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# Toward eco -citizenship: A praxis for empowerment

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TOWARD ECO-CITIZENSHIP:  
A PRAXIS FOR EMPOWERMENT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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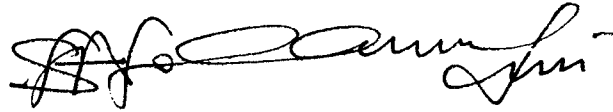
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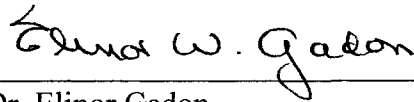
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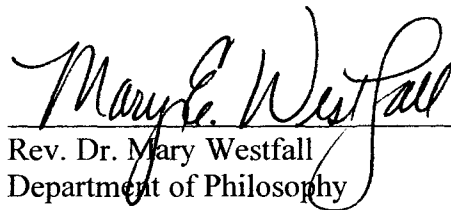
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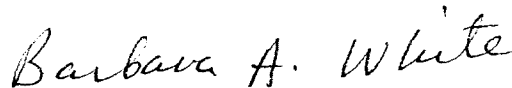
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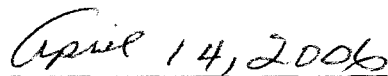
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## ABSTRACT

### TOWARD ECO-CITIZENSHIP: A PRAXIS FOR EMPOWERMENT

by

PENELOPE S. MORROW

University of New Hampshire, May, 2006

My teaching practice and research is about holistic education which assumes that, at some fundamental level, everything is connected. Holistic education is a philosophy, a worldview, that challenges the fragmented, reductionist, mechanistic and nationalistic assumptions of mainstream culture and education. The ultimate goal is to transform the way people look at themselves and their relationships in/to the world from a fragmented to an integrative perspective. This emerging paradigm can also be called ecological, evolutionary, spiritual and global. There is a growing belief that such education is fundamentally spiritual, in its search for wholeness.

Western civilization has been dominated from its Graeco-Roman beginnings by separateness which was given philosophical legitimacy by Aristotelian logic and theological legitimacy by Augustine. The entire Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm is built on this reductionist, pragmatic philosophy. Many great scientific discoveries have resulted from this model. However, in the light of serious degradation to the biosphere, many scholars and physicists now recognize an implicit wholeness and connectedness.

Our educational models need to reflect this unity and, as such, holistic education has the potential for transforming the world, each individual-in-relationship at a time.

This dissertation explores and develops an emerging educational model aimed at helping students come to a deeper and broader ecological-spiritual awareness and attitude toward nature through a spiritual identification with it. I argue that this 'identification' actively facilitates and promotes a change in students' behaviour toward the environment and thereby supports a sustainable, ecological ethic. The model will be grounded in case studies from the classroom, follow-up interviews, the writings of various classic and contemporary writers and hands-on experience with teachers and practitioners.

The writings of my students in 'their own words' and text excerpts will be woven throughout. The aim of phenomenological 'truth' is expressive disclosure of immediate experience that enables, in this case, eco-spiritual learning to be seen.. So, I offer up some of the students' reflections to see what can be uncovered in our search for understanding what might be involved in eco-spiritual learning and transformation.

## INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of education should be to enable individual humans to fulfill their proper role in the larger pattern of meaning.

Swimme & Berry (1992)

This research has been a journey of long gestation-an emergent birthing process, on many levels, for me and many others. There have been several deaths and births in my own, immediate family along the way. . . reminding me, profoundly, of the natural cycles of birth/death/re-birth. Much pain and joy! And, always, my students, my teaching, have been my grounding. I have heard and shared many hundreds of their stories of pain and joy over fifteen years, and I hope I can do justice to them. These, mostly young, searching students are our future and their resulting optimism gives me hope. Indeed, without their urgings and enthusiastic encouragement and involvement, none of this would be!

There is a numinous quality to sharing stories around our class circle (campfire) with candlelight in our midst-and of our movement from questioning to discovery that we can make a difference in our dis-eased world, as individuals-in-community. Through their narratives, and my own, I hope to be able to convey the experience and mystery of what it feels like to become an active participant in creation, in the Earth community, to become an 'eco-citizen.'

Not wanting to be solipsistic in any way, I offer our stories of coming to 'eco-spiritual' awareness in the hopes that it may be an example/offer some hope that care and compassion and joy can emerge in the pursuit and practice of earth-centered wisdom, and the process of whole-body and mind, experiential education.

I often tell my story of my childhood tree-house in Hampshire, England. It was a 1,000 year old oak tree, mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1066. It was huge and hollowed out inside, room enough for four of us to fit inside comfortably. It always felt warm and safe with a soft, muskeag-y carpet-floor. We were safe in her. Within, we became blood-sisters and brothers, traded secrets, tried to smoke and gave up, and had picnics. We felt grounded. From our 'natural' home and with our caring group of friends, we felt like we could do anything! Many students have similar childhood stories of connection with Nature. I have sat with my three-year-old grandson while he played for hours in a big, moist, leaf-pile, or handled a wriggly worm or hung out with his big dog-companion, Gus, entranced and enraptured.

We know our primal connection with our matrix, the earth. Our modern, urban society has lost touch with this resulting in dis-ease and addiction (Glendinning, 1992). Our own and indigenous wisdom and women's ways of knowing (Belenky et al, 1986) can bring us home, as responsible, caring two-leggeds-in-relationship, if we care to listen.

This introduction serves to situate myself as a learner-researcher, and what brought me to my particular practice of feminist, embodied pedagogy, and how my life-story has led me to this endeavor. Then, I will provide a brief description of my student-respondents and our classroom setting to contextualize the study. Hopefully, the reader will come to know the people involved through their own words and evocative descriptions of their experiences in our Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions class.

Chapter 1 gives the background of our patriarchal attitudes and behaviours that have led to the present environmental degradation. It explicates how the Enlightenment was a particular hermeneutic or spiritual attitude with concrete implications for our current predicament and that the situation has been exacerbated by both the modern political economy as well as by the typical university emphasis on the head/intellect.

I suggest, along with others, a new kind of teaching/learning, a spiritual pedagogy that involves a sea-change in how we see the world and how we behave. I offer my own case studies of the process involved in my Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions class to show how a spiritual model may point in a more sustainable direction. Though, the focus of this research is not to that question, but simply, towards a new form of teaching that may have such ecological consequences.

Chapter 2, Methodology, describes the existential-phenomenological method and case studies, a multi-method, qualitative approach, I will be using to give voice to an aspect of my students' and my own experience of eco-spiritual learning. This embodied experience addresses the student holistically: mind, body and spirit, as 'beings-in-the-world' compared with the Cartesian and patriarchal dualistic split of mind/body, subject/object, religion/science, etc. This approach wedds humanistic objectivity and engaged subjectivity.

I plan to weave together my own experience, that of my students 'in their own words,' and scholarly and literary texts to get at the particular sort of learning I want to elucidate. . . I will use the responses to over 35 questionnaires and six in-depth, follow-up case-studies, that may point to a new model of learning/teaching earth education. This

kind of spiritual learning is also a pedagogy of liberation or empowerment (Paulo Freire, 1970, 1999; bell hooks, 1994).

Chapter 3, The Model, has a focus toward developing a morphology of a pedagogy for eco-citizenship, for personal empowerment, and a resulting caring for the 'ecos' (our home, earth, all beings). It is the substantive piece of the research, integrating students 'own words' to elucidate what might be the steps or aspects involved in such transformational learning? This 'conscientization' is not a linear progression per se, but can occur in a roundabout way or even simultaneously.

I suggest a HELP model, as recurring issues of (1) Holistic Education, (2) Embodiment, (3) Liberation and (4) Possibility seem to emerge as we look at how students come to see/interpret life differently than they did prior to the class. What elements are involved in how they come to experience change in themselves,(identity), their relations with others, and their actual behaviours?

The discourse of eco-feminists, deep ecologists, eco-psychologists, philosophers, theologians, and the practitioners and elders of the indigenous and wisdom traditions are helpful in articulating the kind of spiritual learning involved.

There are also continuing emerging themes around community, interconnection and immanence. There is invariably a movement from feeling lost and alone to one where we feel part of a larger reality, of creation, if you like. I describe these steps in my autobiographical introduction to show how my own experience as a student led me to develop a particular praxis.

Finally, the Conclusion addresses how this model of learning might help to meet the ecological problem outlined in Chapter 1 and begin to answer the four research questions of this dissertation.

**Borderlands...who am I as a teacher/researcher? Who are my student/learners?**

I love teaching! I have been doing it all my adult life both in the United Kingdom and the United States, in pre-schools, high schools, adult education, and universities. My great-aunts in Wales before and during World War 1, my adventurous aunt who went to Canada in the 20s, my sister and three cousins are all teachers. It's in my blood. Though I have been offering the Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions<sup>1</sup> course for fifteen years, since writing and receiving a Summer Fellowship Award, I am very much on the margins, as a part-time, non-tenure track instructor. There are drawbacks and advantages to this: the main asset being that I've had the freedom to "be/do differently."

I have used and am still developing, an engaged, holistic pedagogy, as opposed to the traditional, authoritarian, didactic model of the 'modern' university (the last 300 years) which tends to compartmentalize and privatize knowledge. Engaged pedagogy uses practices that provide students with ways of knowing that enhance their ability to live fully and deeply. They want knowledge that is meaningful. It means that my voice is not the only account of what happens in the classroom. Hence, I will be using/integrating the voices of my students to speak for themselves, as they do in our classes. (Their voices will be in italics.)

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<sup>1</sup>These are immanent spiritual traditions that see divinity in all creation, compared with transcendent (Semitic, patriarchal) religious traditions that see spirit as outside creation, and relatively inaccessible, e.g., God the Father in Heaven.

I call it Women's Spirituality as it is more inclusive than feminist spirituality, and it is political in the sense that it is about social change.

Holistic education addresses the mind, the body and the spirit, where students and instructors regard one another as ‘whole’ human beings, not seeking book-knowledge alone but also knowledge about how to live in the world. My/our students are ‘seekers’ and I believe there is an aspect of our teaching vocation that is sacred.

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994, p. 13)

Feminist pedagogy and Women’s Studies epistemology have offered a connection between ideas/theory and practice, striving to create particular spaces for the sharing of knowledge. Many students enter feminist classrooms expecting the opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom—as liberatory. But, progressive, holistic education, engaged pedagogy, is even more challenging than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy, because it emphasizes “well-being.” This means teachers must be committed to self-actualisation, and well-being, too, if they are to teach in a way that empowers students.

‘The practice of a teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, she or he cannot help many people.’

Tich Nhat Hanh

While it is unreasonable for students to expect classrooms to be therapy, it is appropriate for them to hope the knowledge will enrich and enhance them; be meaningful, applicable knowledge. We must also allow ourselves to be vulnerable, being wholly present to our students/co-researchers, in mind, body and spirit. When professors share narratives and our own experience in discussions and conversations, we’re no longer all-knowing, silent interrogators, and our stories can show how experience can



illuminate our understanding of academic material. This integration of theory and praxis helps address a dis-ease in the academy where the Aristotelian head is severed from the all-knowing body. (See Chapter 1, Background, for future discussion on this,)

Paulo Freire challenged the ‘banking system’ of education that requires students to consume information fed by a professor to memorise, store and regurgitate it for examinations. He insisted that education could be the practice of freedom, a liberatory pursuit where we can all know—a ‘conscientization’ with emphasis on praxis—action and reflection upon the world in order to change it. This is engaged, holistic pedagogy.

At this juncture, I would like to share my story as to how I came to such a pedagogy for empowerment. My commitment to learning kept me in school, but I often felt alienated from traditional education: the passivity and detachment and the authoritarianism. I was given hope and possibility by particular teachers along the way who modeled and exercised other ways of being and doing. It is my hope to teach in ways that do not reinforce existing systems of domination. My work addresses the gender oppression of women (and nurturant qualities of men) and by association, of the earth. My ecofeminist epistemological standpoint implies this. (More on this later.)

### **Personal Background and Influential Teachers**

I am a white, middle-class, English, educated, married, divorced, re-married, 58-year old mother of two sons and three grandchildren. I grew up in post-war England, (b. ’46) in a time of rationing and bombed-out buildings. My parents, everyone’s, lives were changed by the war. My mother joined the Voluntary Auxiliary Detachment and wore the uniform of a naval nurse, nursing and meeting allied troops. My father became an army squadron tank commander in India and Burma and returned four years later, a highly-

decorated hero. . . and PTSD (though it was not recognized in those days). Together, with his childhood in the Depression in Wales, where two of his brothers had to go into the coal mines, our household was very conservation-conscious. We recycled out of necessity—I remember making our Christmas tree bells every season out of the silver foil milk-bottle caps. And year-round, all silver wrapping was collected to give to the Blind/seeing-eye Dog Fund. We were never allowed to leave the table without clearing our plate: “they’re starving in India!” to which we irreverently replied: ‘Well, let’s pack it up and send it to them, then!’ We grew our own vegetables, had fruit trees and our grandfather would come over at weekends to help dig the potatoes! My mother cooked, baked, bottled and sewed, knitted and repaired. . . everything was fixed and maintained and nothing was thrown away! The tea-leaves were thrown on the roses and the birds got all the (soaked) stale bread. Leftovers were lunch the next day. Our father was the consummate recycler to his dying day and I thought him obsessive, but now I see him as my greatest teacher.

BUT, I am painfully aware that I do not live simply, or very sustainably, today, in terms of my ecological footprint and lifestyle! How do we become responsible, caring eco-citizens? What causes us to ‘walk our talk’ and change our daily behaviours, even when we ‘know better’? These are two of my research questions addressed in my teaching and in this dissertation. And, how to go about using a praxis for empowerment? An empowerment that helps a student come to voice and to become a ‘change agent’ in their own domain and hopefully, in the public arena?

It will be important to address the important and dominant worldview that has brought us to the brink of an eco-spiritual crisis. Writers, artists, philosophers and

theologians have been warning us for over a century. William Morris, Ruskin, Mary Shelley, Blake and Coleridge all foresaw the downside of capitalism and ‘romanticised’ Nature. Goethe and Schiller urged us to beware in Germany. On this side of the Atlantic, we’ve had eloquent warnings from Emerson and Thoreau and thinkers such as Tillich and Einstein and the Dalai Lama have enjoined us to question our behaviour. So, what does it take to question our insidious indoctrination in capitalism, consumerism and materialism, and the denial inherent in our secular, post-modern society? And, what are these ingrained, cultural mores and values of our modern worldview that keep most of us in a mad rush to acquire and consume, with little time for simple pleasures, like sitting in our gardens and parks, or just being present to our natural world, to our animals, to our children and grandchildren at play? Why is it that we often escape into sex, drugs, alcohol, eating disorders and shopping to fill ourselves up? Many of us detect an emptiness in our lives; many suggest that there is a spiritual void in our world at large.

The human is considered to be “homo economicus,” an essentially economic being. Thus, economic matters are believed to be the source of our happiness. Economic expansion through industrialization, computerization and globalization is the Holy Grail of materialism. Such Progress is considered to be evolutionary. Modern socialization structures our understanding of the world via the-isms of objectivism, rationalism, the mechanistic worldview, reductionism and scientism. Work and education are based on standardization, bureaucratization and centralization. The modern approach to nature is anthropocentric and guided by instrumental reasoning. Above all, modern culture sees itself as a victorious force progressing in opposition to nature and has contempt for non-modern cultures, with their primitive worldviews, such as their ‘sacred whole’ and

reciprocal responsibilities toward the Earth community. The spiritual life is devalued, being the farthest from 'rational' thinking. Higher education is compartmentalized into insular disciplines. Relationships of competition and dominance or submission are preferred and 'masculine' traits of 'reason,' are valued above 'feminine' traits of empathy and relationship, etc. As eco-feminists Vandana Shiva, Karen Warren, Charlene Spretnak and others have pointed out in their gender analysis, both women and Mother Earth have been oppressed and violated since the masculist assertion of the Enlightenment: "cogito ergo sum." There is an eco-spiritual crisis, and secular education, having thrown out the baby with the bath water, reflects and perpetuates it.

Education instead has become an institution whose purpose in the modern world is not to make culture, not to serve the living cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. Education as we know it, from preschool through graduate school, damages the soul. (Robert Sardello, 1992, *Facing the World with Soul*, p.50)

In the words of the Dalai Lama:

Simply make clear the essential human values: a warm heart, a sense of caring for one another... These values can be taught without referring to a religious point of view. . . . Learning to care for others is a key point in our survival (1999, p. 2).

He goes on to say he fundamentally believes in giving individuals a sense of hope, of "somehow helping them to believe in their own inner potentials" (1999, p. 2).

Along with the waning of religious traditions and values (love, compassion, forgiveness) the advancements and development of science and technology led people to believe that all problems could be solved through technological means, the "quick, outer fix." We have learned to systemically disconnect self from the world, self from others, and even self from Self. People living in modern societies are afflicted with a permanent identity crisis: it is open-ended, transitory and changing. It is peculiarly individuated and

the ability to fashion one's life as freely as possible is taken to be a basic right. Religion that once enabled us to 'feel at home' in the universe is privatized in modern societies, and is experienced as fragile, possibly artificial and unreliable. Our do-it-yourself universe of meaning-making is fraught with frustration and we are homeless in the cosmos. What can we be doing differently in our culture in order to engender, to learn, a more compassionate way of being, to feel an integral part of the whole wondrous web of life, to love and sustain it and not to be tearing it apart? Of course, education plays a major role in this kind of learning.

This brings me back to my own story. I had just turned forty, and in spite of giving myself a celebratory birthday party, I had many voices saying, "Over the hill!" I was newly divorced, a mother of two confused, questioning teenage sons, with a big, old house to pay for. It was, indeed, one of those major crossroads in life when one wonders what and where and why? I'd started a holistic health center in the house to generate income, and to be able to put to use my newly-acquired skills as a massage therapist learning about healing. It was suggested I look into divinity school given my interest in a life of service. I was accepted! The early months were full of confusion and searching, until I finally fell upon a class in Feminist Theology taught by Dr. Sharon Welch, who was only hired for three years. My experience as a student in this class transformed my life. This is how I wanted to teach.

My dissertation argues that this transformational learning toward eco-citizenship and empowerment must have an eco-spiritual emphasis to be effective in terms of any authentic change. Never mind, "Is there a God at Harvard Divinity School?" What was I, Penelope Morrow, a forty-year-old divorced mother of two teenage sons, born and raised

in England, doing at Harvard Divinity School? I was becoming desperate, wondering if this was really what I wanted: the academic and prestigious halls of learning that offered yet more intellectualized questions and answers? I will never forget my initial interview with my advisor, Dr. Ecker, the Buddhist scholar. (I was accepted to study the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and was exploring Buddhist practice.) I asked him enthusiastically what his Buddhist practice was. There he was sitting in his Harvard chair, surrounded by tomes, in this monastic room – he backed away from me and stiffly and haughtily replied: “Penelope, I’m a scholar, not a meditator! I nearly fell off my chair, and feeling repelled as a human being, a fellow-seeker, I left his office knowing I was in the wrong place! This was confirmed shortly afterward when I attended the first introductory lecture by Dr. Yamamoto on Zen Buddhism, His Japanese accent was so strong, and the content was so dense, I left feeling this is all very Zen, but I don’t think I’m going to learn anything here!

Just previous to coming to Harvard Divinity School I’d been in analysis with a Jungian trying to sort out and understand the huge loss and transition I was undergoing with the break-up of my sixteen-year marriage. I was fascinated by working at the symbolic level and of interpreting dreams and the psyche, and I was drawn to study more. So, I was in a year-long Jungian Analytic Seminar at Andover-Newton Seminary. The Boston Theological Institute, consisted of seven theological schools, and we were allowed to take up to half our courses at any school while pursuing 50% of our studies at the graduate school where we were registered. Harvard had no “alternative” psychology courses, only offering one Family Systems course which I took, and found totally uninspiring. The only inspired piece of the semester was when Dr. Burton, a Boston University psychologist, was away at a conference, and a female family therapist came to

talk to us, Dr. Ann Maddocks. She talked about the feminist critiques of the model that tended to maintain the status quo. I loved this! This had been my frustration as a psychiatric social worker at Massachusetts General Hospital twenty years earlier when I sensed the uselessness of trying to force round pegs into square holes—or use drugs and shock treatment! I proceeded to write an extensive critique of the Family Systems model (as I had done of the AA 12-step Recovery Model in another class) and consequently, did not please the professor.

So, I was searching... for something more spiritual, more soulful, more inspirational, more meaningful, more. . . life-changing. . .

I truly loved the content of all my courses and the headiness of the intellectual discourse and the inquiry. One could not help but be inspired and impressed just “being” at Harvard. I soaked it all up: the exposure to the brilliant and famous professors, the interesting cross-section of students, exploring courses in the Yard (Harvey Cox and Carol Gilligan) and attending courses at the other schools (Mary Daly at Boston College, Carter Heyward at Episcopal Divinity School). But, I hadn’t been totally “grabbed” . . . something was lacking.

Soon, a small group of half a dozen or so of us began to develop a camaraderie, a closeness. I think we all met at one of Richard Niebuhr’s courses. There was Roger, a passionate, intense, handsome and fun, gay fellow from Washington, DC. There was the sweet, good man, Rick, who was a counselor at the Perkins School for the Blind and the brain-injured; and his sweet, bright partner-to-be, Gail, who became the Assistant Registrar at Harvard Divinity School. There was Tom Chappell, of Tom’s of Maine fame, bringing the ‘soul into business,’ and the outdoorsy, healthy, reflective couple from

Florida, and the brilliant, young lesbian who went on to Vanderbilt. We jelled as a group of seekers. They often got out of the city and the pressures of school, and came up to our ten-room, funky house in York, Maine, for a retreat of like minds. We realized that we found God at Harvard by forming a small, close-knit community among ourselves, sharing our process, our learnings, our frustrations, our intentions to explore a deeper level, to be more. . . Fifteen years later, I'm still in touch with Roger, the first of the cohorts—we're very close.

So, I was still searching for that 'aha' moment. First, I needed to find a new advisor for myself! I heard Sharon Parks was good—human and caring and brilliant. Her field is Pastoral Counseling but it was not mine, as I knew I did not want to be ordained or part of any (Christian) institutional church. I wanted to work with and minister to all faiths and peoples. I had started a Holistic Health Center at my house in York, Maine, where I was one of six practitioners using alternative healing modalities and therapies. Dr. Parks was not the mentor I was looking for.

