives of young children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world. We’ll consider how, throughout the changing seasons, we might invite children to slow down and experience the natural world, to take in the sounds, the smells, to feel the air, the colors and movements of the world around them. In addition to practices that can be used outside, the series will include practices that can bring the natural world into the day care home or pre-school/kindergarten classroom.

Sandy Bisdee, Center Naturalist/Educator, completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. She brings over twenty years of experience as an educator of young children to her work at the Center. A gifted storyteller and musician, Sandy has engaged in a deep study of Native American perspectives. She has studied with the Choreocosmos School of Cosmic and Sacred Dance and has completed both “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program at CEINW and the North Carolina Environmental Education Certification Program.

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

A Two-Year Co-Research Program for Educators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A beautiful collection of practices has now been published entitled *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice, 2006-2008*.
To order a copy, see “Publications” at the Center website.

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

The Thomas Berry Hermitage Project



The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World seeks to rescue from demolition the dwelling place of Thomas Berry, distinguished Greensboro, North Carolina native, whose life and works have notably influenced the spiritual and intellectual history of the 20th and early 21st century.

Recipient of eight honorary doctorate degrees, Thomas Berry has received recognition from sources all over the world for the depth and breadth of his work in bringing into consciousness a new vision of the human-earth relationship.

Through his writings and lectures he has sought to revitalize the major cultural institutions of education, politics, economics, and religion, and his work continues to generate creativity in the fields of art, music, dance and literature.

The Thomas Berry Hermitage now lies in the path of a proposed loop-road around the city of Greensboro, NC where Thomas grew up and had a childhood experience of a “meadow across the creek” that served as a touchstone for his future life and work.

After retiring from the Riverdale Center in New York City in 1995, where he wrote *The Dream of the Earth*, co-authored *The Universe Story*, and produced a vast body of papers and articles, Thomas took up residence in the Hermitage on Berry family land in Greensboro, NC. From 1995-2004, the Hermitage provided a quiet place in the woods where Thomas was to write *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* and his latest book, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. Now in his 94th year, Thomas resides in the Wellspring Retirement Community a stone’s throw away from the Hermitage site.

There is a vast network of educators, artists, musicians, scholars, scientists, ecologists, and religious and community leaders across the Earth who draw their professional life and inspiration from Thomas Berry. We suspect that they would be as saddened and upset as we are in contemplating the demolition of this historic place, a place whose significance would only grow in time and be a source of pride to the citizens of North Carolina and the world.

Seventy-one organizations, inspired by Thomas Berry’s thinking, are now working to meet the needs of the demanding times in which we live. Among them is the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, a non-profit organization located just east of Greensboro, NC, that seeks to move the Thomas Berry Hermitage to the earth sanctuary where it is located.

In its new setting, the Hermitage will provide a context for the continuation of Thomas Berry’s vision. Please join us in our efforts to move the Thomas Berry Hermitage to the earth sanctuary at The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. You can help by going to www.beholdnature.org and clicking on “The Thomas Berry Hermitage Project.”

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

A Brief History

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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E-mail: beholdnature@aol.com

www.beholdnature.org



Mission Statement

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

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

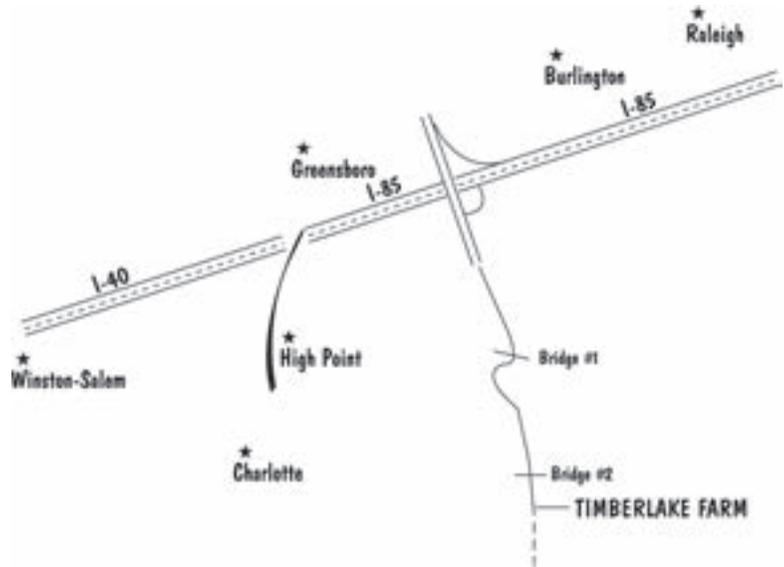
Located within the beauty of a 165 acre earth sanctuary, the Center's way of working is threefold: First, the Center offers a setting within which national presenters explore the relationship between the inner life of the child and nature from diverse perspectives. Second, the Center provides a context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

FROM WINSTON-SALEM/
GREENSBORO

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

FROM RALEIGH/DURHAM/
CHAPEL HILL

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



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

Center for Education, Imagination and The Natural World
at Timberlake Farm
1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road
Whitsett, North Carolina 27377

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