Following the “via negativa” had left me lost and directionless and disconnected. I had no intention of being ordained like most of my fellow students. Intensive Jungian studies began to feel like a double-fitting of all experience into one man's archetypal theory, Buddhist studies were too heady and not about practice, and the courses on the body with Margaret Miles were about denial of the body from Augustinian theology and Gnosticism. I was lost in a sea of Christian and Unitarian whiteness. Was I wasting my incredible opportunity to explore religious thought and the meaning of life? Was I wasting time and money? What was I doing commuting two and three times a week from Maine to Cambridge, sometimes staying overnight, leaving my family, which was



already in a state of upheaval from the trauma of the extended separation and divorce? I still trusted I'd find spirit at Harvard. I was looking for the Real in this world of increasing virtual reality and detachment and absence of the sacred. I was selected to be part of a seminar in Native-American Spirituality, which I loved, but it was not my heritage, my reality, so not something I could fully relate and enter into. But, I was getting closer... the issue for me was how I might live more deeply and meaningfully. I was aching for spiritual growth and learning.

Then, it happened. I walked into professor Sharon Welch's feminist theology class. . . the students were sitting in a circle with flowers and a candle in the middle of the floor. The TA was strumming a guitar and the professor, I gradually realized, was the petite woman standing with a baby in a papoose on her back. The atmosphere was relaxed, the sun was streaming in through the high, clerestory windows. I felt I was home, and yet, it felt like a sacred space. This was what I was searching for at Harvard Divinity School: a learning experience that was human and welcoming and that had a spiritual dimension. I believe this was the introductory session. We were going around the circle naming ourselves and why we were there and what we were hoping for. I think this was a 'first' at Harvard Divinity School. Dr. Welch (to be known as Sharon) outlined the expectations of the class. She would lecture at the beginning for only about ten minutes, highlighting some points regarding the readings for the day, and following this, the individual and groups would be responsible for a more in-depth critique of the readings. . . 'would anyone like to volunteer for the first presentation?' I was so excited by the collegial agenda that I threw my hand up! I couldn't believe it. . . I'd volunteered to give the opening talk in the grandiose Sperry Room, from the lectern where ALL the

famous theologians, authors and professors had stood, on Mary Daly, no less! It was scary but enormously empowering!

This class was the ultimate, transformational experience for me in terms of my waning enthusiasm for being at school. I was passionate about the course: my teacher, my peers, the content, and the process. Our collegial, collaborative small groups were mutually inspiring and the encouragement and support for our individual presentations was powerful. Yes, I wanted to hear and learn more from our esteemed professor, who'd written "Communities of Solidarity and Resistance," but I began to realize how much we could learn from our peers and their experience (there were many priests and nuns in plain clothes) and more importantly, how much deeper was the learning when we had to do it for ourselves and one another. I looked forward to the class like no other, and loved the sense of community that grew among the fellow students. Indeed, it was here that I met a couple of the people who would become my spiritual support group for the duration. It was hard to address Professor Welch as Sharon, and I was quite tongue-tied whenever I'd see her around campus. I'm sure this stemmed from my English background where the university professors were the Herr Doktors of our highly-stratified, authoritarian education system where, in my day, in the 60s, only 3% of our population got to university. Sharon Welch was doubtless more approachable than I felt she was.

I know that my development as a teacher, my approach/style is most definitely an outcome of my learning experience in Sharon Welch's Feminist Theology course. The feminist pedagogical methods of integrating theory with reflection and praxis and collaborative learning and sharing are very important to me. The idea of 'relationship' in

the classroom, of modeling the egalitarianism of mutual learning, and the development of a sense of community and trust are key in my understanding of my teacher-facilitator role. I am aware of the personal empowerment that emerges from such an attitude that engenders individual and group blossoming. I see the shine in my student's eyes, the excitement in their smile, as they start to speak and to contribute more and more—they remind me of myself seventeen years ago! And the mirroring they do, we all do, for one another, serves as a catalyst for more discoveries, the yearning for self-knowledge. This cycle of enthusiasm for 'something deeper,' for meaning, escalates. . . it's contagious, and the students write and talk about how their discussions and learnings continue with their roommates, their friends, their mothers. I remember that was the excitement of our core-group of seminarians, when our discussions from the class extended into the cafeteria and our homes. The readings, the ideal, the experiential, was becoming more real to us, the more we integrated them into our everyday lives.

I'll never forget my first experience of circles, of ceremony, of ritual created in our class community, and then co-creating and exploring in circles of our own with friends. Such excitement! Such freedom! Such potential! The realization that we didn't have to depend on the male, ordained clergy for access to God: that we all have this ability. This kind of knowledge is truly liberating.

Also, there's no question that the content of Welch's course was empowering and liberating in itself. Hearing and reading about the very idea that God was a Woman and that we have a 35,000 year old history that has been erased from our patriarchal Greco-Roman history books was mind-blowing and eye-opening, to say the least! What confirmation! Not just confirmation of me, as a woman, crucial in itself, but also in the

affirmation of life itself: of the interconnectedness of ALL things, of Relationship, of the Mother Earth herself. What more could a female seeker find: BALANCE in all things, a balance of Yin and Yang, of male and female, the anima and the animus, of Creation as Mother Earth and Father Sky. How liberating this is for men, too, trapped in their limitations of extreme gender stereotyping, and as fodder for wars, emotionally suppressed. (Boys don't cry!) I have two sons and two husbands (one ex!) and two grandsons. . . all very sensitive males, seeking wholeness. What healing potential there is in the discovery of the missing female power.

I know now, after fifteen years of teaching in this compassionate vein, that our students, male and female, feel this way. Visions of hope and possibility replace and melt away the limitations and chains of modern and post-modern thinking, both atrophied monsters of materialism.

I know for myself, and also for the majority of my students, that the discovery of the Goddess has been sorely missing from the God the Father concept. Not only are women now included in the possibility of divinity and wholeness, but we also now have a heritage to be proud of—women were worshipped as life-givers and miraculous, cosmic beings! It is important for us white, western women, and men, to rediscover that we have an indigenous heritage, too. Now, we can know of our intimate connection with the earth, with nature, with one another, with all there is.

I think this is the break-through concept/experience for ecological identification! This mystical realization addresses the whole-sightedness of Parker Palmer and Robert Frost. Buddhism emphasizes the joining of wisdom and knowledge in education. Knowledge and information by themselves, without compassion, lead to heartless

understanding. This is largely the dilemma in our world at war today. Intrapsychically, people are at war within themselves. Bringing the heart back into education is a way of healing our dis-ease. When we show we care and we are reminded of our potential, then there is hope. When teachers model caring and compassion, then the student can respond in kind, and the process of learning becomes hopeful and liberating.

I know that my own experience of my own potential, within a sense of community, inspired me to learn and grow, and my wish as a teacher is to encourage the same liberatory, emancipatory excitement in my students. My research hopes to explore and point to a model, a praxis, that engenders such knowledge and eco-spiritual awareness.

This research/study is by no means conclusive or definitive but it may point a way toward an education for eco-citizenship, an awareness that seems to be borne out of an identification with, and love for, our earth and all her beings.

### **Who Are My Students?**

The majority of students in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions courses are women, between 18-22 years of age, white, mostly from New Hampshire (UNH is a state school), lower to middle-class, with mainly a Roman Catholic background (largely Irish and Italian descent). However, UNH is attracting an increasing number of out-of-staters, and these students tend to be more privileged, with some women of colour. Typically, each semester, there are one or two men in a class of twenty or so women, and one or two older students, several identified lesbians, all of whom add some diversity of experience and variant Voices to the mix. I've had two mothers and daughters take the class (see case studies) and two grandmothers and their

granddaughters (separately). There's often a member of staff/faculty in our group, which also adds a mature perspective, and there have been several graduate students, including Ph.D. candidates—one of whom is a case study. Many have gone on to graduate school. (I have written many recommendations, as we in our Women's Studies Programme realize, we know our students better than many of their Major advisers do!) Many are/become change agents in the society at large and many stay in touch. One of the fun parts of this research has been finding former students and hearing what they are doing!

Looking at the rosters from the fifteen years of offering this class, students come from all departments across the college, mostly from Liberal Arts, with more and more coming with an Environmental Conservation/Environmental Education emphasis. Over the last five years, many students came from Professor Chris Schadler's Environmental Conservation class, turned on by her engaged teaching, but with an overwhelming sense of paralysis about what to do in the face of an overload of depressing information with regard to what we have done to our planet! They are feeling a sense of hopelessness and are looking for some hope. Many have heard from former students and friends who took the class that this class is a space where community and spiritual practices offer some coping skills and hope.

I would say that the self-selected group that finds this class are "seekers"! Mostly, their Catholic background has not worked for them, as women, for the earth, and they are looking for something more. . . more connection, more hope more spiritual. . . . I suggest in this dissertation-research that there seem to be some key components that are essential in developing a 'praxis of empowerment,' and that a pedagogy that moves us from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview/identification is vital.

As Hage and Rauckiene (2004) of Klaipeda University, Lithuania, write:

(Environmental ) Education as a process of reconstruction is aimed at changing the system of values, knowledge, activity or behavior. . . The principles of ecological consciousness are identical to the principles of humanistic psychology: self-actualisation, awareness, responsibility and authenticity, can address our environmental crisis through concepts and practice of empathy, unconditional positive regard and a wider identification beyond humankind to include the natural world (p. 61).

In working towards developing a praxis/model for eco-awareness and eco-citizenship, I propose there has to be a paradigmatic shift from the I to the We of humanity, a knowing that we are all part of nature, inter-connected, and this is essentially a psycho-spiritual shift. “Ecological consciousness should be more metaphysical, and should explain the perception of human in the universe” (Kuhn, 1970).

### **The Classroom: Student Words**

A spiritual education tends to the aesthetic; art and beauty need to be part of education. Our classroom will typically have flowers, a central altar adorned with cloth and personal religious objects—paintings, pictures, photos, books, music—and there’s always food. Similarly, with the class assignments, the weekly group collaborative, and student presentations, we all contribute and bring in that which aesthetically pleases: poetry, music, artistic expressions, collages, etc.

*I rejoiced in the weekly service which was W.S. 595. Each class offered some component of ritual and still encouraged intellectual thought. In the classroom there was a scarf or a cloth in the center of the circle of chairs. On it were lit candles and incense, so the space would not only appear welcoming but would smell welcoming. Strewn across this altar were artifacts brought in by students or selected especially for the day from Penney’s personal collection. My favorites were the goddess figure replicas. I developed a habit of sketching goddesses while in the class that go into the margins of my notebooks still. Class would open with a call to mindfulness and would proceed as a dialogue that incorporated the thoughts and feelings of the 40 some students in the class ... conversations were frequently picked up again during the week if a classmate was spotted around campus....their faces were like oasis’ in the desert of busy bodies who were just going to their next destination. (D. M. Interview 10/18/04)*

Together, with visiting practitioners of the different religious and spiritual traditions we are studying, we are able to ‘experience’ the texts through movement, dance, healing circles, artifacts, visuals and dialogue (see Appendix F). This way, spirituality provides theory in practice and in such a framework/epistemology, concepts are recast and have different shades of meaning. Such embodied learning allows for a primal learning, a Re-membering—that we are all connected. Spirituality and this work of education implies relationships with each other, with other traditions, with all there is. It is this identification or knowledge that I hope to demonstrate, which may lead to attitudinal and behavioral change in terms of how we live our lives on the earth. The wisdom and indigenous, spiritual traditions and understanding have much to teach us. These ancient cultures make no separation between the sacred and the secular. Indeed, their language often has no word for ‘religion.’ And art, music and movement are all part of everything—of Life and reverence.

As spirituality is part of our being, it is key to embrace this as learners, teachers, academics, and researchers without having to render any of ourselves invisible. When Carl Jung, the psychiatrist, was asked by Bill W., one of the founders of AA, and a patient, if he could keep the ‘spiritual’ out of the program – Jung replied that it is the ‘spiritual’ that would make the behavioral/attitudinal changes work: “*spiritus con spiritum.*” The substitute use of spirits was the search for Spirit!

Our weekly three-hour class begins with quiet and meditation, led by either students, the teacher, or the guest. Daily practice is encouraged. Here, the Zen Buddhist writings of Thich Nhat Hanh are the most accessible and encouraging to the students.



*I really enjoyed the Book: Being Peace, by Hanh. I use that book as a centering tool whenever I need to step back from my busy life. It helps me to gain perspective on what's really important." (J. D. interview, 4/1/05)*

How can we have peace, social justice, harmony in the world, if we do not have it/be it ourselves? Our visit to the local Western Buddhist Order ashram, Aryaloka, in Newmarket, allows us to practice under the guidance of an ordained, woman priest, Amala. This is often a life-changing experience in terms of what a difference meditation can make in terms of our inner, and consequently our outer differences and behaviors. The weekly Reflections/Responses on the Readings are also a key piece of self-knowledge and awareness in terms of our own attitudes and lifestyles vis-à-vis the earth. Our sharing of these reflections engender lively and profound discussions.

The goal of Environmental Education is to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its' associated problems and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively towards solutions of current problems and prevent new ones. (Clover, 2003)

The above description of our classroom dynamics and pedagogies is an attempt to engender such consciousness toward the environment. J.D. writes:

*The Universe as a whole does not offer a wide range of options for one to actually explore themselves and their relationship to the earth and other peoples. My search for spirituality and the resources I acquired through this class have helped to shape it. (Interview, 4/1/05)*

I am often affectionately known as Mary Poppins or the consummate Bag-Lady. From the first day of class, I arrive with several bags of accoutrements, books, flowers and food. The students see that this is going to be a different sort of class! There is excitement in the air. It's always held on Friday afternoons, so I know I will have committed students who really want to be here. Ultimately, the engaged, holistic, liberatory class must have love/eros in it, to model and engender the care and compassion

that is developed in a community, to ‘feel for the organism’ that is our environment—to move from the microcosmic to the macro—from ‘I’ to ‘We’ that defines an identity with the planet, an identity as an eco-citizen. D.R. says:

*A classroom with love in it. That is what is the most meaningful. It sounds strange and cheesy, but it wasn't strictly professional, and it wasn't "fluffy" either. It was deeply meaningful and life changing.* (Interview 8/21/05)

bell hooks (1994) in her ground-breaking essay, *Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process*, writes:

Understanding that eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination (p. 195).

Here, she refers to Sam Keen's definition (*The Passionate Life*, 1984) that in its earliest conception, “erotic potency was not confined to sexual power but included the moving force that propelled every life—form from a state of mere potentiality to actuality.” She continues:

Given that critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully, to some extent it must rely on the presence of the erotic in the classroom to aid the learning process.

Not only does holistic, progressive pedagogy break down the body/mind split, but also breaks down the false dichotomy between object/subject knowledge and the inside world of the academy and the outside world since the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are occurring (e.g., the sense of community that develops). Thomas Merton in his essay on pedagogy, “Learning to Live,” suggests the purpose of education is to “discover the ground of their being in

relation to themselves, the higher powers, to community.” I agree this is the aim of environmental education in particular.

C.G. writes:

*I was able to connect with this life form of energy that I never named as such before. Once you can learn to tap into that, it is transformational.....I became aware of a larger order of things. I understand my part in the larger picture that transcends time and space.” (Interview, 3/24/05.)*

Her response to the question what else from W.S. 595 has she integrated into her life,

C.G. responds:

*I knew that I could not live with things as they were and with this incredible awareness came a responsibility to myself that would change my life for ever.” She continues: I read back on journals I wrote in class and was shocked at the tension and anger and didn't even know I was experiencing. I resolved the tension by taking actions. Now I am living my authentic self and feel the satisfaction that being aligned with goals and values can bring.*

Ten years later, C.G. is a consultant nurse and educates other nurses in and around Boston. She enjoys teaching/helping the healing professionals.

### **How Do I Set Up, Organize My Classroom/Dynamics?**

In the feminist classroom, we certainly do not have the teacher standing behind or at a podium, lecturing at the students as the authority, separated and above our students! We meet in circles, so no-one has their back to another: we are equals. There is a face-to-face relationship and respect for what everyone says; we are challenged to recognize each other's presence and are physically close to one another. The instructor is also offering something of ourselves to our students. We are bodies:

I think that one of the unspoken discomforts surrounding the way of discourse of race and gender, class and sexual practices has disrupted the academy is precisely the challenge to (that) mind/body split. Once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we're automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space. The person who is the most powerful has the privilege of denying the body. (hooks, 1994, p. 137)

We are subjects; the erasure of the body, and the over-emphasis on our heads (intellect) leads us to believe we're listening to objective, neutral facts. Embodiment disrupts and deconstructs the way power and hierarchy has been used in the classroom. We all have particular knowledge and our stories and we can learn from one another, all coming from our different backgrounds/histories.

Although my female relatives were/are teachers, none has been a university professor, so my identity is not as such. I am also a bodyworker, holistic health counselor, mother, etc., and I am more comfortable in this non-hierarchical setting where we are all learning and becoming, together. And the luxurious fact that Women's Studies tries to limit our classes to 25 students allows for us to truly get to know one another. We practice a highly-participatory, interactive pedagogy. There is much discussion of the texts and how our experiences relate to the readings. There are no exams per se ( there is a formal, mid-term and a final integrative essay) but weekly, reflective writings on the books, discussions, guest speakers/practitioners and experiences. These are often shared in class. We generally experience a practice once a week and follow-up with the texts and reflection the next week of class. Each student chooses a tradition from the syllabus to research and present, collaboratively, as part of a small group. These students are the experts of the day: they facilitate the discussion. . . our students are empowered to find their Voice. I speak a lot in the first class, explaining our dynamics/expectations, though

students will introduce themselves with their background, context, and why they're here in this particular class.

We all have name placards on our desks until we know each other's names; we are not mere Social Security numbers and we encourage the students to do most of the speaking and ask questions. My role is to facilitate learning, conversation, inquiry and to pursue their questions as they arise, to direct and encourage. I role-model critical inquiry and enthusiasm. Our students are not passive consumers. Some students, trained traditionally, are resistant to such progressive pedagogy—they're not used to engaging/being heard. There's a shifting in ways they think about ideas. . . how do we know what we know? Who owns the knowledge(s)? A 'conscientizacao' (Freire) is being fostered. The status quo is critiqued. The students who select to take Women's Studies courses tend to be on the margins of the academy—females and questioning males—not privileged (we're a land grant, state college), identify with their ethnic heritage, exploring their sexuality, etc. Some women are older, as I am, returning to school after years as a wife and mother and/or in the workforce. Some are members of the UNH community and staff.

Education as the practice of freedom is not just about liberatory knowledge, it is about liberatory practice in the classroom. Sharing personal narratives that link our knowing with academic theory really enhances our capacity to know. Focusing on experience allows students to claim a knowledge base from which they can speak—coming to Voice such that they can speak freely in other settings; listening to one another is integral to this process. It is vital that I, as the teacher show by example the ability to listen to all voices. The sharing and linking of experiences to the academic subject

matter/texts facilitates this, and the more they come to recognize their own uniqueness and their part. Difference and diversity are fascinating and worth learning from and celebrating. It also fosters compassion and understanding.

As a teacher/learner/researcher, I grow intellectually and develop sharper understandings of how to share relevant knowledge and what to do in my participatory role with students. We are a community of learners together. It is not always cosy or joyous—learning as a process of self-discovery can be painful. Challenge to growth and change often is. Class agendas have to be flexible depending on the needs of the students. Letting go of total control is key. It is also important to let the students know that their grade is something they can control by their labour in the classroom—they help evaluate themselves, and this takes away a large piece of the meritocratic, authoritarian pressure from the start.

The academy can, and should, be a place of challenge, dialectical interchange and growth. It can and must be a place that fosters care and connection. As critical pedagogues, we're teaching students ways to think differently, such that knowledge could lead them to live differently. Critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness to provide students with ways of knowing that enables them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully, and more sustainably.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

Religion without Science is blind..  
Science without Religion is lame.  
Einstein.

In this chapter, I propose to describe two major dimensions or ‘threads’ that are seen, by many scholars, as the root cause of the problem of our ecological crisis, today. Both the Enlightenment and the Aristotelian model have greatly influenced our hermeneutic or worldview/paradigm of the West/North over the last 300 years or so and they have led us to view mind over matter, to see the rational, thinking mind, as separate from (and needing to have control over), the feeling, experiencing body. We will see how the concept of ‘body’ also includes the Earth and women as perceived through this androcentric and anthropocentric lens.

First, I would like to address the Enlightenment, a historical fact and an ideal reconstruction that emerged over a hundred years (1685-1793), and was a triumph of humanism (Crocker. 1969). But, it was a particular spiritual attitude with negative implications for our current, ecological predicament.

#### **The Backdrop of Western Civilization: The Enlightenment and How Our Patriarchal Attitudes and Behaviors Have Led to the Present Environmental Degradation**

I would contend that for the majority of the world’s peoples over the history of humanity, cultures and civilizations, religion and science have never been separate. In fact, in most pre-modern languages, there are no words for Religion—it just is—there is

no separation between the sacred and the secular. Other world religions and indigenous spiritual traditions see spirit in Nature and humanity as a humbled, awe-struck, part of it all. In Chinese landscape paintings, we see the tiny figures of human beings, if at all, in the foreground against the huge, towering mountain or the ocean wave.

It is interesting to read of two men, from different cultures (East and West) give their descriptions of climbing Mt. Everest, the highest mountain at 29,000 feet in the Himalayas of Nepal. In 1972, the Japanese climber, Yuichiro Miura (1978), was interviewed in a Seattle newspaper and gave a truly Shinto account of his relationship to Everest:

I was alone on the South Col Saddle, a tiny speck amidst the white expanse. . . . dissolved the essence of my Self into the void of Himalayan sky. . . the Mountain. . . . taught me the real identity of a man named Yuichiro Miura. . . . the sole meaning of one's existence—whether on the highest peak or in the lowliest of pursuits—is not to understand life, or mold it, or change it, or ever really love it. . . . but rather to drink deep of its undying essence (Miura, 1978, p. 92)

By comparison, Huston Smith (1965) remarks:

When Mt. Everest was scaled the phrase commonly used in the West to describe the feat was “the conquest of Everest.” An Oriental whose writings have been deeply influenced by Taoism remarked, “We would put the matter differently. We would speak of ‘the friendship of Everest’” (p. 209).

So, what went wrong in the West, vis-à-vis our attitudes toward the earth/Nature?

It is a combination of influences from the Judeo-Christian Biblical imperative of 2½ to 3,000 years ago to the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Western Europe, and the rise of capitalism and the historicist, March of Progress culminating in Darwin's Evolution of the Species and colonialism. The ‘white men's burden’ as Shiva and Mies (1993) call it, is not a pretty picture. The miracle of science and technology has brought us, in a relatively mere 300 years, to the brink of disaster. It was noted that science brought us out of the realm of mystery and miracles, into the



realm of rational empiricism, but given the extent of the technological fixes and the sci-fi promises of biotechnology and proposed colonization of space, perhaps 'science' should go back from whence it came! The separation of 'fact' from 'value' of mechanistic, Cartesian, dualistic thought and science has been a problem that brings us to this lonely, existential place where 'God is dead' (proclaimed by Nietzsche early this century).

René Descartes and Francis Bacon, the founders of modern science and rationalism, were reacting to the confusion and political chaos of the medieval world of constant war, the Black Death plague, the Roman Catholic Inquisition and the newly-formed Protestant church's murder of women as witches,<sup>2</sup> who were seen as a threat to the Church and the growing medical profession. The cosmic, organismic world-view was replaced by one of control: of nature, of women, of unpredictability. Carolyn Merchant (1980) writes:

Bacon transformed the natural magician as 'servant of nature' into a manipulator of nature and changed art from the aping of nature into techniques (techné) for forcing nature into new forms and controlling reproduction for the sake of production. . . . nature divided into atomic particles which were passive and inert. Human dominion over nature. . . . was to be achieved through the experimental 'disclosure of nature's secrets (pp. 182-188).

What's more the language of Descartes is unashamedly violent and sexist, of rape and teasing and torture, of man's (sic) control over nature, and by association, women.

Historically, our western, European culture is based on the Judeo-Christian Bible. Lynn White, a medieval historian with deep environmental concerns, in his groundbreaking essay, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, sharply criticized this tradition for propagating a view of the universe that sharply separated God and the world

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars give evidence of horrific genocide. Rosemary Reuther numbers them in tens of thousands, Ann Barstow in thousands and Mary Daly notes up to nine million were murdered over 300 years.

and humanity and nature, encouraging a disposition of conquest and exploitation of nature.

And God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him. . . . And God said: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Gen. I. v. 27-28, *New American Standard Bible*).

Together with the Platonic philosophy of separating matter from spirit, female from male, earth from heaven, nature from culture, we can see the disembodiment from our primal matrix that has resulted. Add to this the privileging of the one over the other, and we can understand the oppressive nature of 'modern' societies.

The Enlightenment philosophers dismissed the Middle Ages as an irrational aberration in (European) Civilisation's grand trajectory, that began with Greek rationalism and was energized by the other foundational movements in the birth of modernity: Renaissance humanism, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. It was a radical break from organicism, (hierarchical) holism, and interrelatedness towards neoclassical, mechanistic worldviews. . . . the passage from the Dark Ages to the Enlightenment! How could such brilliance (in the Arts, especially) lead to so much social and ecological destruction? As Spretnak (1997) writes: "the promise of paradise gained must be weighed with the tragedy of paradigms lost" (p. 44).

Wishing to break free of the Church's grip on practically everything, Renaissance humanism contrasts the Christian view of sinful, weak man with a neoclassical sense of rational man's unbounded potential. The Western perception of a radical discontinuity between humans and the rest of the natural world grew out of Platonic philosophy: we're imprisoned in the dumb matter of our bodies, and nature is irrelevant to the culmination of the human race, the Greek male!

Then, the passivity of nature, argued by the Reformation to protect the glory of God, was subsequently adopted by the mechanistic philosophy and became central to the Scientific Revolution. Material bodies are acted upon by external laws such as gravity and inertia. A new worldview was emerging: the Newtonian-Cartesian world of unchanging atomism and a well ordered machine/nature/cosmos. Nature was now to be ‘bound into service’ and ‘made a slave.’ She would be put upon the ‘rack’ of scientific investigation and made to reveal her secrets. Francis Bacon used such language in the courts during the witch-hunt hysteria, the Burning Times, which occurred during this entire period. Scholars estimate that anywhere from hundreds of thousands (Barstow, 1994) to nine million (Daly, 1978) were murdered, mostly women! Both Nature and Women were perceived as forces that had to be controlled.

The panentheistic, medieval, Christian world, where all creation was infused with God’s presence and guidance, was replaced by a clockwork universe that was set in motion by God and operated autonomously according to Newtonian laws ( Deism).

This scientific rationale was particularly influential in the creation of modern, economic theory. Adam Smith (1759) came up with a ‘hidden hand’ of the market: an invisible force organizing all the individual, discrete beings buying or selling labor, services or goods, into a coherent social mechanism. Akin to Newtonian gravitational action at a distance, this was a rational, mechanistic science of economic activity.

In all, modern man emerged as the detached manipulator of the rest of the natural world, with a humanist emphasis that located all value in human endeavours; an ideal liberalism based on individual self-interest.

In the nineteenth century, economic Expansion through imperialism was seen as the answer to growing social problems. Spretnak (1997) shows that the World Wars, the Holocaust, and the Marxist nation-states, the poverty of the Two-Thirds World, were all the result of:

something vital lost. . . when the modern, scientific worldview pushed aside all vernacular knowledge of body, nature and place. The loss was not some sort of ethereal Volkgeist but rather, extremely pragmatic knowledge situated in a web of living relationships (p. 63.).

She cites Vandana Shiva's critique of Modernity's dismissal of local knowledge of agriculture, in India, as a devastating example.

Spretnak (1997), in her insightful, historical overview, then critiques post-modern deconstructivists as modern! . . .

that they have been socialized and educated in the scientific-humanist worldview, that is dedicated to the denial of the power and presence of nature. The myriad ways in which 'social construction' and the deconstructivists' own individual experiences are embedded in the processes of the real—the dynamic physicality of the cosmos—have, in all likelihood, never crossed their minds (p. 66).

She challenges the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of academics and intellectuals who fail to challenge the discontinuities of the modern worldview<sup>3</sup> between humans and nature, body and mind, self and the rest of the world. She challenges their culture/mind ("language games," concepts) that projects assumptions onto the body/dumb, inanimate matter and causes even more separation and discontinuity.

Hence, Spretnak argues for "ecological postmodernism" that replaces groundlessness and relativistic meaninglessness with groundedness, supplanting freedom

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<sup>3</sup> 'Modern' refers to the worldview that reifies reason and objectivity as opposed to 'irritatio,' emotional and relational thought.

from nature with freedom in nature, our cosmos, our home, “our constitutive embeddedness in subtle, bodily, ecological, cosmological processes” (pp. 72-73).

This perspective is emerging from many directions (Spretnak [1997] cites Griffin, Jencks, & Abrams [1996]), and the realization that perception and language are acts of participation in nature, as embodied understanding/knowledge, in contrast to the humanist/Enlightenment worldview that we humans are set apart from other species and dumb nature by our capacity for complex language. There is, in fact, an essential reciprocity between our human senses and the sensuous earth. . . .” the biosphere is experienced and *lived from within* by the intelligent body, rather than seen as an abstract, objectifying concept borrowed from science” (p. 76).

To conclude, Spretnak draws her eco-feminist conclusion:

Modernity’s obsession with order over (the fear of) chaos: illogicality, irrationality, indecisiveness and ambivalence, are all traits, in our patriarchal culture, associates with women! Hence, to be truly post-modern is to be, among other things, ecological and feminist” (p. 79).

### The Aristotelian Head-Disembodied Paradigm

The second ‘thread’ that addresses the problematic background which many argue has brought us to our ecological crisis is the Aristotelian, logical-philosophical model of education with its emphasis on the head/intellect. This is further exacerbated by the modern political economy and the resulting social structures.

Understanding. . . is to see the way things are put together, and to see why and how they work as they do. . . the urge to understand ourselves and the world we live in is one of the noblest and most powerful of human motives; but often when we ask for the bread of understanding, we are fed with the stone of knowledge.

*Unis Journal for Discovering Universal Qualities. Spring 1987.*

A paradigm is dominant not in the statistical sense of being held by most people, but in the sense that it is the paradigm held by dominant groups in industrial societies; and in the sense that it serves to legitimate and justify the institutions and practices of a market economy. . . it is the taken-for-granted common-sensical view which usually determines the outcome of debates on environmental issues.

Paradigms then provide maps of what the world is believed to be like. They constitute guidelines for identifying and solving problems. Above all, paradigms provide the framework for meaning within which 'facts' and experiences acquire significance and can be interpreted (Cotgrove, 1982).

The dominant social paradigm that has held sway in everything from our cultural beliefs and politics to our educational system has been that of modernism and mechanistic, empirical science and rationalism. Since Descartes uttered those infamous words—"cogito, ergo sum"—rational thought/mind has been in charge. And since Aristotle declared women and animals of not having a mind, or a soul (confirmed by Aquinas 1300 years later), women being inferior mutations of man, androcentric, rational thought has been the *modus operandi* for 400 years or more. I would argue that education, especially higher education, has been operating on the Aristotelian, separated-head model, dissociated from the body, and, dare we say it, the soul? Yes, we have had a disembodied educational paradigm in the sciences, particularly, which has definitely influenced the social sciences and even the humanities, all of which have been seeking academic credibility. I would contend that the crisis in the humanities/liberal arts, and in the university, in general, is due largely to the fact that education is not addressing the whole human being: the body and the soul, as well as the mind, of the student.

The prevalent paradigm(s) of modernism, mechanistic materialism and subjective idealism, although they served post-medieval, enlightenment Europe well vis-à-vis the perceived chaos of the times, are becoming outmoded in the educational arenas, especially the field of environmental sciences. As well as my own relatively brief encounters with the science courses, I have had countless students, over ten years, despair over the information-overload of environmental education requirements. They entered the program because of a deep caring for the earth, and part-way into it, realise that they

feel overwhelmed by the facts, the science aspect, and a definite lack of values training and ethics with a resultant feeling of alienation and paralysis in terms of what can be done. One mature, bright student told me this semester that she thought she could come back to school and put her spiritual life on the 'back burner,' while she pursued her degree in Environmental Conservation, but she realised she couldn't separate the two and was at a crisis point of whether to continue.

The modern worldview has imposed devastating discontinuities between humans and the rest of the natural world, between self and others, and between body and mind (Spretnak, 1997).

In essence, that which can be measured, counted, and quantified is made central. It might seem that adopting such an orientation would yield concrete, reliable knowledge about the world, but certain ideological assumptions underlie the seemingly obvious decisions about how, what and why to quantify. Modern science constructed mechanistic models of how the world works and then perceived only the sorts of data that would fit the model. Like any cultural orientation, the modern worldview has accrued a complex record of successes and failures.

What is this modern worldview we find implicit in our educational system, including environmental education? Contrary to public opinion and what is taught in various sub-fields of science (environmental conservation), the scientific way of understanding natural phenomena is based on a culturally specific epistemology. This is often overlooked partly because of the legitimating ideology that few people are able or willing to question, and partly because the cultural epistemology shared by scientists has become so widespread around the world that it has taken on the mythic status of a 'culture-free' mode of inquiry. Even the biological aspects of human and other forms of

life are influenced by cultural practices. The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), suggests that the word 'culture' should be seen as:

. . . denoting a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life (p. 89).

What are these cultural attitudes manifested in [environmental] education?

Spretnak (1994) names them: "the Western patriarchal worldview of fragmentation, alienation, agonistic dualism, and exploitative dynamics" (p. 187). Carolyn Merchant (1980, p. xviii) elaborates on a perspective that includes both nature and humankind in explaining the developments that resulted in the death of nature as a living being and the acceleration in the exploitation of both human and natural resources in the name of culture and progress. The modern worldview holds a salvational sense of progress and sees economic expansion and technological innovation at the center of importance.

There are issues of both substance and process here. The teaching pedagogy mirrors the content of the courses, in the sense they're all part and parcel of the same Objectivist paradigm. There is an emphasis on the individual and his/her own problem-solving ability and the pressure to be prepared for the 'real world' of consumerism and the job market of government, industry or corporate America where technical fixes are the mainstay. There is very little questioning of the fundamental norms and values and with the model of top-down teaching, from the authority, there is very little collaborative, 'inner-directed' learning. I interviewed two professors in the field of Environmental Conservation and, although they try to teach the material in a systemic, 'holistic' way, they both echoed the difficulties. One [male] has been teaching in the Live, Learn, and Teach experiential education program at UNH for 25 years, and also co-teaches a course



in Sustainable Living, and admitted how difficult it is to integrate ecological sustainability as a living process into the education in the classroom. “It is not easy to address the emotional as well as the intellectual faculties. It is a challenge to state the ‘truth’ in an appropriate context so there are supports and boundaries for the student.”

The [female] professor in the Natural Resources Department agreed that environmental education is a “traditionally scientific-reductionist, end-of-pipe modality and trains people to narrowly define problems such that if you can’t come up with a hypothesis then you can’t deal with them.” She said that many Natural Resources, Forestry and Wildlife Management, as well as Water/Hydrology programmes still operate in this ‘end-of-pipe,’ fragmented, problem-solving way rather than in a ‘whole system way.’ This is because there is no legislation or political clout for anything else—again, it is the whole cultural paradigm. Though this professor also tries to teach more in a ‘systems’ fashion, vis-à-vis sustainable human relationships with the Earth and resource management, from my own and my student-interviewee’s experience, her methods are traditional and overwhelming in terms of voluminous amounts of reading and information and expectations. “She is the Info Queen!” The professor told me that she has always had to be twice as good as a man to be successful in her field.. Again, the emphasis on grading and competition can be anathema to a new, collaborative, creative, problem-solving educational method. The traditional argumentation required in a paper is that of the adversarial method. Janice Moulton (1996) points out:

The Adversary Paradigm accepts only the kind of reasoning whose goal is to convince an opponent, and ignores reasoning that might be used in other circumstances: to figure out something for oneself, to discuss something with like-minded thinkers, to

convince the indifferent or the uncommitted. The relations of ideas used to arrive at a conclusion might very well be different from the relations of ideas needed to defend it for an adversary. And it is not just less reasoning, or fewer steps in the argument that distinguishes the relations of ideas, but that they must be, in some cases, quite different lines of thought.

Moulton points out that once upon a time it was thought that scientific claims were, or ought to be, objective and value-free and that science ought to confine itself to the latter. Popper (1958) the historian of science, though recognizing that scientific statements invoked values, believed that the reasoning in science was objective and value-free....that is, deductive: the test of a theory was that it could withstand attempts to falsify it.

Then, Kuhn (1962) argued that even reasoning used in science was not value-free or certain. He argued that theory changes because one is more *satisfying* than the other, because the questions considered are more important. Indeed, that science/philosophy is also governed by paradigms.

Moulton shows that the Adversarial, Aristotelian paradigm of reasoning prevents us from seeing that systems of ideas that are not directed to an adversary may be worth studying and developing, and that adversarial arguments may be incorrect for non-adversarial contexts. In fact, experience may be a necessary element in the reasoning process and that differences in experience would give rise to different beliefs that are not resolved by argument. It must be accepted there are other ways, that include an awareness of values in the exploration of new knowledge. So, in the new paradigm, experience and dialogue and exploration of new ideas are part of the equation.

### The Banking Paradigm (Freire, 1973)

This is another, disembodied, educational practice used in the university ( all schools) that should also be addressed in terms of ecological education, in particular.

First, an excerpt from Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1970):

The American university has become the final stage of the most all-encompassing initiation rite the world has ever known. No society in history has been able to survive without ritual or myth, but ours is the first which has needed such a dull, protracted, destructive and expensive initiation into its myth. . . We cannot go beyond the consumer society unless we first understand that obligatory public schools inevitably reproduce such a society, no matter what is taught in them (pp. 54-55).

The standard Cartesian-Newtonian mechanical worldview has been trapped within a cause-effect, hypothetico-deductive system of reasoning. The formal, operational education breaks a system down into its basic parts to understand the way it works—certainty and prediction are key.

Schools and standardized test-makers, assuming that formal operational thought represents the highest level of human cognition, focus their efforts on its cultivation and measurement (though sometimes they fail to get too far beyond concrete forms of thinking). Students who have moved beyond formality are rarely rewarded and sometimes even punished in educational contexts. . . . constraints of the Cartesian dualism and the structural forces which limit our ability to see the world from outside our restricted vantage point. In its logocentrism modernity discounted the terrain of private inner reality. (Kincheloe, 1991, pp. 44-45).

Paulo Freire, the revolutionary educator, challenged the 'facts and measurement' concept of modern, scientific thinking/education as oppressive. He named it the 'banking' system of education. As Richard Shaull (1973) writes in his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

At first sight, Paulo Freire's method of teaching illiterates in Latin America seems to belong to a different world from that which we find ourselves in this country. . . . But there are certain parallels in the two situations which should not be overlooked. Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and is subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system (p. 14).

Freire sees education as suffering from 'narration sickness,' where the subject (the teacher) drones on at the objects (the patient, listening, passive students), where the facts, the words, become lifeless and petrified. The task is to fill the students with the 'contents' of his narration, which is disconnected from any existential knowledge of the students. Education becomes an act of depositing, which, instead of communicating, the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. Freire notes that it is the students themselves who are filed away through lack of creativity. He says:

Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention, and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world and with each other (p. 58).

In the banking system of education, the students are assumed to be ignorant and the knowledgeable teacher bestows his gifts on them. Unlike the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, they never educate each other. Freire concludes that banking education mirrors the oppressive society as a whole, and the more successful these learners are in this system, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their engagement with the world and as transformers of that world. I love his example he gives to ironically demonstrate the kind of important questions discussed vis-à-vis reality.

Rather than critically consider Reality:

It [education] will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Roger gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on the contrary, Roger gave green grass to the rabbit! (p. 61).

This reminds me of my courses in logic and conceptual analysis, as an undergraduate, where most of the term it was discussed whether “all ravens were black”( classic Aristotelian logic/philosophy).

Freire acknowledges there are many well-intentioned, bank-clerk teachers who do not realize they are ‘serving to de-humanize.’ In order to overcome the passive oppressiveness of banking education and the necrophily (compared with biophily, all that grows, is alive—Fromm) of such controlled thinking, Freire argues for problem-posing education and intentionality, for ‘conscientizacao.’ This self-consciousness necessitates a reciprocal dialogue between teachers and students, where they both become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow. The teacher presents her material to the students for their consideration and they reflect and reconsider together, a ‘constant unveiling of reality.’ This emerging process view of learning mirrors the current narrative of the emergent universe which has really been more developed and understood since Freire worked and wrote in the 50s. He writes: “Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without men, but men in their relations with the world” (p. 69). The ‘praxis’ is key in his philosophy, whereby we reflect on our action in the world. Instead of fatalism, the ability to perceive ourselves as we perceive the world, our deepened consciousness of our situation, leads us to see the situation as a historical, social reality capable of transformation. We become agents of change, of our own lives, humanized.

Apropos Freire’s critical work, I would like to return to the conversation I had with a former student, who is an environmental conservation major. A. C. said she definitely had to go around the traditional outline and requirements to meet her needs.

She felt the programme missed a sense of place in the world and the emphasis was getting a job. There was no ‘big picture’ and the science courses seemed arbitrary and meaningless. There was only one course that addressed the spiritual dimension and *“the issues with the teacher made it hard to deal with the important material. . . and the talk was about redirecting environmental education in the new way, but the strictness of the format, the readings, was in the old way.”* She added, *“We learn how horrible and devastating everything is and it upsets people. We need recognition of our feelings and what to do about it [the environment and the state of the world].”* She noted how it is a great department but the UNH administration was affecting the teaching and extra-curricular projects have been shut down. She felt the programme needs options for ‘hands-on,’ passionate work, rather than the practicum which was more ‘like getting a job, an internship.’ This is why she is working at Emery Farm part-time to heal and to be doing something she loves. *“At the University, there’s a laying-out of all the information, of what’s wrong, but there are no connections. . . then students are out in the huge world. We need more help in what to do!”*

Her statements echo Freire’s imperative that students need praxis as well as theory; they need to be empowered as agents, as conscious reflectors, who can transform their world.

I concluded by asking her what she got from the Earth-Centered Religions course (not officially part of the Environmental Conservation program), and upon reflection she replied: *“Mostly a realization of our connection to the greater whole of the Universe; . . . why it is important to act righteously. . . otherwise we trash the earth. It matters! The Native-American connection was especially important. . . because of where we live, the*

*connection with this continent is important. It also helped me understand all religions are trying to give us some message of connection, so I gained a greater respect for all religions...and Christianity. . . my parents' religion. . . I can talk to them. . .*"So, here we see not only self-understanding but greater tolerance and a connection to a wider community, family, indigenous knowledge.

### **A Possible Direction Towards a Solution**

So, we need a new kind of teaching/learning, a spiritual pedagogy, that will involve a sea-change in how people see the world and how we will behave in it.

At this millennial turn we need to go beyond the Cenozoic era with its evolutionary and growth-oriented cultural attitudes and behaviours, and move into a new Ecozoic era of environmentally-sustainable practices. This has radical implications for our everyday lives and behaviours. It is imperative now to transcend the anthropocentric worldview to a more inclusive, decentering reality. Naturally, education is essential if this change is to occur, and its pedagogy must move from the Aristotelian head model to include, as well, the heart and the body and the soul: i.e., the whole human being.

Many scientists, academics and indigenous elders have been warning us that we're dangerously near to exhausting world resources, that we have damaged and poisoned our planet and caused innumerable species extinctions. Meanwhile, our population grows exponentially as does, seemingly, our existential and collective despair and denial about it. I believe that along with scientific understanding, social policy and legislation, we need an inner change of mind and heart to adequately come to grips with our situation. This psycho-spiritual transformation, I want to emphasize, is not simply

cognitive, it also entails a change of behaviours and actions vis-a-vis the wider natural reality in which we find ourselves.

It seems to many that we are at a crisis point in modernity. The old attitudes toward nature and fellow man (of dominion and competition) are clearly not working for the world. There is a need for an application and integration of a new paradigm of interconnectedness and Systems thinking. The new physics, for example, seems to be confirming what many mystics and indigenous peoples have always known: we are one. We are all part, indeed, co-creators, of Indra's jeweled web.

Similarly, our educational pedagogy must evolve from the emphasis on the intellect to include the heart (emotions) and the soul (spirit) in our search for meaning. As such, this holistic teaching and learning would constitute a new hermeneutic that includes an ethic of care and compassion for our fellow creatures. Such a spiritual identification with, and caring for, the wider nature of which we are a part seems necessary if we are to survive, never mind thrive.

Given the experience of my classes over fifteen years<sup>4</sup> of the Earth-Centered Religions course, I can see full well that the sharings and learnings and creation—respecting wisdom of older, indigenous, living traditionals and their spiritual practices and insights have offered great hope to my somewhat despairing students. It is indeed empowering to know that there are alternatives to the way we live in the West, in the ‘Absence of the Sacred’ (Jerry Mander). Indeed, there are other life-affirming ways. We read literary critic Paula Gunn Allen (1988), herself a Laguna Pueblo/Sioux Indian who writes:

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<sup>4</sup>The course was offered for three summers and as an Independent Study before it was taught during the academic year.



. . . the earth is not a mere source of survival, distant from the creatures it nurtures and from the spirit that breathes in us, nor is it to be considered an inert resource on which we draw. . . Rather for the American Indians. . . the earth is being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive. . . . (p. ).

Indeed, I believe religion(s) can be an integral part of the revisioning of a needed environmental ethic of care and connection. Sallie McFague (1992) writes of the need also of contemporary Christian theology to turn from anthropocentrism and individualism to “feel the depths of our being that we are part and parcel of the evolutionary ecosystem of our cosmos.”

#### Systems Science – The New/Old Paradigm

Now, since the revolutionary thinking in science of Einstein, Hiesenberg and others, we have a model that is more organic with the realisation of the deep relations between space, time and matter, which revitalizes them all and shows us that individuals and entities exist within relationships. There is no such thing as pure objective fact any more; the very nature of the observer influences the observation and the object being observed. The machine model of the nonliving is replaced with the organic, systems model of quantum physics where all is in flux a la Heroditus, where all is changing and connected. Scientists like Fritjof Capra and David Bohm write about the mystery of the New Science that shows us that we are all one, that we are a microcosm of the microcosm, that we are all ‘walking stardust’ and related. In fact, New Physics is confirming the mysticism of the ancients and the living indigenous peoples and their Earth wisdom. In our highly technological, modern society of the West, we need the credibility of ‘rational’ science to sanction the Old/New Universe theory. The New

Cosmology, the 15-billion year old story of our cosmic birth<sup>5</sup> and evolution right up to the miracle of the self-reflexive creatures that we have become, reflecting on our own place in the grand scheme of things, the mystery of creation reflecting on itself is awesome. The nuclear physicist Brian Swimme and the ecotheologian Thomas Berry, the philosopher Paul Brockelman and physicist Paul Davies, have all written extensively and excitedly about the new narrative and the possibilities it holds out for a new, holistic creation story that people world-wide can believe in, agree on, and with it regain a sense of awe and love and connection with all Being, all that is.

It is an exciting, transitional crossroads in our human/earth history. We are moving from the old paradigm of atomistic alienation and rampant (mal) development and capitalist greed to, hopefully, a new paradigm of cooperation and altruism.<sup>6</sup> We must—if we are to survive and evolve.

It is interesting that East meets West, and North meets South, and authors and thinkers/philosophers such as the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Starhawk, Fritz Capra, have become best-sellers. We are searching for a better way. Our Aboriginal and traditional teachers as well as contemporary scientists, can remind us of the webbedness of life, of the natural cycles of birth, life, death, rebirth, of an implicate order in the chaos, of reverence, of hope.

Our 'secular city' (Harvey Cox) is in dire need of a spiritual imperative and guidance. With the historic occasion of Religion and Science once again being in dialogue after 350 years of mutual exclusion of 'blind religion and lame science,'

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<sup>5</sup> Starhawk's renaming of the Big Bang to the cosmic Birth is much more in keeping with the idea of the emerging universe and the new life-affirming narrative.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the ethics of care of Carol Gilligan, Peggy Sanday, Nancy Chodorow, Nel Noddings, etc., we now have biologists like E. O. Wilson and Kellert and Paul Shepherd and Ralston writing on biophilia and altruism.

(Einstein) there is the possibility of vision and a healthy moving forward at this millennial turning of the century. Instead of apocalypse we have a new Ecozoic era/story of wonder. The new discoveries in science show us an emergent universe, over and above the cyclical universe of traditional knowledge, which has irreversible sequential modes of transformation; it is/we are all part of the process of co-creation. We have some say in the matter, with our human abilities to consciously reflect and act! Brian Swimme (1992), the cosmologist, tells us what we've gained in controlling the earth as a collection of objects we have lost in our capacity for intimacy within the communion of subjects. Nor is it clear we've achieved the happiness that was promised by the technological fix.

He writes:

A newly developed mystique of our plundering industrial society is committed to moving out of the Cenozoic, not by entry into the Ecozoic, but by shaping an ever more controlled order of things that might be designated as the Technozoic era. . . Certainly the corporation establishment with its enormous economic control over the whole world of modern existence is dedicated to the Technozoic. From this it is clear that a mystique counter to [this] must be evoked if the Ecozoic era is to come into being. . . [One of]. . . biocentric [not anthropocentric] norms of reality and value. . . There is a special need . . . to awaken a consciousness of the sacred dimension of the Earth. For what is at stake is not simply an economic resource, it is the meaning of existence itself. Ultimately it is the survival of the world of the sacred (p. 257).

He believes we are moving into a meta-religious age, that seems to be a new comprehensive context for all religions, that it is vital for us humans to go beyond concepts of ethnic groups or even global community to knowing we are a species among species. Finally, he writes:

Beyond all this (institutional changes) and a sense more encompassing than any of these is the role of women in the future. . . As [their] participation increases throughout the world, as women are liberated from the oppressions they have long endured, as women reach new levels of personal fulfillment, a new energy will undoubtedly be felt throughout the Earth (p. 257).

Add to the woman's ethic of care the indigenous people's wisdom and we may have a cosmic liturgy that reflects and celebrates the miraculous 'balanced turbulence' of the glorious Universe, as Black Elk describes:

The virgins danced, and all the circled horses, the leaves on the trees, the grasses and the hills and in the valleys, the waters in the creeks and in the rivers and the lakes, the 4-legged and the 2-legged and the winged of the air—all danced together to the music of the stallion's song. (Black Elk, Lakota)

An Emerging Holistic Worldview. Yes, indeed, I would conclude that it is time to integrate the old and the new paradigms as we move into a more ecologically-aware society. As such, the above learnings are possible, necessary and transformational.

I see that we are betwixt and between paradigms: the old paradigm of scientific method and deductive reasoning and the new paradigm of emergent and inter-connected knowledge. We are undergoing a paradigm shift, defined by Lester Milbrath (1989) as "changes occurring in discontinuous revolutionary breaks [rather than] more gradual kinds of change" (p. 116), or as Thomas Berry (1988) says, "We are in-between stories."

We need to address the culture of denial in education, "the conceptual and ideological double-binds, and the sense of uncertainty about how to think about educational issues within metaphorical frameworks that situate the individual within culture, and culture within natural systems (Bowers, 1997).

Educational philosophy needs to change from the current liberal emphasis on individual emancipation, rationally-based, moral decision-making, and individually-based centered caring and spirituality to a more comparative study of how other cultural approaches might frame these concerns. Instead of anthropocentric educational philosophers like Dewey and Freire, we might read more ecologically-based authors like Gregory Bateson, Brian Swimme, Charlene Spretnak, and Dolores LaChapelle. Bowers

(1997) also has very interesting critiques of the use of computer technology: how it results in non-critical learning, marginalises other forms of cultural knowledge (oral, elders') and relationships (community) and privileges a Westernized intelligence and should still be seen as a Cartesian technology. He writes:

Teachers might be better able to help students understand how the hype that surrounds this culture-changing technology obscures the fundamental moral and political issues connected with the extension of this technology in more areas of community life (p. 256).

The individual is totally separated from his/her environment in virtual reality!

### **A Pedagogy of Possibility for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

I offer my own case study of the process involved in my Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions class. This spiritual model may point in a more sustainable direction, though the focus of this thesis is not to that question, but simply, a new form of spiritual teaching/learning that may have such ecological consequences.

The following quotes point to/hint of the possibilities of such a spiritual and holistic worldview:

Earth: isn't this what you want,  
an invisible re-arising within us?

Rainier Maria Rilke Duino Elegies

When my father has said a word—in speech or in song—I ask him: “What does that word break down to? I mean, breaking it down to the syllables of sound or phrases of sound, what do each of these parts mean?” And he looked at me with an exasperated—slightly pained— expression on his face, wondering what I mean? And he tells me, “It doesn't break down into anything.”

Simon Ortiz

“Song/Poetry and Language”

All suffering is bearable if it is seen as part of a story.

Isak Dinesen

But yield who will to their separation,

My object in living is to write

My avocation and my vocation

As my two eyes make one in sight.

Robert Frost

Given that our world, our earth, our morals and our educational system are all in dire straits (although the majority of the American population would say they lived in the most flourishing and successful country in the world!), I join many other critical thinkers in a quest for a new educational paradigm; one that would give us a moral compass with regard to our connection with the global-earth community, with creation and all that we are.

Although it is true that several hundred years of science and technology have led to amazing advances in understanding and improved standards in health and standard of living, the resulting quality of life is questionable. We have been severed from our primal matrix, the earth, and the sense of the numinous in our daily lives. The anxiety and the stress-related diseases are a manifestation that all is not well on the home-front. We moved away from the holistic (but hierarchical) medieval understanding of natural law and the March of Progress has caused an unbelievable amount of damage to our environment and to our psyche. Chellis Glendinning (1994) writes:

In today's world the existence of such a primal presence may seem a distant and long-lost memory. Our knowledge of its wisdom becomes muddled by the daily onslaught of appointments and traffic jams, by a socialization process that unabashedly trains us to mistrust our own feelings and perceptions, and most pointedly, by the layer upon layer of psychological entanglement, bereavement, and disorientation in our own hearts. Meanwhile, in the latest and most subtle effort at suppression of the primal matrix, university-taught deconstructive and New Age "you-create-your-own reality" ideologies are training people to deny the existence of human universalities and a preference for well-being in favor of superficiality, absolute relativity and meaninglessness (p. 8).

It is time we put the heart into and the body back onto the Aristotelian head. It is time for experiential, embodied education that also opens up to grace in our lives, to meaning and mystery. Our secular education based on humanist values, since Plato, has been a limited vision at best. Plato established a dualism of the universal and the particular, of noumenon and phenomenon, of mind and body, of mind and matter that has since shaped the European tradition. The central concept of humanism is that man [sic] is a terrestrial god who can shape his own destiny and control nature.

What would be/are some of the education aims and purposes of an alternative environmental education?

(1) Microcosm of the Macrocosm Awareness

First, Thomas Berry (1988) in his essay on the American College in the Ecological Age, explains:

By universe education I do not mean universal education or university education, but the education which identifies with the emergent universe in its variety of manifestations from the beginning until now. So, too, by earth education I do not mean education about the earth, but the earth as the immediate self-educating community of those living and nonliving beings that constitute the earth. . . (p. 91).

Professional education should be based on awareness that the earth is itself the primary physician, primary lawyer, primary revelation of the divine, primary scientist, primary technologist, primary commercial venture, primary artist, primary educator, and primary agent in whichever other activity we find in human affairs (p. 107).

We, humanity, and [environmental] education are the microcosm of the macrocosm, and with our emergent understanding of the holographic/holistic nature of all existence, we are indeed at a crossroads in evolution where a new cultural mutation into an ecological context is required, a reintegration of the human process with the earth process. A new story is in the making. At the highest levels of formal education, we have the luxury of reflecting on meaning and the values that are now needed. We are now self-reflexive subjects aware of the 'commanding presence' in the total earth presence.

(2) Connection, Community and Immanence

I believe it is so important to develop and experience these three key concepts in the context of the learning-classroom setting. With our contemporary culture's emphasis on the cult of the individual, we have lost our sense of community. All the prevalent developmental theories have misemphasised the essential process of healthy maturation as 'separation.' According to modern, depth psychologists (Freud et al.) children (or more to the point, male children, since they were assumed to be the human norm), made their way free of maternal relationship, passing through stages of needs and experiences. In these models they never step outside! We need a body-oriented, ecological and relational approach to learning. Charlene Spretnak (1997) writes: "...the actual presence and power of body, nature and place are now asserting themselves and poking large holes through the modern ideologies of denial" (p. 4). By body she meant the unified body-mind; by nature she means our actual physical context (not a scientifically theorized system),; and by place she means our own bio-region.

So, in our classroom, we integrate different modalities and processes in order to engage the whole being and to develop a sense of a learning community evolving and co-



creating together. The teacher-facilitator is part of the growth process (see Freire above). Hence, as well as much book-learning, we include movement, small group discussion, collaborative presentations, field trips, going outside the classroom, inviting practitioners and teachers in to share their perspectives and wisdom, and art work as well as sharing our thoughts and feelings and dreams as we go along. We reflect by keeping weekly journals. We share our stories as we write and recreate them. We hear each other 'into voice' (Nelle Morton). It is important to hear their "little stories" and how they fit into the "big stories." Dialogical methods are key. Teachers, ideally, are catalysts calling students to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in their own learning. The goal here is to overcome the objectivist model and participate in the web of relationships, and that by 'indwelling' in the world we are given 'bodily knowledge' of it, on the essential nature of personal knowledge (Polanyi, p. 60).

By dancing, laughing, crying, meditating, discussing, being together, and by risk-taking and being self-disclosing, we develop the trust with the boundaries of safety that make it possible to bond as a community. Such a learning community, or conscientization, is not a therapeutic setting per se.

Parker Palmer (1993) does not think a 'therapeutic community' is appropriate in education and in contradistinction he defines it:

Community is clearly central to the life of the mind—the nature of reality (ontology), how we know reality (epistemology), how we teach and learn (pedagogy), and how education forms or deforms how one lives in the world (p. xiii).

He agrees it is time to drop the metaphor of fragmentation and see reality as the community of connections and cooperations that it is seen to be by the 'new' sciences of biology and physics. An ethos of trust and acceptance is needed, not competition and

impersonal grading. “In the absence of the communal virtues, intellectual rigor too easily turns into rigor mortis” (Palmer, 1993, p xvii).

(3) Lastly, I would argue the importance of ethics and spiritual values in environmental education.

Many teachers have noticed a decline in young Americans’ sense of moral reasoning. Fewer than ten years ago students often reported that they were well aware of a framework for morality but found it irrelevant. By the mid-90s, many adolescents had no answer when asked what moral principles might apply to a particular situation

Spretnak (1991) writes:

Can we really be so surprised, though, that alienation and apathy, random violence and hate crimes are on the increase? When modernity’s ideology of the Autonomous Individual is the focal point of life as a student and then as a consumer in the hypermodern world, what result but a deep sense of disconnection could we reasonably expect. . . as if the Lone Cowboy had no interaction with air, water and food; as if he were not in his very molecules with all entities born of the universe (p. 120).

So, the relatively small group of self-selected students who choose to take courses in environmental education do so because they care. But, given the surrounding cultural ennui and self-centeredness in which they are immersed, there is a prevailing undertow of sadness and despair and paralysis over what to do.

Secular, post-modernist education of relativism and cultural constructivism only leaves them in a worse state of nihilism and meaninglessness. So, I see that ethics and values and spirit are needed back in the classroom, especially around the issues of our primal matrix, our connection to ‘the ground of being’ to Mother Earth. As Palmer (1993) defines it:

An ethical education is one that creates a capacity for connectedness in the lives of students. . . such an education would root ethics in its true and only ground, in the spiritual insight that beyond the broken surface of our lives there is a 'hidden wholeness' (Thomas Merton) on which all life depends. In such an education, intellect and spirit would be one, teachers and learners and subjects would be in vital community with one another, and a world in need of healing would be well served (p. xix).

bell hooks (1994) writes about the sacred aspect of teaching:

[We] believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can deeply and intimately begin (p. 13).

She agrees that students today seem very wounded in their psyches, do not want therapy per se, but do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit.

They do want knowledge that is meaningful and will provide them with ways of knowing and being that enhance their capacity to live more fully and deeply. We/they need ways to formulate theory from lived experience. We need healing words, healing practices, healing wisdom. "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks, 1994, p. 12).

Bringing the integrating role of Spirit into the educational process, together with the embodied knowing body-mind, brings wholeness and the ability to act and reflect (theory and praxis), and be a fully present, accountable person in this mystery called life.

As Jung wrote: "In the final analysis, we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted."

My goal is to explore a model of spiritual learning that builds upon our scientific and theoretical knowledge by changing our way of being in the world, our ecological identity if you will, which in turn effects our relations to ourselves, others, and all of life.

This pedagogy of empowerment is developed from my own as well as my students' learning experiences over the past decade, and also from the writings of such classic educators as Paulo Freire, Starhawk, Joanna Macy, bell hooks and Parker Palmer, as well as from the earth-centered, living, wisdom traditions of indigenous peoples and their writings.

In attempting to elucidate what the new praxis for empowerment could look like, I have identified four research questions for further exploration:

- (1) Given that the planet is in crisis and that students feel overwhelmed and powerless from the overload of information, and from the collective angst---what is it that enables them to feel empowered to make choices and changes, through their semester-long course in Women's Spirituality & Earth-Centered Religions?
- (2) What is the praxis/pedagogy that may help to develop the awareness that they have the power to choose, to act, and that they can make a difference in the world?
- (3) What might be the developmental steps in a coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity or responsibility as a member, an eco-citizen, of the earth community?
- (4) Is this 'consciousness' lived-out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

The following chapter will describe the methods and process used to point toward emerging factors and key areas to address in a pedagogy for ecological consciousness.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS

The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates

We cannot use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring genuine change.

Audre Lorde (1984, p. 112)

Since I have been arguing against the old paradigm of atomistic, fragmented and reductivist methodology, I obviously will not be using quantitative methods to determine whether my alternate educational pedagogy works! As United States naturalist Cindy Cowder (1984) said, "That reductionist science is inadequate to understand organisms, whether they are spiders, starfish or women; that we can only understand organisms by seeing with a loving eye" (p. 6). This makes me think of the revolutionary research of biologist Barbara McClintock (Keller, 1983), who had a "feeling for the organism," becoming very attached to her specimens of corn, contrary to the objectivist, detached, scientific method of her contemporaries. Margaret Mead (1928, 1961), the outstanding anthropologist, also wrote on the significance of gender in research. I am a woman, working mainly with women students, and I have a feminist epistemological standpoint. As sociologist, Marjorie deVault (1990) wrote:

. . . the dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform the tradition. Mary Daly and C. Wright Mills think of method not as a codification of procedures but rather as information about. . . actual ways of working. It is more a heuristic process of conversing, writing, listening, asking, a multi-method approach, being aware of many voices, not one single, universal Voice (p. 210).

At the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge. This insight is as applicable to feminist knowledge as it is to patriarchal knowledge, but there is a significant difference between the two: feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings, whereas patriarchal knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of only half the population needs to be taken into account and the resulting version can be imposed on the other half. That is why patriarchal knowledge and the methods of producing it are a fundamental part of women's oppression, and why patriarchal knowledge must be challenged—and overruled (pp. 5-6).

Perhaps *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) means we are more drawn to an inductive method, with flashes of intuition and insight rather than the orthodox hypothetico-deductive method? In contrast to detached observation, controlled experiment and quantitative measurement, human science research involves description, interpretation and self-reflective or critical analysis: qualitative research methods. In trying to ascertain what “works” in environmental education, vis-à-vis my goals of integrating the “whole” human being in their connectedness to one another, to learning, to Divine/Goddess/God/Nature/Earth/Life/It (Christ, 1989) to all that there is, the phenomenological hermeneutic approach is the most appropriate method in looking at the “lived-experience” of the students. The research approach of description, interpretation and reflective writing offers a methodology (praxis) that is fundamental to the process of feminist pedagogy.

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching, questioning—theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world. . . then research is a caring act. . . To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5)

Method (the pursuit of knowledge) is different from procedures and techniques in that it implies a particular philosophical/epistemological perspective. The methodology of phenomenology posits an approach that is presuppositionless; it stays away from concepts and fixed procedures that would govern the research; it is discovery oriented.

My quest is to make some sense of what happens in our classroom to enable the [female] students<sup>7</sup> to undergo some transformation such that they become/feel empowered, to act in the world, to feel a sense of connection and to want to do something about it. What is it to be a good teacher, thinker? As Heidegger (1971) put it so beautifully, “to think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world’s sky” (p. 4). Van Manen (1990) writes: “the question that is at the center of the professional and personal life of an educator concerns the meaning of pedagogy” (p. 42) so this is the best justification for the hermeneutic phenomenological method, to ask: “What does it mean to be a teacher?” And as Gadamer (1975) said, the essence of the question is the opening up of possibilities and to keep ourselves deeply interested, that we “live” the question, to go back again and again to the things themselves (the subjects and their life-world). “A phenomenological researcher cannot just write down his, or her, question at the beginning of the study. There it is! Question mark at the end!” (Gadamer, 1975). No, the dear reader has to be pulled in to wonder

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<sup>7</sup> Usually there is a male student or two, sometimes more, in the class looking for a more connected way of knowing.

about the nature of the phenomenon as the human-social-scientist does. We are wondering what “works” for the students’ subjects, where and when and how are the transformative moments? Where, when and how do the subjects feel a connectedness to the divine/Goddess/God/Earth/ Life/It and how to provide some orientation for the lives we are living in the shadow of ecological destruction (Christ, 1989, p. 65)?

In order to weave together the weft and the warp, the depth and the breadth, and ambiguities of our experiences (both the subjects and the teacher-researcher doing reciprocal research), I would use a “multiple methods” approach. Reinharz (1992) writes:

Feminist descriptions of multi-method research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link the past and present, “data-gathering” and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks. In addition feminist researchers use multiple methods because of changes that occur to them and others in the project of long duration. . . “journeys’ (p. 197).

Along with my feminist epistemological, phenomenological stance, I find the life-story, the personal reflections and responses of the subjects, most illuminating. Robert Atkinson (1995) writes:

We become fully aware, fully conscious of our lives through story. Reclaiming story is part of our birthright. Telling our story enables us to speak our truth and be heard, recognised, and acknowledged by others. It is only through story that our truth can be told, that the meaning of life can be identified. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear (p. xii).

These are our spiritual autobiographies that help us discover, and become more aware of, our deepest values and what we can put our trust in. We see that our pain and our struggles have served a purpose over time. Indeed, part of my course description reads: “the on-going project will be to create your own stories using a journal, dreams, poetry, sculpting, music and movement. . .” (Appendix F). Because I am researching the connection between the environment and spiritual values, the life-story serves four



functions (according to Atkinson, 1995) of “bringing us more into accord with ourselves, others, the mystery of life, and the universe around us (p. 6). Atkinson along with Abe Arkoff (1995) see the researcher of human experience as someone who must value the inner tale longing to be told and retold to find meaning in our otherwise confusing lives.

Over thirteen years or so that I have been teaching this course and engaging with the students/subjects on our transformative process with regard to our connection to the earth, indigenous wisdom, “to “all that there is,” I have collected many responses and mid-term and final essays (with their permission slips). Hence, I use a combination of case studies, in-depth interviews, “friendly conversations,” (Spradley, 1979), multi-voiced collaborative ethnographies (Elaine Lawless, 1993), and thick description (Geertz, 1973), and participant observation and journal writing as useful contributions to the piecing-together of the quilt of knowledge of “what works.”

Many of the research methods overlap and some confusion arises. For instance, “case study” is often equated with field work, ethnography, participant observation, qualitative research, naturalist inquiry, grounded theory, or exploratory research. I am doing a case study, prevalent in the field of education for over thirty years (Wolcott’s classic study, 1973), “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). Wolcott (1992) also sees it as “an end-product of field-oriented research” (p. 36), rather than a strategy or method. Merriam concludes that the most defining characteristic of case study research is the notion of a “bounded system” (Smith, 1978), and/or an “integrated system” (Stake, 1995). Thus, a group such as our class, Women’s Studies 595, is such a system. Unlike experiential, survey or historical research, case study does not claim any particular methods for data

collection or analysis. Any and all methods, from testing to interviewing, can be used.

The decision to focus on qualitative case study stems from the fact that I am interested in insight, discovery and interpretation, rather than hypothetical testing; it is interpretation in context (Cronbach, 1975).

By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the research aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study focuses on holistic description and explanation. As Yin (1994) observes, case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

Case study is a good fit for my research explorations and findings as it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It concentrates attention on the way particular groups confront special problems taking a holistic view of the situation. They are problem-centered and small scale, often over a period of time. The end product is a "thick" description (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomena under study. Heuristic means it illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomena. Case studies can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is already known. Previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge, leading to a rethinking of what is being studied. ". . . the uniqueness of case study lies not so much in the methods employed (although these are important), as in the questions asked and their relationship to the end product" (Merriam, 1998, p. 31). Case study is particularly suitable if you are interested in process.

I also looked at the work of Harry Wolcott (1994) and his extensive writings on description, analysis and interpretation—DIA approach and beyond this, the work of Denzin (1989) on interpretive interactionism was most helpful—another word for ethnomethodology, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, etc. Essentially, "the focus

is on the experiences that radically alter the shape, the meanings, persons give to themselves and their life projects” (p. 14). This method lends itself particularly well to epiphanies, such as turning point experiences. Further, it is well suited to my own particular standpoint as well as that of my student-subjects, since the characteristics are existential, interactional and biographical, naturalistic, post-positivist, and concerned with the social construction of gender, power, knowledge, history, and emotion.

### **My Lens—A Memo**

Using the work of Maxwell (1996), I must ask what is the lens through which I am looking at the phenomena? So, I address the following questions in order to be clearer about my stance.

- (1) What I am most excited about in my study is: using/developing a pedagogy that excites and liberates students to become active, concerned, caring, fully-alive and participating members of our earth-community.
- (2) My main hope for the study is: that it will encourage similar changes in the academy toward more experiential, liberatory meaning.
- (3) The main thing I’m afraid of doing in the study is: being solipsistic rather than benefiting the students in their learning process.
- (4) The biggest assumption I am making is that it works for everyone.
- (5) The main way this research draws on my experience is: my own learning/ conscientisation process through my work, time, study of indigenous and wisdom traditions that led to compassion for all beings, for myself, to joy and love and gratitude of life.

- (6) One thing I am sure about what is going on is: the student-learners and I enjoy the process/pedagogy of learning this way/holistically.
- (7) I would be really surprised if, as a result of the research, I learned. . . . that the students had forgotten everything learned from WS 595 and not integrated any of it into their lives, i.e., concern, caring and love for the earth, each other, all beings, themselves.

### **My Concept Map and Values**

Beyond description and interpretation, qualitative theory provides a model or a map of WHY the class learning is HOW the way it is—what I think is happening and why. Grounded theory (Strauss, 1967) means theory that is inductively developed during a study and in constant interaction with the data. Similarly, the Research Questions should remain adaptable to the interactive and inductive nature of qualitative research before it is clear what specific questions the research can address. Although we are looking at the process by which occurrences take place, rather than outcomes (Merriam, 1988), Strauss reminds us that, in fact, qualitative research can also identify causal relationships, quoting Miles and Huberman (1984): “. . .Field research is far better than solely quantified approaches at developing explanations of what we call local causality—the actual events and processes that led to specific outcomes” (p. 132).

Instead of asking whether and to what extent (quantitative research), we ask how x might play a role in causing y. For instance, in this research, how the embodied pedagogy used might play a role in the student’s ‘coming to Voice,’ to eco-citizenship, or eco-awareness/conscientisation? And, in conceptualizing my KEY concepts as Transformation from isolation to Connection (I to We), to be aware that I am not using

my concepts of community, ritual, body, experiential learning, etc., as “placeholders” for the actual concepts or relationship I need/am looking for in the development of my theory.

### **Memo on Personal Values and Identity/Subjective “I’s”**

Using Peshkin’s (1991) warning: “So that I may avoid the trap of perceiving just what my own untamed sentiments have sought out and served up as data. . .” (pp. 293-294), I can identify at least three Subjective I’s.”

- Pedagogical/Meliorist “I” that is disturbed by the inadequate teaching many women/minority/seeking men receive and looking for ways to improve this.
- Community Maintenance “I” that I liked my self-selected group of students and felt protective toward them.
- Nonresearch “I” that is grateful for the (usually) warm reception from my classes, generating a concern for the people involved.

Also, the following and other variables can affect the validity/alternative explanations of the research:

- Student Selection—Did I interview enough students and bias the data by whom I interviewed? I tried to find students who had different perspectives and opinions of the teaching methods. (All were done years after grades and written references.) Students were from a variety of disciplines: science, social science, nursing, art, outdoor education, women’s studies, etc. There were men, some of whom were resistant to my methods. Several students were ready to drop out of school. I included older women, part-time and graduate students, some who did not participate in the camaraderie of the class, such as commuters. I stopped

interviewing when I heard the same things repeated with little new information—Strauss' (1987) “saturation point,” although the cross-checking/similarities of the respondents is confirming. And, discussing my observations and conclusions with them also increased my confidence in the validity of my work.

It is also important to address the three types of understanding in qualitative research that have distinct threats.

- Description—needs to be accurate, concrete and detailed. I have the “written words” of the 35 or so questionnaires plus the in-depth 3-mail case study and I have transcribed and listened to the five tape recorded follow-up interviews.
- Interpretation—it is important to understand the student’s perspective, not my own. Following up over e-mail with many of the initial questionnaire respondents, I was able to get more detail of their experience, in their own words. Further, the five in-depth interviews gave the students the opportunity to reveal their own perspectives.
- Theory—paying attention to discrepant data and/or considering alternate explanations or understandings of the data is important, i.e., how are the students coming to eco-consciousness?

Inherent reflexivity is the term used with regard to the impossibility of eliminating researcher bias in qualitative studies; explaining them is the best we can do. Indeed, it is our preconceptions and values that inspire and bring us to our particular research!

“Validity is not the result of indifference but of integrity” (Hess, personal communication).

Similarly, “reactivity,” the influence of the researcher on the setting, is not to be eliminated, but to be understood and to use productively. I see the resulting dynamic of trust and collegiality/egalitarian relationships, and empowerment as an asset to the honesty and comfort of the respondents, in our “friendly conversations” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). I have been seeking ongoing feedback from two of my interviewees and outsiders.

Finally, there is an internal “generalisability” within the setting/group studied and corresponds to the “statistical conclusion validity” of Cook and Campbell (1979) in quantitative research, although there is no reason that the results are applicable beyond this particular setting—the “face generalizability” of Judith Singer (Maxwell, 1996).

Of course, I refer to the current literature on holistic and spiritual education, weaving it throughout, but it is relevant to include Joseph Maxwell’s (1996) insightful comments:

(A literature review). . . can lead to a narrow focus on literature, ignoring other conceptual resources that may be of equal or greater importance for your study and can lead you to ignore your own experience, your speculative thinking and your exploratory research, and association with advisers who know the territory. It is important to construct the research study from various existent ideas, but using our own experiential knowledge (p. 26).

C. Wright Mills (1959) in a classic essay, writes:

. . . the most admirable scholars within the scholarly community. . . do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other (p. 195).

The following chapter, *The Model*, has a focus toward developing a morphology of a pedagogy for eco-citizenship, for personal empowerment, and a resulting caring for the ‘oekos’ (our home, the Earth, all beings). It is the substantive piece of the research, integrating the students ‘own words’ to elucidate what might be the steps or aspects

involved in such transformational learning. This ‘conscientization’ is not a linear progression per se, but can occur in a roundabout way or even simultaneously.

### **My Research Process**

What began four to five years ago as a purely phenomenological research became more of a longitudinal, case-study approach, under the guidance of Dr. Mimi Becker, a social-science, international policy scholar. A phenomenological study focuses on the essence or structure of an experience/phenomenon-in this instance, transformational learning, and attempts to depict the basic structure of this experience. Understanding that phenomenology is a school of philosophical thought that underpins all qualitative research, I chose to use more of a case-study design to gain more of an in-depth understanding of the (class-learning) situation and the meaning for those involved. Here, the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gained from case-studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research. I felt this was more relevant in terms of how the students might apply their eco-spiritual education, after they graduate. And, indeed, I conducted a follow-up study of my students.

It is true, I have kept in touch with many of my former students over fifteen years or so, and one of the most interesting and fun parts of this research was to get back in touch with many of them to see what they were doing now, and how, and whether, they were integrating what they had learned in Women’s Studies and Earth-Centered Religions, in terms of eco-spiritual awareness.

I developed an interview/questionnaire (see Appendix C) of a dozen questions that I sent out to former students I tracked down through various avenues, over the course



of two years or so. The series of twelve questions was to ascertain what brought the students to the course, what was going on in their lives at the time, what they remembered as important, meaningful and useful, and what were they integrating into their everyday lives.

I handed-out, and sent out by snail-mail, in the early days, and later, by e-mail, around fifty to sixty questionnaires over a year or two and, surprisingly, I heard back from a good majority, so this encouraged me to continue. So, through old addresses, alumnae and departmental lists, I tracked down a goodly number of students who seemed to have a vested interest in my study. They were willing to share their memories, recollections and experiences of the class and excited by the implications of the research—that such a holistic, pedagogical approach may be developed and continued in the academy. I set-out to work with as wide a range as possible. I wanted to find students from the early days of the class, when it was a summer program, twelve to fifteen years ago, as well as more recent graduates. Most of the students were Juniors or Seniors and, typically, there would be a couple of graduates as well as one or two, and sometimes four or five (brave, open-minded) men!

Altogether, I collected 35 responses that I worked with to begin to analyse and interpret and identify emerging themes. There were ten responses that I did not include, as they were minimal in content and not really answering my questions. These initial questions were fairly open-ended, especially Question 10, asking them to describe/evaluate the pedagogy of the class, but specific enough to ascertain what I was trying to discover: what worked for them? I was interested in both the content and the

process of Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions as far as what they remembered as particularly helpful.

My respondents range from 22 to 55 years of age, including half a dozen parents, (at the time), and a grandmother. All are working presently, with several in graduate and vocational programs. It is important to note ( see Appendix E) that the students are from a range of disciplines: environmental science, psychology, English, women's studies, anthropology, etc) and some were graduates in the MALS and Ph.D. programs. Most of the respondents were in the class from seven to ten years ago, so it is a fairly longitudinal study, in terms of what they are doing now, many years later.

As I read through the responses, I wanted to know more and decided to do some in-depth case-studies. Thus, I eventually arranged for five Questionnaire respondents to come to my home for a taped in-depth interview, a follow-up to their responses, which was later transcribed. These were 1-hour to one and a half hours in length, and were 'friendly conversations,' (Spradley, 1972) fairly-open-ended, allowing them to talk about what was meaningful to them, while I would bring the conversation back to address my research interests. One further case-study/in-depth series of conversations were conducted over e-mail, as the student, whom I had kept in touch with over 9yrs. now lived in Ca. Using the process of triangulation, collating the characteristics and themes that seemed to be emerging from the 35 questionnaires/initial interviews, and using the literature and my own life-experience, I developed my model and clarified my research questions (see Appendix B).

The following situates/describes some of my in-depth, case-studies, who they are and what they are doing now. They show a movement from 'searching' and loneliness

towards a feeling of connection and are currently working in meaningful work, in-service, and living out conscious and sustainable lifestyles. They have become caring, responsible eco-citizens. What were the things about the class that mattered the most to them in terms of this transformation? This is what I set-out to analyse and understand.

A.A. was my very first student. She and another young woman, took the course in the hot summer of 1991, as an independent study. We read Starhawk, *The Mists of Avalon*, Merlin Stone's *When God Was A Woman*, and did lots of journaling and expressive art, together. I remember A. as one of the shyest students. Now, she is a co-ordinator for the Peace and Social Justice League! She describes, in her taped interview, of how she uses her 'priestessing' skills of breathing, grounding, and ritual whenever she is feeling scared at the demonstrations she attends. I have witnessed her running large meetings and introducing national speakers and activists in our local community, a sizeable city. She also lives a highly, conscious and sustainable lifestyle-what a model!

C.H. was a Ph. D. candidate in my summer course in 1994 from Colorado, a single mother and feeling very isolated in academia and with her move out east. I invited her to a full moon circle at my home before class began, and we have been friends and colleagues since. She also remembers the power of the symbols, the ritual and the field-trips to the mountains of Vermont to work with the Vodun mambo, Ochazania. A wonderful body of poetry came out of the class; she had not been able to write creatively for a while. C. H. is now a Director of a Writing Program at a Boston college and integrates some of the holistic and engaged pedagogy in her own teaching practice.

B. S., a 40-year old, graduate student in Sociology, was working in a local restaurant, where we met. She was intrigued and took WS 595 in 2003 and then WS 797

(a higher-level seminar, based more on Women and Sustainability) the following year. Her life changed: She quit her 'successful' sales career of seven years and is heading to Lesley College in Cambridge this fall to pursue graduate studies in Women's Studies and Expressive Arts and plans to become a teacher. The discovery of the Goddess in all her life-affirming forms was the key piece in B.S.'s (an Italian Catholic), development and excitement.

M.W. a Biology major, was in a large class of 35 students, in 1996. She was also searching, fresh out of high school. She actually dropped-out of the University soon after taking Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions as she discovered what she really wanted to do—and that was to work with herbs and gardening and healing. She went to Herbal Medicine School, in New Mexico, has been a herbalist and an organic farmer, for several years. (We re-met at the local Farmer's Market.) She is now in Nursing School, a 'hands-on program training to be a nurse practitioner and integrate both holistic and mainstream medicine in her practice.

M.W. lives sustainably in a handmade house, built of recycled wood, with our local mailman. It is a small world! She keeps in touch with six or more students from our class, two of whom met there and are a couple, ten years later. . . and were two of my questionnaire respondents! All of them live their lives with a high degree of ecological awareness and concern, and are indeed, change-agents, re-visioning our society.

V.S. works in our department and we had known each other for years when she decided to take my courses. What an asset it is for everyone to have an older woman in the class, who has life-experience and prolific reading and a Voice to share. She was /is an inspiration and she is inspired to study further. V. came back to school, now her

children were older, and was undergoing big transitions having just lost both her parents and a close friend. The support of the class-community and the ancestor-spirit world of African and Native American traditions was very comforting to her. Her extensive and highly-evocative memories and writing are a substantial contribution to this research. She knew about the mind/Body/Spirit connection, she began our classes with fifteen minutes of T'ai Chi, and was excited to participate in a class that included the whole human being. V. took my WS 795 seminar two years later and her group presentation was on the New Paradigm in physics: how everything is inter-related. V. continues to hold lengthy discussion with our students and mentors them on a daily basis.

I am aware that, generally, those students who come to such a class as Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centred Religions are 'seekers' looking for 'something more' and they are open to feeling part of 'something larger' within our class community and beyond. I was interested in finding out the characteristics and the steps in such a progression towards an eco-spiritual awareness.

How did I begin to analyse my data? Using the responses of the thirty-five questionnaires and grounding it in the literature and my own experience, I saw themes of community, immanence/embodiment and connection emerge. And, with regard to the over-arching research questions, especially, Question 2, What do you remember/stands out about your experience in this class? What has been most meaningful?, my HELP model began to take on some useful shape as a possible tool of analysis.

What were some of the initial themes that emerged as I sat with the data over some months? Summarily, I saw indications of some repeated patterns as I started to explore some answers to my questions. I started to highlight some recurring themes and

descriptions. These appear in the following chapter, in detail, as I elucidate the HELP model as an analytic tool to help me understand what and how the students were learning.

Starting with my research questions, what seemed to be happening?

Research Question 1: Given that the planet is in crisis and that students feel overwhelmed and powerless from the overload of info., & from the collective angst-at-large-what is it that enables them to feel empowered to make choices & changes, throughout their semester-long course in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions?

Generally, the students describe their feelings of 'being lost', depressed and searching for 'something more' on entering my class—they are 'seekers.' They are often well-informed and care deeply about the state of the world. I was interested to learn what helped them overcome their sadness and helplessness

Research Question 2: What is the praxis/pedagogy that may help to develop the awareness that they have the power to choose, to act, and that they can make a difference in the world?

I witnessed the students 'coming into their own' and having fun with the holistic, experiential approach that I used to balance off the textual learning and I wanted to understand what exactly might be the educational methods that were helping to effect such change?

Research Question 3: What might be the developmental steps in a coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity or responsibility as a member, an eco-citizen, of the earth-community?

It seemed worthwhile to see if there was a process, a morphology, occurring, in the transformative learning that was happening in the class-community, individually and as a whole, as far as becoming to feel part of a 'larger whole?'

Research Question 4: Is this 'consciousness' lived-out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

As I had been teaching and developing this course over 15 years, it was suggested this was an opportunity to locate former students and see if they were 'walking their talk?' What were they doing in their lives, career-wise and on a daily basis? How much of what they had learned in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions were they integrating into their lives. Did they have, need any support systems?

The findings were encouraging both with regard to what the students recollected, found helpful, and what they were applying in their lives, today. I began to identify a model and I learned a lot from them, also. I will address these findings in my concluding chapter. As I began to evaluate the data, I saw both issues of content and pedagogy emerge; it was as important to identify HOW they learned as well as WHAT they learned. So, I needed to ascertain how the pedagogy worked in the teachings of indigenous religions insofar as the students 'conscientization' as eco-citizens.

Much of my research is based on the ground-breaking liberatory work of the Brazilian, revolutionary, educator Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994), the radical, feminist, African-American, cultural critic and author. Freire's global understanding of liberation struggles always emphasized that the important initial stage of transformation towards freedom is that historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstances. bell hooks goes further in her naming of 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' and the oppression of women and people of color. They do not speak of 'conscientization' as an end in itself. but always as it is joined by meaningful praxis. That is, it is not enough to have good intentions, but we must, in our individual lives, live out what we affirm. My research further explores this

idea. With action and reflection we are capable of transforming the world-of giving it meaning, in this particular research, as participatory, ecologically-aware citizens.

Were any of my students acting on their learning and changes of attitude towards themselves, each other, and what I heard as an ‘identification with something larger,’ many years after they had taken the course? Were they now activists and change-agents? And, further, what did I learn? How may I add to/adapt my pedagogy to include my findings?

The following chapter is the exploration of a model towards eco-spiritual learning that emerged from the ‘lived experience,’ through the students’ own words. The findings will be discussed in the concluding chapter.



## CHAPTER 3

### AN EXPLORATION OF A PEDAGOGY/MODEL TOWARDS ECO-CITIZENSHIP

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

I would like to begin with a question and a response by David Orr (1994), a leading environmental educator, as it is pertinent to my own pedagogy and its aims, which is to draw out our affinity for life and. . . open our souls to this glorious planet. I will similarly ground my students' words with a relevant textual quote throughout this chapter in my exploration of a model.

How are minds to be made safe for a planet with a biosphere? One answer is to load students down with more facts and data having to do with the decline of one thing or another. As teachers, educators, and concerned citizens we are obliged to tell the truth as accurately as we see it, which means partially through a glass darkly. But part of the truth cannot be told: it must be felt. It is within us. It would be odd indeed if several million years of evolution had not equipped us for this moment of truth. . . We are of the earth; our flesh is grass. We live in the cycle of birth and death, growth and decay. Our bodies respond to daily rhythms of light and darkness, to the tug of the moon, and to the change of seasons. . . Call it 'biophilia' (Wilson, 1984) or the ecological unconscious (Roszak, 1992), the earth is inscribed in us, we are of the earth. . . What do we do about that simple but overwhelming fact? (p. 204)

He says, the answer is to face it, but we are still caught up in denial, and all the addictive and dis-eased behaviors of our consumerist culture. How are we to educate? He continues:

The answer, I think, is implied in the root of the word 'education/educate,' which means 'to draw out.' What needs to be drawn out is our affinity for life. That affinity needs opportunities to grow and flourish, it needs to be validated, it needs to

be instructed and disciplined, and it needs to be harnessed to the goal of building humane and sustainable societies. Education that builds our affinity for life would lead to a kind of awakening of possibilities and potentials that lie largely dormant and unused in the industrial-utilitarian mind. Therefore the task is, as David Foreman stated, is to help us” open our souls to love this glorious, luxuriant, animated planet [Roszak, 1993] (Orr, 1995, p. 205)

In Part 1 of this chapter, I invite the reader to join me on a journey from Cambridge, to the hills of Vermont and to the mountains of Taos, New Mexico at 6,000 feet in order to introduce you to some of my teachers and elders. My experiences opened me up to new ways of knowing and being, beyond my Eurocentric focus and had a major impact on the evolution of my pedagogy. The learnings were profound and life-changing in terms of my eco-spiritual awareness. I was a searching, young parent in a new world in the early 1970s. My sheltered, Anglican heritage was limited compared with the exciting and challenging 'melting pot' diversity of America. I was needing a moral compass and spiritual practice. This adventure in learning, of feeling connected to the Source (Oscar, Igbo diviner), being grounded in spirit/the earth/community/ family/friends, is ongoing and sustains me in these troubled times. My hope is that fellow students in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions are also helped by such learnings (textual and experiential).

In Part 2 of this chapter, we will hear the students' descriptions, in 'their own words,' of their learning experiences in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions. I weave my analytic and interpretive comments throughout their evocative writings in order to highlight the re-occurring themes that emerged from the data (36 questionnaires and five in-depth, taped interviews at my home, and one e-mail, in-depth interview). I identify several key steps/realizations that seem to be important in such eco-consciousness and explore a possible model of pedagogical-praxis that may help educate

students toward identifying as eco-citizens. It is a holistic, collaborative eco-spiritual model.

I know from personal experience and that of my students that a KEY piece in this transformative education in identifying/becoming eco-citizens, and feeling a responsible part of Creation, is participation in actual indigenous/earth-centered teaching and practice with indigenous teachers. As mentioned earlier, both Wilber (2000) and Steingard (2005) see this as the transformative element in holistic/environmental education (as opposed to transitional/academic knowledge).

Working with the data, I became aware of recurring characteristics that were highly meaningful in terms of the students developing eco-consciousness: The Body, the Goddess, the pedagogy, coming-to-Voice, collaborative discovery and caring, to name a few. There were also continual references to Community, Connection & Immanence. There was often a movement from feeling lost and alone to one where they feel part of a larger reality, of creation.

Consequently, I saw what could be called the HELP model emerging, as issues of (1) Holistic Education and Hope, (2) Embodiment and Empowerment, (3) Liberation and (4) Possibility seemed to emerge as we look at how students come to see/interpret life differently than they did prior to the class. This chapter will see what elements are involved in how they come to experience changes in themselves, their identity, their relations with others, with the Earth and in their actual behaviours. In other words, how are they developing an eco-awareness, becoming eco-citizens?

Over the fifteen years of this course we have had the good fortune to work with many teachers who shared their time and knowledge(s) with us, several of whom came

consistently over many years such that they became part of our UNH community. Indeed, Arthur Hall, Ochazania Klarich and Oscar Mokeme all offered residencies, (separately) as we were funded on three, separate occasions, and many University of New Hampshire students and faculty participated.

To name some of our teachers there were: Arthur Hall (Camden, Maine, and first African-American to win The New Hampshire Governor Shaheen Award for work in the schools); Adam Smith, John Coyne and Ned Rollins ( drummers); Ochazania Klarich (Vodun mambo, Vermont); Carol Leonard, Laura Paterson and Jackie Mariani (midwives, witches and healers, New Hampshire and Maine); Catherine Mclaughlin-Hills (nurse-midwife, Durham, New Hampshire); Oscar Mokeme (Igbo diviner, Portland, Maine); Candace Cole-Mcrea/White Owl (Mohawk, Milton, New Hampshire) Shaman Pee-Mee and Boldwing (Abenaki and Apache, Goffstown, New Hampshire); Maureen Crowell/ Gentle-Wind-in-Her-Hair (Miq M'q); and Vidyvati and Amala (ordained women priests in the Western Buddhist Order, Newmarket, New Hampshire). We also listened and learned from 'bridgers' of traditions such as Dr. Funso Afolayan, (Ph.D., History and grandson of a Yoruba diviner, Nigeria), and Dr. Mary Westfall (Christian minister and feminist theologian).

**PART 1: What Indigenous People's Have To Teach Us/ Being Part of All Creation, of the Earth Community of Beings—My Story and Learnings**

So, I offer up my own story that brought me to a praxis for/of empowerment, to a feeling of immanence and connection to a larger whole, with a yearning to share this with others. . . to speak about and open them up to similar hope and joy in these troubling times of 'cosmic loneliness' (Meadows et al, 1992). These are embodied, eye-opening

experiences that offer hope and alternative practices to live more gently on the Earth in our materialist, individualistic society.

In response to any criticism of colonizing/co-opting indigenous religions and making a “smorgasbord religion,” Spretnak (1991) notes:

If we wish to explore the richness and depth of human spirituality, we need to embrace its diversity, the treasure at the core of each tradition. The purpose of examining various spiritual paths, however, should not be to pluck out bits here and there to mix in a planetary stew, for each tradition possesses its own integrity. At the very least, even reading about the diverse insights and effects of the practices might suggest to modern and post-modern readers new ways of thinking about the dimensions of being that is especially illuminated by a particular wisdom tradition. An interfaith approach also increases understanding, and presumably respect, and often serves to generate interest in neglected aspects of one’s own tradition. Most importantly, a consideration of the wisdom traditions might stimulate spiritual *practice* for they are entirely process-oriented, the teachings being mere supports for the experience of practice (p. 8).

When I first came to this country in the early 70’s, uprooted from life on a small farm in a medieval house with an outhouse most of the year, in bucolic John Constable country of Suffolk, England, I was thrown into the American maelstrom of activist Boston and surrounds. As a mother of two youngsters, I found the grounding I needed in a Buddhist Retreat Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a microcosm of world spiritual traditions in itself. I met Larry Rosenberg, my first spiritual teacher-mentor in 1974 at a hippy wedding on the rocks in Gloucester, Massachusetts, performed by Harvey Cox of Harvard. Dr. John Lilly was there (the dolphin researcher). I had been dropped into a pot pourri of new-age thinkers, just off the boat from little ‘ole England! What a paradigm shift; what a gift! Larry was close to Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn (who wrote *Full Catastrophe Living* and *Wherever You Go There You Are*) so I had the best minds for teachers, and Larry was still at Brandeis and had just met with Krishnamurti and had asked him about his dilemma of whether to remain a professor at the university or to ‘drop out’ and follow

his heart/practice of Buddhism. Krishnamurti replied: “The future is not in the University!”<sup>8</sup>

Anyway, Buddhist practice and vipassana meditation and sitting offered me a Middle Way, some peace of mind in my new, existentially confusing situation. The idea of sitting quietly and watching one’s thoughts and emotions and bodily sensations arise and then pass away was an exercise in the impermanence and transience of everything.

As Spretnak (1991) described it:

When we embrace the truth of being, the illusory constructions of stasis and self fall away, and we are released into the great cosmic vibration with its exquisite manifestations and dissolutions trillions of times per second. But what is a second? What is a moment? Our constructs of discrete, units of temporality (the measurement of and by discrete units moving through space) dissolve into the cosmic dance of flux. We are it. It is us. No illusions of separation, so no alienation (pp. 51-52).

Albeit these are very grand words and ideas, and lest I got caught up and attracted to my escapes to the city, Larry Rosenberg reminded me that my real life as a mother of two young boys, and as a wife in a highly dysfunctional marriage, was my practice. So, in my daily life of much chaos and activity, I was able to be more in the moment, let go of my ‘ego’ that felt a need to control everything, realise “this too will pass” at difficult moments, and to keep breathing and to subtly feel at one with the flow of things. This mindfulness and letting-go of attachment (to ideas, people, emotions, fear) and above all, compassion, helped me survive. As I read, listened, talked, sat, the more the ideas of non-harming and connection felt so right, so life-affirming. Suzuki (1991) was popular at the time and his book ends with:

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<sup>8</sup> Larry took his advice, and was down and out for several years, letting go of everything. He now runs the Insight Meditation Centre at 300 Broadway in Cambridge. He’s been there thirty years, teaching, and has written several books.

We must have beginner's mind, free from possessing anything, a mind that knows everything is in flowing change. Nothing exists but momentarily in its present form. One thing flows into another and cannot be grasped. Before the rain stops we hear a bird. Even under the heavy snow, we see snowdrops and some new growth. In the East I saw rhubarb already. In Japan in the spring we eat cucumbers (p. 138).

Twenty-five years on, the wisdom and insights of guru-teachers such as Thich Nath Hanh and the Dalai Lama have informed my practice and teaching and understanding in the world. The Dalai Lama describes earth as our home and sets forth a "practical ethic of caring for our home" grounded in the Buddhist understanding of interdependence. Tenzyn Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1992) said:

I think there is a direct connection between the correct understanding of ecology and the natural environment and the Buddhist principle of interdependence in terms of causes and effects and in terms of parts and wholes, factors and aggregates. But the correct understanding of the subtlest level of interdependence—that of the level of things and conceptual constructions—has more to do with maintaining the balance of the inner and outer world, and with the purification of the inner world (pp. 114-115).

This sounds like New Physics to me! The key here, in Buddhist practice, is the awareness/mindfulness of the individual. What a different world we would have if we had this environmental consciousness aware of our acts and thoughts towards all being.

Without question, the work of Thich Nhat Hanh, the exiled Vietnamese Zen priest, has the most profound effect on my students, out of all the earth-centered spiritual practices they study and experience. His idea of Inter-Being is oft-quoted in their papers and responses.

In one sheet of paper, we see everything else, the cloud, the forest, the logger. I am, therefore, you are. You are, therefore, I am. That is the meaning of the word "interbeing." We interact (1987, p. 87).

And part of the 13<sup>th</sup> precept (of 14) says:

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, we are committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. (Hahn, 1987, p. 99)

Emerging from a ten-day retreat with Thuy, as he is called, you really feel a bodily connection to the community with a heightened awareness of the healing green of Nature, the soft grass underfoot, the bright sky and the cheery bird-song, and the folks who formed the Sangha along with you.

Then I discovered the Goddess, a cultural feminist movement that came of age in the 80s. This was a remembering of the pre-Christian, earth-centered, cyclical folk religion of the Celtic and Old European peoples. How affirming of myself, as a woman, excluded from the patriarchal God-the-Father religion, of my body and its natural processes (the bleeding, the miracle of giving birth, the mystery of producing milk), of my heritage, my ancestors, of life and of Mother Earth!

The contemporary renaissance of Goddess spirituality is not just a protest against patriarchy or Western religion or the cultural negation of the female body (although these are vital concerns, too).

It is the practice of an embodied way of knowing and being in the world. We have immersed ourselves in the erotic world of myth, symbol, poetry, song, dance and Ritual for more than [25 years] in order to come to our senses. . . We hungered to feel scrumptious connectedness emanating from every direction of our being (Spretnak, 1991, p. 149).

My initial discovery of this celebratory, women's ways of being/knowing/learning was my first feminist theology class I walked into at Harvard Divinity School in the 80s.

Professor Sharon Welch had a baby in a papoose with her, and the class was sitting on the



ground in a circle with a candle in the center. I felt as if I had come home!<sup>9</sup> I learned about the experience of immanence, interconnectedness and community (as opposed to the inaccessible transcendence, alienation and individuation of our modern, androcentric culture). As Starhawk (1999), a wiccan, feminist theologian writes:

The three core principles of Goddess religion are immanence, interconnection and community. Immanence means the Goddess, the Gods, are embodied, that we are each a manifestation of the living being of the earth, that nature, culture and life in all their diversity are sacred. Immanence calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth, to live with integrity and responsibility. Interconnection is the understanding that all being is interrelated, that we are linked with all of the cosmos as parts of one living organism. What affects one affects us all. The felling of the tropical forests disturbs our weather patterns and destroys the songbirds of the North. . . and Community includes not only people but also the animals, plants, soil, air and water and energy systems that support our lives. . . Community is personal—(but) must also be seen as reaching out to include all the earth (p. 22).

For five years or so, I was part of a gathering of midwives, witches and healers, mostly women, and men sometimes, who met to explore the joy and wonder (and the frustration of working with groups) of co-creative possibilities and acknowledging the eternal round of the seasons and feasts and holidays, of realizing an older story of our connection to Mother Earth, when she, and women's bodies, were respected as givers of all life, and that the Christian holy days and stories are a modern rewrite of pagan (*L. paganus* means country person, folk) festivals.<sup>10</sup>

Again, my students, over fifteen years, have marveled at the discovery and the sense of belonging and affirmation felt on learning about the Goddess and all her implications. She is a metaphor for healing for all of us caught in the gender wars of oppression and violence, as well as for the Earth herself. Of course, God is beyond

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<sup>9</sup> My students describe such a feeling when they come to our Earth-Centered Religions class. Later, I will address this alternate pedagogy.

<sup>10</sup> Winter solstice became rebirth of the Son/Sun: Christmas.

gender, but the female symbol can perhaps redress some of the wrongs caused by God the Father of the last 2,000 to 5,000 years. The work of archeologist Maria Gimbutas (1991) and cultural historian Riane Eisler (1987) is important scholarship showing us not only the powerful and peaceful origins of our pre-Indo European culture, but also gives us a vision of the possibilities of a partnership future, whereby women and men and the natural world can live together in relative harmony and mutual respect and awe.<sup>11</sup>

Eisler (1987) writes:

[In this gynanic world] limitation and fear will no longer be systematically taught us through myths about how inevitably evil and perverse we human beings are. . . In this world, children will not be taught epics about men who are honored for being violent. . . They will be taught new myths, epics, and stories in which human beings are good; men are peaceful; and the power of creativity and love—symbolised by the sacred chalice, the holy vessel of life—is the governing principle. . . and after the bloody detour of androcentric history, both women and men will at last find out what being human can mean (p. 203).

A most hopeful and helpful, guiding vision for our time!

Continuing on my own journey for what other traditional, indigenous, immanent, religious traditions have to offer as ‘salvation’ for our very troubled times of worldwide violence towards women and Nature, of war and the constant genocide/suicide of men, I believe the wisdom of our indigenous elders (and *Women’s Ways of Knowing*) have a message of hope for us in the West/North if only we will turn off our TVs and computers and gadget-machines long enough to listen.

Twenty years ago I was sitting in a lecture in a course entitled African Religions, minding my own business and wondering why I was there, when Professor Lamin Sanneh talked of how we mortals are like mere ants in the face of Divinity, of God. And, lo and behold, I felt something crawling up my face, tickling my nose—it was a black

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<sup>11</sup> The original meaning of “fear” of God in the Hebrew Bible was “awe.” Through early Church politics and translations, religion became the “opiate of the masses” of Marx.

ant, in sparkling-clean Sperry Hall of Harvard Divinity School. A sign! A semester later, I took a course on Religion and Medicine (I had started a holistic health center in my big, old, Victorian home in Maine) and Karen McCarthy Brown came to talk to us on Haitian Vodun. She was an initiate; I was intrigued. I thought if she, an average, white, Harvard-trained, Western scholar could do it, why not I?

A couple of years later, developing my course on comparative religions where the goal was to search for a moral compass in our ecologically chaotic times, I went searching for a teacher-practitioner in an African tradition. A student (1991, and a questionnaire respondent), led me to an African-American woman, Ochazania Klarich of Vermont, a “mambo” in the Haitian-vodun tradition. Again, my cozy, relatively unchallenged world was turned akimbo. My students and I, over the years, have danced, drummed, chanted, done ritual, been ‘head-washed,’ dreamed and learned about a world rich with symbol and tradition that very much addressed our daily lives and struggles in a real, embodied way. We built shrines, communed with our ancestors and felt the connection more and more to the world of spirits, of nature, of Spirit.

Luisah Teish (1985), born and raised in New Orleans, a priestess of Oshun in the Yoruba Lucumi tradition (part of the huge Diaspora syncretistic religions) writes of da (Fon) or ase/ache (Nigeria):

The energy that carries creation, the force field in which creation takes place. . . while all nature contains energy from the Da and is considered fundamentally sacred, trees, rivers, mountains and thunderstorms are considered particularly so because of their utility and endurance. . . in the West African view both the rock and the human are composed of energy provided by the Da. . . the human is receptive to the energy emanating from the rock and the rock is responsive to human influence (p. 62).

This is a tradition rooted in the concerns of everyday life, where the rituals and charms speak to our senses, and they can be seen as a part of psychological transformation rooted in things that speak to us at a deeper level than words. Working with the personification (male, female and cross-gendered) of the forces of nature, the Orisha or Vodun have extrahuman powers to act as intermediaries between humans and the Creator (Olodumare). For instance, if someone has osogbo (illness, poverty) from a deity, this is due to an abuse of power (neglect, laziness) and it can be changed into ire (health, wealth) by proper sacrifice and by correcting the behaviour (ease, work). Ire can degenerate into osogbo through lack of proper action.

Making the pilgrimage over the years, either with an anticipatory group of students or alone, the three hours north up into the hills of Vermont transported me/us into another world of reality and understanding, full of ritual and the power of symbol, the song, the drum, prayer. It truly felt like an outpost of the Caribbean, especially at the bémbs (feasts for the lwa spirits) when so many of us crowded into Ozhazania's living room, usually wearing white, heads wrapped in scarves, danced and chanted and moved for hours with dozens of votive candles lighting the beautifully-decorated and colorful spirit-shrine that was being honored. The 'mother' of the family was a big, beautiful woman, Gloria, who was a nurse at Dartmouth Hitchcock. She was an 'obadiah' from Jamaica (a herbalist-healer) and she settled in Vermont because the Green Mountains reminded her of home. Being part of Ozhazania's 'house' was an eye-opening experience to the richness of another cultures' way of honoring the sacred, the spirit-world, in everyday life. We always joined 'mambo' in her daily prayerful walk up the mountain behind the house, first asking permission of Elegba to enter the threshold

between two tall pine trees, then calling and singing to various spirits in nature/universe along the long climb up, the lwa of the river (Oshun and Yemaya) the Spirit of the hot, thundery sky (Shango), until we got to the top where prayers for peace were said and little offerings gathered and made. Often the work was overwhelming and scary, overcoming fears and working with dreams and prophecy, undergoing a ‘head-washing,’ an initiation, not really knowing what I was taking on.

I will never forget the powerful dreams I had the night of my ‘initiation’ head-washing. I was very aware of the powers of the pot I had been given, that was nearby on a shrine I’d made to Yemaya, as instructed; it had some earth from Africa itself in there. All through the night I was struggling with a spirit (of death, another underworld, of fear?), a cold and menacing presence that was trying to pull me down and out of my body. I awoke feeling very unnerved, but at least I was here, alive and well. I had won at some level. There is a lot of trust involved. And when I am trying to understand it all and make sense of such occurrences, I remember McCarthy-Brown’s (1991) words:

Haitians acknowledge this quality of memory [who does the remembering in our written histories?! who is omitted?] more directly. Whereas we are anxious that our history not be false, their anxiety centers on the possibility that their history might become lifeless or be forgotten. Whereas in our eyes truthfulness is the paramount virtue of any historical account, in theirs what matters most is relevance and liveliness (p. 19).

As Dr. Funso Afolayan put it in a statement as part of a proposal submitted to the New Hampshire Humanities Council in June of 2000: “Haitian Vodun through its spectacular synthesis of many cultural traditions, emphasizes the essential unity of mankind and the transformative, regenerative and mediating powers of rituals in creating and maintaining order and well-being in the world.” We have to understand that although Haiti was well-isolated for most of its early history, enabling the African

traditions to remain fairly intact, it is a country with a history of extreme hardship, poverty, political oppression, and suffering, especially the slave-history, so its practices sometimes seem harsh.

So, when through good fortune, I met Dr. Wandé Abimbola, the *awise-ni agbaye*, the spiritual spokesperson for the Yoruba people in the world (ten million in Nigeria and forty million in the American Diaspora), I felt as if I had been led to the source. A friend, a documentary filmmaker, and I attended his inaugural lecture for the Department of Africanist Studies at Boston University. He had been teaching at Harvard before that. And when I heard the presentation mostly sung in ancient tones of the Yoruba language, and he talked of his tradition of divination and healing, I knew this was to be the next wonderful part of my spiritual journey. The African Yoruba religion seems gentler, more rooted in history. As Dr. Funso Afolayan, Professor of African History and Religions at UNH, described it: “Yoruba religion emphasizes the continuity and interplay of the past in the present and the interconnectedness of the natural and the spirit world.”

Over that year, the experience of a one-hour divination, replete with stories and chanting, and the appropriate sacrifices made at the Shango House-shrine in Roxbury, Massachusetts, under the learned but kind guidance of Baba (term for Father), the chief *babalao* himself, I felt most fortunate and intrigued to see/learn more.

Dr. Abimbola gave a talk entitled “Wanted: A New Covenant” at Harvard University in May of 1997, in which he talked of

. . . the deep connection of the Yoruba people with nature to the earliest times in Yoruba mythology when the Orisa (the divinities) came down from heaven above the earth in human form and created human beings in their own image, but instead of becoming humans when they departed, chose to become part of nature. From that point on nature became higher than man (p. 14).

He talks of their Creation Story, of the separation from nature and the verses of Ifa tell us it is time to:

. . . witness a dramatic change in our relations with our fellow humans as well as with the rest of creation. . . a new covenant based on the energy of Ifa which is peaceful, intellectual and tranquil energy. What Ifa is saying here is that we cannot continue to relate with one another on the basis of force. We must seek a new way of life if we all want to survive in this world (Abimbola, 1987, p. 21).

Finally, alongside these other-worldly/this-worldly experiences, we have been adopted into the family of Jo and Frances Suazo, in Taos, New Mexico. Jo is the seventh in line of medicine men for the Taos Pueblo which is rare in that it has withstood attack from Mexico, Spain, and the American federal government over hundreds of years. Their 1,000-year-old village is the oldest inhabited community in this country. They have chosen, still, to live without electricity and plumbing. Their water comes from the gushing river that pours down from their sacred mountain and divides the village into the North and South side, the winter and summer sides. So Jo and his wife Frances, a descendant in a long line of midwives, know intimately the land and the plants where they have lived for generations, not relocated and dispossessed as were most Native peoples. Over twenty years, my husband and I have traveled out there, once a year, staying at 7,000 feet in the fresh, mountain air of the fantastic Southwest, with the scent of brush-sage everywhere. We are invited to hang out with the family and the community and be part of their lives. Through countless stories and expeditions to collect herbs, picnics, informal drum and dancing gatherings and powerful age-old ceremonies at the pueblo, we have witnessed and learned, especially about the native wisdom of how to live peacefully on the Earth, respecting all creatures and acknowledging the importance of balance between the male and the female and all of life.

Their indigenous wealth of knowledge about medicines and natural healing, and their ancient songs and drum rhythms with their primal power, can help us lead a life in balance, again, if only we care to listen and learn.

Frank Waters (1984), the prolific author on the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, writes:

In the Kiva (the secret, underground ceremonial chamber) man is reminded that he lives in the whole of the immense and naked universe. And he is constantly made aware of the psychic, universal harmony which he must help perpetuate by his ceremonial life. For the Kiva is not only an architectural symbol of the physical universe. The universe with its great axis rock and its great sipapu canyon, is itself but a structural symbol of the mystical soul-form of all creation. And both are duplicated in man himself (p. 174).

Thus, I offer up my own journey in the hopes that it can demonstrate how indigenous people's and their traditional practices can teach us much about living gently on the earth. My wish, my belief and my work has been to share and expose the students at the University of New Hampshire to similar indigenous, wisdom traditions and knowledge. I believe/know that such knowledge can guide us in the needed direction of our individual and planetary healing. From the centering, compassionate practice of Buddhism to the world of guiding Spirit(s) in African and Diaspora religions, and to the connection to the land and all-our-relations of Native American traditions, there is so much from which we, and our mother earth, can benefit.



## **PART II: An Emerging Model in the Students' Narratives**

....my first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds.....then other peoples. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all.

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

To re-capitulate: I am attempting to develop and describe a model of facilitating eco-spiritual awareness that has been used over fifteen years of teaching Earth-Centered Religions, using a holistic approach to teaching that involves the intellect, the body and the Spirit. This is based on the new/old paradigm of perennial wisdom and now, quantum physics (Bohm, 1951, 1980). Current literature reviews and discussions in education address the limitations of the Cartesian, mechanistic paradigm that has been dominant since the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. This worldview sees everything as discrete entities and leads to an emphasis on individualism and competition. As far as the Earth is concerned, it has been a destructive ideology, with global awareness and sensitivity to other sentient beings seen as secondary/unimportant compared with personal and national gain and satisfaction. We know that endless information and education on the state of our planet tends to paralyse and depress people. We spend and comfort ourselves more to compensate for our guilt and continue in our denial, overwhelmed by the reality. We need a new story (Berry, 1992; Brockelman, 1992).

Perhaps, the following students' narratives, describing their learnings, may point to some of the important components of the new story of wonder, awe and love for our 'ecos.'

And, the classroom-community is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Tompkins (1990) says the learning environment is “a microcosm of the world; it is the chance we have to practice whatever ideals we may cherish. The kind of environment one creates is the acid test of what it is that one really stands for” (p. 657). He reassures us that we truly do have the power, as educators, to make a difference, to create/model peace and justice and a more loving world, by the choices we make.

In this chapter, I would like to present the themes and topics that came to light, repeatedly, in the students’ responses to the questionnaire. As I have suggested, issues of the body (**embodiment**), experiential learning, hope, possibilities (**pedagogy**), community and collaboration and connection (**immanence**) seemed to be the major themes emerging from the questionnaire within the overarching categories of change, empowerment, coming-to-Voice, becoming an eco-citizen, that seemed to address my Research Questions (see Appendices G, H and I).

### Spiritual Re-Visioning

We cannot amend our pedagogy until our epistemology is transformed. . . it will happen because we are in the midst of a far-reaching intellectual and spiritual revisioning (Palmer, 1983, p. xvii).

I believe that spirituality in education is the key transformative principle/ingredient that effects change in values, self-identification and even behaviours. What is ‘spirituality’ in education? It is education with purpose: gives meaning, education that is liberatory, education that is emancipation. It connects, it builds relationships between teachers, students, men and women, diverse others, ourselves and nature/creation, with all there is.

... “the spiritual” means to be in touch with some larger, deeper, richer whole that puts our present limited situation into a new perspective. It is to have a sense of “something beyond,” of “something more” that confers added meaning and value on where we are now. . . it may be an attunement to some deeper, cosmic sense of wholeness, a sense that our actions are part of some greater universal process (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, pp. 18-19).

More scholars are addressing the issue between spirituality and education now, thanks to the inclusion of previously marginal voices: women, people of color, gay men and women, indigenous peoples, challenging the hegemony of masculist Eurocentricism. Patti Lather (1994) says such reform of the basis of knowledge disrupts long-held paradigmatic assumptions and dispenses with the concept of neutral research, replacing it with explicit or “openly ideological” research. The Spiritual Voice is becoming heard, less silenced. There is now a cultural ideology and an explicit discourse around spirituality.

It is imperative to seek models whose lived pedagogy can incite us to attune to our own spiritual reservoirs and draw from them the “know-how” and the “be-how” to foster balance, unity and harmony, and growth in our classrooms (Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Daa’Iyaa, 2000, p. 450).

They go on to say, “as the ultimate ‘S’ word, spirituality has tended to be a topic rarely explored in its multidimensionality in the sacred, secular halls of the academy (p. 451). It may also give us insights on culturally-relevant teaching and liberatory pedagogy.

As we are a microcosm of the macrocosm, it is important to move from the ‘I’ to the ‘We.’ I see the “conscientization” process towards becoming eco-citizens involving issues of caring and a feeling of connectedness, being part of the earth-community. Hence, this chapter contains the substantive part of my research, which is to elucidate, point-to, identify what seem to be the crucial elements in the evolution of an active, eco-spiritually aware student, a change agent, who wants to make a difference and help to

preserve our planet for the future generations. For a description of this process, I will use the student's own words to see what pedagogical characteristics we might hope for: such as connection, empowerment, coming-to-Voice, etc.

#### The Students' Stories—Highlighted Characteristics: I-to-WE

For many students, the discovery of the fact that we have a history/herstory was revelational( see later) as was the relational learnings, as the following quote summarises:

W.R. (2004) Artist, Graduate Student:

*I have always been interested in learning about pre-history. Somewhere along the line, humanity has gotten on an evolutionary destructive path. My 'aha' was mostly from the Relationship aspect of the class. To me, this exemplified HOW we need to approach the eco-crisis. The conclusion was not WHAT to do; we basically know that, but rather how to be, to network, and to work together. We did that in class.*

In presenting the dominant themes as far as the students are concerned, I hope to show what was important to them in terms of moving from I-to-We, from isolation to connection. Then, collating these “data” we can analyse, interpret and theorise somewhat in terms of what may be occurring in the “consientization” of the students.

I have highlighted the major, recurring themes in bold-type. The date that follows the students' initials shows when they were in WS 595 and/or WS 795.

#### Situate: Students Searching

So many of the students speak of their searching-mode that brought them to WS 595 and how sharing stories, learning of their erased history, affirmation of themselves as women, developing a Voice within a safe, trustworthy community, together with their reflective writing—all helped them feel a sense of connection to themselves, each other, and to nature, such that they felt able and accountable in terms of making some changes.

Beginning with Question 1 of the Questionnaire, I situate some of the students and why they came to the class-generally, they are searching for something more. . . .

Question 1: When did you take WS 595/795? What brought you to the class? What was going on in your life at the time?

C.H. (Summer, 1994), Ph.D. candidate writes:

*I believe I took the course in the summer of 1994. I came to the class on a recommendation. I was looking for a course to feed my soul after my first semester at UNH as a doctoral student in the Writing Program (in the Education Department). **I felt lonely and disconnected.** I had left my spiritual community back in Denver some time ago, and I needed a new spiritual community in my new home in New Hampshire. I wanted to find a way to integrate my spiritual beliefs and practices (the importance of service, prayer, meditation, ritual, ceremony) with my academic work.*

A.B. (Fall 2002)

*I realize I was lonely and **searching for connection.** I was in the middle of some big transitions.....I didn't have my parents to turn to because they are addicts and at the time were in rehab. I also hadn't made many friends thus far in college, because I had trouble finding others that shared my values. . . I was definitely in a stage of searching and seeking. . . I began to search deeply in my spiritual life and I found I wanted more. I had recently stopped going to Catholic Church, finding I often felt empty there, and unfulfilled. I wanted to connect to this new perspective of myself as a woman in a man's world with my spiritual life. Luckily, I had come to the right place!*

J.Z. (1992)

*At the time I began class I was feeling **a bit lost.** . . class truly helped me to recognize **my longing** to feel in touch with the sacred within and surrounding myself. Growing up I wasn't raised with any particular religion. Sometimes I felt left out as a child. The Feminist Spirituality class really had a great effect on my views of organized 'religion' and helped me to realize that there are many ways of expressing our sense of the magic within ourselves and the world around us. . . For me, the central theme of earth-centered spirituality in class was very important. I am not sure that I recognized my own love of nature and my feelings of **connection to the natural world as spiritual** before exploring it in class. I remember during the semester that I was in class I went for a walk in the woods. I was sitting beside a river on a snow-covered hill surrounded by evergreens. The sense of comfort and of peace that the earth gave me became crystal clear to me, and **my sense of connection and love** of the land and the trees and water brought about an intense feeling of awe within me. This was for me a recognition of myself as a spiritual being nurtured by, and part of the magic of the natural world around me.*

From the student's responses, to the Questionnaire, we can see that issues/themes around "lost" and "lonely" and searching for "connection," are repeated. The following Questions asked what was most meaningful to them, what did they remember most about WS 595.

The Most Meaningful—Epiphanies in the Students' Testimonies

(1) The Goddess/the Body

Question 2: What do you remember/stands out about your experience in this class? What has been most meaningful?  
Question 3: Can you describe any ahas/transformations that occurred during/from the class in terms of your eco-spiritual awareness/growth and how you see the natural world/others/all around you?  
Question 12: What from WS 595/795 has been most meaningful? Worthwhile? Positive? Helpful?

Questions 2, 3 and 12 ask what they remember as the most meaningful? The majority replied that learning of our erased Woman's history was affirming and life-changing. Over half (19) wrote about the importance of **the Goddess**. As Chellis Glendinning and Ochazania Klarich, two of our teachers, point out, our aboriginal, Neolithic heritage is not that far back, and it is still there in our collective memory/unconscious. There is a feeling of "coming home" to our pre-Christian birthright when we learn of our invisibilised heritage when God was a woman! Our Judeo-Christian, patriarchal worldview that has led to dominion over all things and to untold violence against women, oppressed peoples and the Earth needs the BALANCE of women and Wisdom traditions' ways of knowing---of eco-citizenship!

The discovery of "When God Was A Woman" (Merlin Stone) and the 25,000 year old history of the Goddess in Old Europe and the Middle East is a profound epiphany for most, if not all, the students, women and men. Having been excluded from the male

godhead for over 3,000 years. . . this is a huge, affirmation for women! No wonder *The Da Vinci Code* has been a worldwide bestseller for several years, now. Women and the Earth have been subjugated for thousands of years. It is time for Women's Ways of Knowing and indigenous knowledge about the Earth to bring Balance back into our worldview.

K. C. (December 2004)

*I was taught in my Catholic upbringing that Eve was the downfall of all creation, thus making women inherently evil. . . In regard to both sexuality and women's health, learning about **the goddess** religion has been **very liberating** for me. It only makes sense that we celebrate the wonderful and powerful aspects of the female experience. In the time of the goddess, women were powerful healers. . . The Goddess spirituality gives women positive self-images about their place in the life cycle.*

K. G. (1999), Poet and R.N. in her 40s; daughter also in class

*I came to understand the systemic and historic use from ancient to present times with the politics of spirituality to desacralise the feminine and the need to universally reframe spirituality in the feminine **Body of not only myself** and also expand it on our place of being, **the earth**.*

C. G. (1995), R.N.

*Most significant was the connection I felt with spirituality minus the male perspective. Learning about society before Christianity. Understanding there was a mother/female deity in the form of **a goddess**. Suddenly 'religion' became something I could relate to and wanted to know more about.*

C.A. (Spring 2003), Midwife-in-Training

*When I am outdoors or interacting with nature in other ways I consider the alternatives to the patriarchal god-the-father that I grew up knowing. I find so much comfort in the idea of **goddesses**. I look at Christian Mary so differently; I have intense curiosity about Mary Magdalene. . . . When I envision a female version of god it is easier to pray and I can **feel truly connected**.*

L. E. (2002)

*I have integrated much of what was discussed, reviewed and/or mentioned regarding **Witchcraft and Goddess-Spirituality**. These points of discussion, circles, demonstrations,*

*etc., resonated the rest with me. Integration has meant embracing the Goddess and becoming a witch. . . The Spiral Dance, The Burning Times, and our class circles changed my life. . . My life has become a one-woman battle with patriarchy, misogyny, women as objects, the media, judgment & close-mindedness. I speak my truth clearly and concisely, always making allowances for debate and discussion. I feel I have opened the eyes of many who would have otherwise just crinkled their noses at words like 'pagan' & 'witch.' . . I'm still exploring. Goddess spirituality that holds up women as divine has been personally fulfilling to me where women have so often been left out and overlooked. I feel most at home with it.*

S.M. (1998), MALS Program

*I remember being very moved to learn **about the goddess culture**, to watch the film, *The Burning Times*, to find out about Gimbutas' work. (Most meaningful has been). . .the exploration into the historical context of women's spiritual lives and how that relates to the world today. . . The most important thing was the opportunity to learn about women's spirituality through so many lenses, authors and experiences. I was completely awed and dumbfounded to learn how much of the time it has been repressed—basically confirming my suspicions of being lied to by the powerful. I also remembered my confirmation of the power of my own inner knowing that women are incredible beings with unique and special gifts that need valuing and not repressing all over the world.*

Even a male student wrote:

J.C. (2005), Mid-Term

*This class has also been particularly helpful for me since it has opened my mind to the **Goddess** tradition, and more earth-centeredness. What most attracts me to the Goddess tradition is the fact there is no hierarchy, that there are no 'isms such as ageism, classism or racism, and that it can be practiced anywhere, indoors or out. Elinor Gadon's "The Once and Future Goddess" has been the most accessible to me in terms of allowing me to move closer to the Goddess tradition While also serving as an intermediary source through which I can explore some of my own spiritual questions. Part of my journey has been discovering the beauty that is all things, and appreciating it. Gadon's work has certainly shown me another path to travel in order to find and be one with beauty. Her descriptions of the practices of the goddess tradition are so open and accepting that I cannot help but feel a closeness with and a fondness for the Goddess, and all those who worship her. By acknowledging the Goddess' omnipresence, by celebrating the inherent beauty of the **earth's life giving ability and the sacredness of nature, I am able to connect most deeply** with all the different aspects of my spirituality. The connection inevitably leads to a connection with others, as the Goddess tradition clearly shows, and I have felt for myself. **Connecting with others**, sharing what is most important to us, and revealing ourselves to others is what gets us closer to our truest, most spiritual selves. . . . Another part of my spiritual journey that has been affected by this class has been the respect I have for women in my life and the world.*



### More on Embodiment

Of course, everything is interconnected, and everything the students experience and say around the Body and embodied knowledge/way of knowing is linked to the ecofeminist and indigenous knowing that we are all part of everything, of nature, of the planet.

B.W. (Fall 2001) Spring 2005 Questionnaire:

*I would have been a different person if I hadn't taken WS 595. At the time I was in search for the **goddess**. I needed healing. While taking the class I found her in me. I found her in all the women around me. I found her in the woods behind my apartment, and in the moon. I found faith in my spirituality, fully knowing that my spirituality is always changing and growing. I gained new confidence in my womanhood. I was awakened to my strength, my flow, my sexuality!!!! Thank you!!"*

M.G. (Fall, 20 04) Spring 2006 Questionnaire

*My class presentation was on **the goddess**. I am still interested in reading about this subject. I think the aspect of this project stuck with me the most is that I have a healthy skepticism of non-earth-centered religions. I love that **the metaphor of the earth as mother** encourages people to respect our planet.*

This association/realisation that the body of the mother Earth/the goddess/ourselves is one and the same, is an epiphany!

A.A (1991) writes (follow-up interview):

*Being grounded on the Earth and in **my own body** has brought me many learnings. I think that there is intelligence and **knowing** that we cannot access through a mental, intellectual approach only. Our culture seems to slip further and further into a "black and white" dichotomous view of the world, which is leading us down a very destructive path of misunderstanding and violence. It seems to me that **body/feeling/Earth centered knowing** has more room for holding alternative, and even seemingly contradictory, information/ideas/ways of seeing the world and acting in it. There seems to be a lack of security in who we are as a culture that makes us very intolerant of anyone else if they differ at all. These fears become sexism, racism, xenophobia, etc., that make it very easy for us to support destruction of others through violence, war and plunder of the Earth and her resources.*

From the above turning-point epiphanies, it can be seen that learning about the Goddess, discovering our power-full heritage, experiencing embodiment through ritual, circles and art and hearing of the importance of the BALANCE of Mother Earth and Father Sky in indigenous religious traditions, is healing and ultimately affirming of women and of all Life/Nature. This is the experience of immanence.

(2) The BODY- Eco-feminism and Immanence

Starhawk (1990) writes:

Earth-based spirituality is rooted in three basic concepts that I call immanence, interconnection and community. The first **-immanence-**names our primary understanding that the Earth is alive, part of a living cosmos. What that means is that spirit, sacred, Goddess, God-whatever you want to call it-is not found outside the world somewhere-it's in the world: *it IS* the world, and it is us .Our goal is not to get off the wheel of birth nor be saved from something. Our deepest experiences are experiences of connection with the Earth and with the world (p. 73).

She goes on to say that when we understand the Earth is alive, then we understand that everything is interconnected. Just as in our bodies. . . what happens to our finger affects what happens to our toe. And, what we do to the Amazon rainforest affects our air that we breathe. This is Margulis and Lovelock's (1988) Gaia theory. **Interconnectedness** is the second principle of Earth-based spirituality. And, finally when we understand these interconnections, we know that we are all part of a living **community**, the Earth.

The kind of spirituality and the kind of politics we're called upon to practice are rooted in community. Again, the goal is not individual salvation or enlightenment, or even self-improvement though these may be things and *are* things that happen along the way. The goal is the creation of a community that becomes a place in which we can become empowered and in which we can be connected to the Earth and take action together to heal the Earth (p. 74).

Thus, the principles of immanence, interconnectedness and community challenge us to take responsibility, to live with integrity, to do something. This is the difference between a lived, practiced spirituality and an intellectual philosophy. My research asks whether/if

students' experience of becoming participants in an intimate, sharing, caring class-community, led to a feeling of interconnectedness and a sense of Spirit in all beings/immanence. Do they feel a microcosm of the macrocosm?

In feminist process, we listen to each other and recognize that different people's opinions are important, even if we disagree, and create a strong sense of safety-this changes people! In our relatively small groups (15-25 people) we can get to know each other and tell our stories of our experience. Ritual, symbolic, intentional process, is also an important part of this process of transformation.

Environmental issues are women's issues! We live in a patriarchal system of "power over," of domination and control. Ecofeminism challenges all relations of domination. When the spirit is immanent, when each of us is the Goddess, is God, we have an inalienable right to be here and to be alive. This kind of value is central to the kind of change we want to create.

Here are some more students' writings on their sense of immanence.

A.O. (1994)

*For someone raised in a strictly academic environment, and from the very ritualistic ordered background of Catholicism, the opportunity to "open up" about spiritual matters was quite freeing. Though the course was definitely grounded in texts and not completely reliant on a physically participant experience, such experiences gave the course a broader manner in which to reach students on an emotional, as well as academic level. For many courses this would be inappropriate, but for a course such as this, I believe that it was an integral part of the understanding process, i.e., it gave the students the opportunity to feel the spirituality they were studying, rather than merely viewing it through a scholar's impersonal lens. I have always been a "learn through reading," academic type of person, and this type of experience was new to me.*

C.G. (1995)

*Most significant was the connection I felt with spirituality minus the male perspective. Learning about society before Christianity. Understanding that there was a **mother/female diety in the form of a goddess**. Suddenly "religion" became something I could **relate to** and wanted to know more about.*

*... **I was able to connect with this life form or energy that I never named as such before**. I now believe that there is a level of energy that impacts who we are and what path we take. Once you can learn to tap into that, **it is transformational**. It requires a quiet intuition most easily accessed through nature, i.e., woods, ocean, mountains, etc.*

*There is a sense of calm when you can get to that place through nature. **I become aware of a larger order of things**. I understand my part in the larger picture that transcends time and space. I see the perfection in the systems of nature that prove to me that nature is not random, but powerful and wise. I am only a smaller component in a huge and intricate system.*

B.S. (February 6, 2004, response)

*... yearning for something unnamed and unimaginable. ... This message, that the sacred feminine **exists in all of us**, and has been pushed asunder for thousands of years, is the most powerful wake up call I have ever received. It reverberates **throughout my entire body** and has electrified both my mind and my soul. I have mostly discovered "**Her**" through my studies and interest in goddess mythology, story and art. My eyes were captivated first by these powerful images and my mind followed as I reached out and explored any and all information I could find. ... Once I discovered how prominent, mythical stories exist in our collective unconsciousness, I was never able to see the same way again. **I was given a gift**. I saw everything, specifically art, with meaning and symbol. Everything became richer and more sensual. I saw this amazing **connective tissue throughout it all**. I felt tied to the past, alive to the present and almost awe-struck about the future. It was almost like I was Helen Keller and I had connected the word water to the scribblings on my left hand by Annie Sullivan and that cold, wet stuff drizzling down my right. I could see!!!*

*With this discovery came unbridled **passion** for more. This passion led me closer and closer to what in some ways has **now consumed me**—this knowledge and acceptance of the sacred feminine and how she shows herself to us throughout history in art and image. Her image is so fascinating to me because it is so diverse. She represents everything—all facets of life—creation, birth, nurturance, sexuality, death, rebirth. All of life's mysteries are revealed through her many aspects. And seeing this image, rather than just reading about it **makes the experience so much more subjective**. ... Understanding empathy, and connectiveness all come into play with this subjective experience. And these attributes are feminine in nature and sometimes sorely missing in this patriarchal culture.*

*It is this lack of feminine attributes that has created this imbalance in the world. My **concern is how to right this balance**. The feminine has been seen as nature and nature as evil. There is spiritual and there is sexual and they are dualistic. Western Culture doesn't recognize the feminine as the creative life force and this has contributed to a*

*mind/body split in our society. Mother Earth is not as revered as Father God. Spirit is more important than body. Thinking is valued over feeling and masculine is valued over feminine.*

*To upright this imbalance, the feminine must once again be recognized as equal and powerful. The way I chose to do this is by exposing **her image as the creative life force**. Specifically, through looking at her body/sexuality in a positive light and as central to her and our existence. **By honoring her body and erotic spirit, we can in turn honor the earth.***

### (3) Transforming Holistic Pedagogy—Ritual, Stories, Indigenous Teachers

An important component of transformational learning is the experiential piece. Steingard (2005) asks: “Are there limits to spiritual growth if spiritual practices are not engaged?” And he notes Wilber’s (1999) distinction between Translation and Transformation, where the former practices focus on new ideas or new paradigms about reality as opposed to the transformation of consciousness “into subtle, causal and nondual domains” (p. 133), in other words, the experience of transformation.

Wilber (1999) argues that transformation requires spiritual practice.

[Without] genuine contemplative practice—maybe Zen, maybe Shambhala Training, maybe contemplative prayer, or any number of authentic transformative practices, all intellectual pursuits of Spirit are reduced to “linguistic chitchat and book junk” (p. 350).

Steingard (in Benefiel, 2003) sees this as an enormous challenge for educators moving towards the spiritual . . . ”academic training and its application to pedagogy are predominantly cerebral.” He adds that “educators and practitioners desiring to go to the next level of development are in a ‘dilemma’—they must complement their translation with transformation” (p. 243).

#### Students’ Perspectives on Pedagogy

So, again, I offer the words of my students to speak to the class pedagogy and Transformations/transformational learning. Yes, the content of the course was mentioned

often: how they constantly refer to and use the texts and the course packet of readings, (including poetry and art work), but it is the experiential and embodied ways of learning that they remember most, years later:

C.H. (Summer,1994), then a Ph.D. candidate, now a Professor of writing says:

*What I remember most were the different **rituals and ceremonies** we engaged in together: Full moon circles, dancing barefoot in the grass in Vermont (the altars in honor of the ancestors), praying at the Buddhist Center, celebrating the solstices. I found them meaningful because I became **reconnected with the earth, my ancestors and my own traditions (Celtic)**. I also remember the woman sculptor who came in and showed slides of female deities. As a **full-figured woman in an anorexic society, I felt affirmed by their full bodies**.*

***Transformations** happened every time I allowed myself to be open to change. I began to live my life more conscious of the moon, the cycles of life, and the cycles of my own body. I became **more conscious of the earth**, the need to ground myself, sometimes to the point of walking barefoot on the earth, or African dance with its downward movements to connect with the earth. Through the acts of kindness by the teacher (you Pen), I became **more conscious of my need for kindness, distant “objective” world of academia** warmth, caring, in the otherwise cold. I became more conscious of my need for healing, through bodywork, touch, massage, as the pain would pour out of me at the slightest touch from a healer when receiving a massage (you again Pen). I became more conscious of **my need for a female community** in a world run by men, and my need to learn more about a possible time and place when women were rulers and **goddesses** were worshipped. These **affirmations empowered** me in my work and in my personal life, particularly when I had to deal with the death of a loved one. I grabbed onto the ceremonies, practices, beliefs, and rituals to get me through the grieving process. I learned to come out of isolation. I learned the value of **community**.*

J.P. (Spring 1991) Was about to drop out of school!! Today, she's a Ph.D.

Candidate in Power/Sustainable Engineering at Dartmouth! She, too, remembers most, fifteen years after the fact, the experiential learning, though she still has and enjoys the readings. Here are her responses to Questions 2 and 3 of the Questionnaire.

Question 2: What do you remember/stands out about your experience in this class? What has been most meaningful?

Question 3: Can you describe any ahas/transformations that occurred during/from the class in terms of your eco-spiritual awareness/growth and how you see the natural world/others/all around you?

*Question 2: The most memorable class was when Arthur Hall came to class. He had a sparkle in his eye and was very warm and caring. He had a nice laugh and we **meditated, danced and talked**. I particularly enjoyed the class because it **exposed us** to a lot of different people. Another really special class was when the old Native American couple came. He was learning to read but completely wise and stressed a life of learning, the evolution of learning, the understanding of life, past present and future. I remember Ochazania came to UNH and we went to her Vershire, Vermont, house. Both were extremely valuable, educational and meaningful. You and Ochazania together were incredible teachers. You had such balance between **eco-feminine spirituality** and how to find your **power within and share it with the world**. I am truly honored to have studied with both of you power mamas who helped me focus and build, design, dance and create **sustainable community**. One of my best friends is her daughter, Lynn Ellen and I am so thankful to have her in my life for she is one of my dancing sisters'.....your class woke me up to many ways of spiritually regarding the natural world. I learned about the woman, feminine connections, that are available. It definitely fostered **connections** between me and **all living creatures**...more compassion, more understanding, more forgiveness.*

*Question 3: The class exposed me to several levels and dimensions of eco-spiritual awareness. It helped me understand my own awareness and open me up to several other facets of my spirituality. I was so young then but it did help place me in my universe and understand the work I needed to do in this life. It's been 15 years since the class...WOW! I was too clueless and this class kept me safe **by giving me tools** to make relatively good decisions in the pressure of college life. Many of my friends took this class at other times and we were able to **discuss, use, incorporate** and give thanks for material we were introduced to in your class.*

And, E.B. ( 1997), now a teacher, awaiting ordination, writes of the reading and reflective writing as well as the experiences:

*I remember the openings of each class. . . the installations/altars in the center of the circle. I remember staying up late to read the abundant amount of readings ( some of the books showed up again during my graduate Studies at Harvard-I was prepared!). . . writing reflections. . . the circle of women. . . going to the home of the **African/voodoo priestess** in Vermont—the dancing, the drumming, and the Peace Pole. . . I remember the numerous visitors on so many topics-dream work, **Native American ceremony**, Goddess traditions. . . breathing exercises. . . making art. . . the thick and comprehensive reader to which I still sometimes refer. . . being exposed to writers for the first time—I now refer to them often. . . I remember being inspired and accepted. . . One could not leave any class without an increased awareness of **interconnectedness and community** through the conversations, experiences, readings, films, guests.*

*I really felt that the **rituals**, writing and reading we did impacted me significantly—and once known, we cannot un-know. I came to new realizations about the **history of women cross-culturally**, across time and space. I was able to more intentionally learn about and between gender and religion and earth. The course truly set me on a path of always*

*including such connections in my own emerging worldview. I learned a great deal about my power, my strength, during a time when I felt vulnerable & weak, seeking wholeness, & the course provided a haven-rich and vast—for me to explore, learn, and to be challenged.*

J.Z. (1992) writes:

*The rituals in class were very powerful for me. Connecting with other people in the group and creating sacred space really allowed me to feel more open with sharing spiritually with people. . . In my life today I can see things that I have incorporated from class into my everyday life. Today, my home ( which she shares with J.I., a male student from the class!) has many altars, some with plants and stones and sea-shells and others with Buddhas and incense and lots of candles, reminding me of the spiritual that is ever present. My garden is also a sacred space for me. . . .*

*For me the essence of eco-spiritual learning in class is that there are many ways of expressing, celebrating, and cherishing the human feelings of love, wonder and connection with the natural world. Each way is valid and beautiful, an inspiration to embrace the compassion and magic of the earth & nature of which we are so blessed to be a part of.*

A.A. (Summer.1991), In-depth case study-interview (February 10, 2006), Peace Activist

Q: What, overall, would you say, looking back these 14 years, has been the most useful in that time, helpful?

A: *Learning how to breathe actually. Breaking down the ritual, I remember that part and use that part and you know I have other things and I have used it a lot in demonstration. . . grounded by belief. . . . one of the most terrifying situations I purposefully put myself into. . . and I remember completely being. . . yeah it was really scary and the same thing actually when I was arrested cuz I was terrified. Terrified of going to jail and all these things but it was mostly partly maybe also because I was in this state of. . . I was focusing on it, but I remember this sudden feeling, thinking oh my God, I have to get out of here, I'm going to completely freak out and then having this like sudden breathing in and out and connecting that and suddenly feeling like **I was part of the goddesses' body** and I was doing her work and everything was fine. And it was like sooo helpful and that's the same thing before I would get out to introduce someone and before I, I know I would remember, right, this is really all about me and God and the earth and you know, **I'm a part of her** ...*

B.M. (2002 and 2004) writes:

*The class helped me to become more empowered, made me feel like I didn't need to settle for something I didn't want, or take abuse from anyone. I guess it would be best for me to comment on interconnectedness, because that is really where I feel I have really come home. I was so lost leaving high school, not having the support of my parents, or the love of anyone. A sheep among wolves. College is overwhelming, a lot more than people give*



light to, especially if you feel like you're on the outskirts. This class has **helped me feel part of something**. Something that I could use my senses to see, feel, taste, touch, be, hear, all of it. I've spent a great deal of my life feeling abandoned and alone, and thinking how much life was passing me by, and I wasn't really living. But this class gave me some kind of **hope**. It made me realise how incredibly beautiful life is, even when it is so hard to get out and see sometimes.

The women in the class had come from so many different emotional places. . .we knew each other's **life stories**, our battles, our inconsistencies, our strengths and our collective beauty. That was the first time a class had ever done that for me. It was '**abre los ojos**.' My eyes were opened. . . I've found myself completely enjoying nature and feeling tied to all living things on earth. It's given me an incredible peace to go out and enjoy something tangible like nature. I don't believe in god, in Christianity. I just believe in the immensity of the moment, the pull of time and space, the beauty of nature, the **interconnectedness of everything**. When I reach down and feel the soil in my fingers, or taste the air, or smell a flower-that's god. Nothing else.....

Both times I took this class, (595 and 795) I presented on Native American spirituality—I'm not sure how religiously I've made it a part of my life, just that I appreciate nature and the interconnectedness of everything. That it brings me solitude and great peace. That I feel **part of something** I cannot define, **yet I feel kindred to**.

M.S. (Spring 2004) 30-year-old male, MALS Graduate

My biggest challenge was learning to see emotions as having value and the idea of honoring them. . . Through the sense of **community** and respect amongst the students and the professor in WS 795, I have been able to grow a great deal emotionally both in terms of trusting others and myself which has given me more confidence expressing myself. **The interconnections and sense of community** was a central aspect of the course and the success of the teaching approach relied heavily on this. A common experience throughout the class was a level of respect and compassion towards everyone that allowed for discussion & openness to such an extent that I have never experienced in an academic setting.

The **biggest transformative** moment was when Oscar performed the shamanic ritual for us. At some point during **the ritual** I began to be aware of something new, something unexpected in the world. I felt in tune and **connected** in an almost unbelievable way that I am still coming to understand. The experience was profoundly mystical. . . The entire class was transformative in many ways from priorities in life and ways of doing things to trusting & acceptance of myself and others.

I see **new possibilities and hope** for myself. . . I have hope and I feel able to love again.

K.R. (2004) Male, A Senior Physics major, the only young man in a class of twenty women, was very ambivalent about being in the class and tried and threatened to drop it several times!

*When I started taking the class I was in a pretty messed-up place in my life. . . I was very insecure at the time. Also, it was the last class of my undergraduate career.*

When asked in the Questionnaire (August 2005) what was the most meaningful memory of WS 595, he responded:

*The good feelings of the class. The class was fundamentally about **feeling connected to life** and that permeated everything. I appreciated the feminist nature of the class and feminism has gone on to shape my life greatly. **I remember Oscar**. That was powerful. P. stands out as a wonderful guide and an amazing person beyond words. . . . What really stands out about the class is **love**, not the conceptual things. That it happened. That it existed. That such good energy was brought into our lives.*

Again, **the care in the community and trust** are key to development and learning. K.R. is in graduate school, presently, and as far as his lifestyle: *I started biking and now I almost never ride in a car. . . I promote cycling in Portsmouth....I shop only at local businesses, period. I care for Portsmouth and try to help it grow.*

#### More on Pedagogy and Praxis

This topic was also one of the main themes that students wanted to talk about in their responses, (along with the Goddess, the body and Community and Connection). The way the class dynamic was organized with the integration of mind/body/spirit, the holistic approach, was very important to them in terms of learning in a meaningful way.

Question 10: Could you address any of the following with regard to your experience of the class, referring to any of the headings: Holistic approach, Empowerment, Peer education, Coming to Voice, Possibilities and Hope, Accessibility of Professor, Community, Interconnectedness, Collaboration, Written responses, Challenges, Healings, Sustainable lifestyle, etc.?
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Answering Question 10 of the Questionnaire, the question relating to the teaching pedagogy of the class, the students gave the most specific responses and examples:

A. A. (1991, Independent Study), Peace and Justice Activist

*The learning came through so many forms: readings, writings, attending rituals, meeting with my co-studier, outside under the moon to discuss our experiences and thoughts. This*

*holistic* aspect of the class led to my learning in a very profound way/on a deep level. I find that this a class I remember in great detail, more than most others I took. The material and learning **became part of me**. I also remember that **the written responses** really helped me to **reflect** and learn more. I was surprised more than once by my own writings. They helped me to see what I had been learning clearly and hold on to them in that way.

The praxis of writing and reflection were important here. Later, expanding on this, in a follow-up interview. . . .

*The deep **interconnectedness** each of us has to other humans and to all of the world is what might move us all to change how we live and interact. This type of understanding I think is already in our bodies but we miss it by staying "in our heads," cut off from and afraid of our **Bodies** and the **Earth** and the mysteries we find there. The way that this class uses both the intellectual approach that we are most familiar with ( and certainly has an important place), and also brings **other ways of knowing** that our culture has lost touch with helped to open the world to me in new ways & to support me on a path I was already heading down but a bit lost on.*

*Another truly revolutionary part of this sort of learning, and I think a big part of why it was condemned, demonized and beaten out of us, is that it **relocates our centre of knowledge** inside of us rather than leaving it with the experts-priests, doctors, politicians, the president. Without our inner authority, it is impossible for us to challenge an outer authority, and this has been used extensively to keep the rabble (that's most of us) in line!*

*There is a large and needed place for teachers, elders, people who specialize in an area and can then share their knowledge. But I see this as **a partnership for learning and sharing** that does not discount what the other person brings to the **relationship** versus the authoritarian relationship that is so common to us.*

A. A. makes a key distinction between inner (her own) and external authority wherein collaborative learning students are producers, not receivers, of knowledge.

S.M. (Spring, 1998) MALS Graduate Student

*So many things are remembered about your class! That in itself reminds me of how positive and enriching the educational experience that you created was. So what do I remember? The first day. Walking into a classroom where the chairs and tables were pushed back, creating an open space to sit in a circle. There was a centerpiece in the middle of the floor, something of beauty, that immediately drew my attention and focus into the setting and to the people around the circle. We, the students, all faced one another as we waited for the class to begin. It was clear from that moment that this class was going to be a bit different from others I'd experienced at the university. On that first Friday when I'd read the syllabus, met all my classmates and the professor during the introductions I knew this course was created with a **wholistic** perspective, one that put*

*the emphasis on the learning environment, the building of the **class community**, and the focus of learning from one another as well as from the professor. At the end of the first class we were all engaged with one another. I had seen and heard from everyone in the room. I knew that my learning was going to be expansive and deep due to all of the members of our class community.*

*. . . Class provided real life experiences as well as great readings, speakers, films, activities, journal keeping and logs and an opportunity for personal explorations in a wide variety of spirituality and religions related to women-----much of which I'd never heard of before.*

Again, peer collaborative learning within a class community is highlighted. And, specifically, in response to the following questions:

**Holistic approach:** *an incredibly valuable approach for change. . . it encouraged us to get to know one another, to build a community of peers/learners. We developed in our learning through many of our senses, through listening, through creating, through actions, through movement, etc. I loved learning this way. My life was enhanced with each Friday afternoon's class.*

**Empowerment:** *you put out the tools that helped each of us look deeper. The readings, the sharings, the creations, the listening we all did. It seemed deep and wide and respectful."*

**Coming to Voice:** *the readings, the experiences, the circle-style sharing/check-in, the journaling the dream noting helped build in me more strength for finding voice, for experiencing my own inner voice & being willing to share it.*

E.B. (1997) A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, taught at Exeter Academy and awaiting call to ministry, writes of how she integrates the embodied pedagogy into her life and teaching. Both the experiences and the texts were important.

*As I begin to teach, my experiences of an embodied and experiential pedagogy, such as in 595, definitely influence me. In my personal life, the practices of breathing, dancing, and writing-and experiencing myself as being connected to the environment around me was influenced by that course. ( She also refers to classes with Mary Westfall, Paul Brockelman and David Frankfurter.)*

**Coming to Voice** (Question 10) *This is essential for young women (and men) and Penelope's classes and course materials always address this. It propelled me to study this issue more in classes in graduate school ( Harvard Divinity)—in a class on feminist ethics and in an adolescent development class.*

*Our assignments in class always required engagement with the issues, experiences and texts at hand, as is standard in academic work. However, I ALSO felt I could engage those issues in a style/language that was most authentic to my own voice.*

*This is and continues to be very important to write myself and also when I assess my own students work & **writing.**"*

**Possibilities & Hope:** . . . *.learning about great despair and danger in the world . . . We learned about both the hurts and hopes of the world. . .stories give me hope and the ways that we listen and learn from one another. . . I experienced transformation in reflecting on the texts and our experiences in class while writing my own reflections. The reflections were extremely important to my own learning-allowing me space to put onto the page how the course material was affecting me. . . As I begin to teach (at Phillip's Exeter Academy) my experiences of an **embodied and experiential** pedagogy, such as in 595, definitely influenced me. In my personal life, the practices of breathing, dancing, and writing-and experiencing myself as being connected to the environment me was influenced by that course.*

D.M (1998), a Middle School Science teacher, writes in 2004:

*I began teaching middle school science this fall. I had to return to my archives at my mom's house and sort through my old binders. Inserted into the cover of my microbiology binder was a drawing that I did in response to one of the readings. The drawing depicts a turbaned woman rising. Incorporated are symbols of femininity such as triangles and spirals. There was a written explanation to accompany the drawing when I handed it in, but I remember being relieved that I could complete the assignment in a way that was more enjoyable for me than following precise format designed by someone who has little knowledge or **care** for my personal interests and needs..... The course's **holistic** approach **empowered me to express my learning in many ways.**)*

C.H. (1994) Ph.D. Candidate, currently Professor/Administrator, University

Writing Program, Boston, MA, writes:

*I have integrated some of the teaching in the class into my own teaching. In particular, in my writing classes, I have branched out from studying different forms of literacy to studying different forms of beliefs-where they come from-why they exist-how they inform human behaviour.*

*My pedagogy has also been influenced by Penelope's class. I now focus on how beliefs shape the way we think, and since I teach critical thinking, I ask my students to reflect on their beliefs in very specific ways--usually via autobiographical writing. We also read books about belief systems that are different from our own. For example, one semester we read "Of Water and The Spirit" by Malidoma Patrice Some. Students studied how Malidoma had to integrate the world of his African Village and the education he received in the West. This process helped students to become more aware of how beliefs shape thinking and how to live and work while honoring differences*

W.R. (2004) Artist, graduate student:

*I think the one thing that stands out the most is the encouragement of freedom of expression. We could really put ourselves 'out' there if we wanted to. I could say it was alternative learning experience, would that class were all this way. I suppose you could call that approach "**empowerment**" because you knew whatever you said or did would be considered. It made one WANT to do more, to beat one's chest, if you will. It felt like we COULD change the world. **A real attitude adjustment.** If I see anyone that took that class now---there is a kinship experience. We should have a reunion. **We bonded.***

Again, themes of community, empowerment and transformation are intertwined.

#### More on Indigenous Teachers – What did the students learn?

Again, looking at the students' testimonies as to the highlights in their transformational education towards a feeling of connectedness to all-there-is, the indigenous teachers, Ochazania, the voodoo mambo, priestess; Arthur Hall, the African American healer/dance teacher; Oscar Mokeme, the Igbo diviner, from Nigeria; Shaman Pee-Mee, Abenaki and Boldwing; Apache, Candace Cole-Mcrae, Mohawk-Scot, and Gentle-Wind-in her-Hair, MicMac, were all most memorable. These teachers have already been mentioned and interwoven in the student's words above. Here are some more evocative descriptions of the opportunity for profound learning from working with our elders.

V.S. (2003 and 2004) Graduate

*Oscar Mokeme is the director of the Museum of African Culture in Portland, Maine, but he is also is a healer and diviner of the Igbo religion of what is now called Nigeria, located in Sub-Saharan Africa., and is the first of his people to bring his knowledge to the United States.*

*Oscar came to our WS 796, Advanced topics in Feminist Spirituality and Sustainability, class to teach us about divination and **how to seek guidance and the help of the spirits by making spirit vessels.** This information was passed to him by his grandfather and he is now in the process of passing it on to his sons. The process of making this vessel took more than the afternoon he could spend with us. It could take anywhere from a week to three weeks of fasting and prayer*

*With the support of a Parent's Association grant written by our teacher, our class went to Oscar. He conducted an all day workshop in the MUB and we were able to experience first hand the divination and healing ceremony of his ancestral people.*

*It is a religion of a people who were once nearly all farmers, mostly yam, cassava the staples of the diet of the region. There is in fact a god of the yam called Aha njuisn, and gods of all of the integral facets of the people's agrarian life. It is a belief system arising from the very structure and life of the **village community which is seen as an extended family**. It has three main components; Chukuwu, who created the visible universe (uwa), spirit forces known collectively as alusi, and the ancestors, those who have passed from this world, but look in on us from a world that parallels ours to help and guide us.*

*Speaking from this tradition Oscar offered a different way of looking at the life of this existence; not as something outside ourselves apart from us and created by an extrinsic set of values imposed on us, but as something intrinsic to us and the physical world. **Spirit is immanent everywhere in the visible world**. Chukwu and the earth goddess Ala, are not outside the world they created and there are no shrines constructed specifically for them. The village and the life created there, the sacrifices made in daily living, each meal an offering of food and the remembrances and prayers offered to the **ancestors** are acknowledgement of the immanence of the spiritual world.*

*Oscar spoke of how our desire for material wealth and our insistence in focusing on this material world only has left us bereft and "dis-eased." Our illness and emptiness come from **being out of balance with natural world** and our ignorance and disregard of those who could help us the most. He then performed a **healing ceremony** using mask and dance so in a small way we would be able to have a direct experience of the spirit world and our connection to it. After knowing the history of the handcarved masks, they took on more than a ritualized costume. The masks, all hand carved, each shaped by the experience and knowledge of the one who created it, It was a mask not meant to disguise, but to reveal meaning, in it's color; black for mystery, green for prosperity and growth, or the material it was made from, clear eyes for a clear mind. I know from my own practice of tai chi, that done as a spiritual **practice, the movements become the physical expression of the creative force (the Wu-chi) in the universe**. Oscar explains it as: "Dance is a means of balancing energy and finding strength – you are aligning yourself with the forces of the universe. In allowing them and inviting them you will be matched with people who will help you." - Oscar Mokeme*

#### Native American Wisdom: Stories of All-our Relatives/The Sacred Hoop

Again, the students' yearning for spirit, for insights on the mystery and cycles of life—birth-death-rebirth—came through most powerfully in the Native people's telling of stories. Gunn Allen (1989) writes on this tradition and then we move into some teachers' and the students' own stories.

For all of us, Indian or not, stories are a major way we make communal, transcendent meaning out of human experience. What differs is structure and the respective communities' sense of the aesthetic. . . though tribal experience everywhere in the world may well share many features with that of Native Americans. . . .

First, for Native Americans, humans exist in community with all living things (all of whom are known to be intelligent, aware and self-aware, and honoring propriety in those relationships forms one of our basic positions. . . Right relationship, or right kinship, is fundamental to Native American aesthetics . . . characterised by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance and communality . . . Nor does the tribal community of relatives end with human kin: the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock, and plants are perceived to be members of one's community. . . . In such a system, individualism (as distinct from autonomy or self-responsibility) becomes a negatively-valued trait" (pp.9-10).

We learned not to romanticize Native American traditions hearing the stories from teacher-healers like Candace Cole-Mcrae, White Owl, who told us of the cruelties she endured as an 'institutionalised, Indian child'—horrific! Because of the experiments done on her, she was handicapped and legally blind, but as she did more and more healing work, her sight and the use of her legs returned! Indeed, I/we witnessed this over the many years she came to our classes. She told us of the animal and bird spirits that helped her through, especially a white Owl. Her stories were of hope and connection to the Spirit world.

Ann Jellison, a local Abenaki storyteller, would share her stories of Spiderwoman and all her beings of The Sacred Hoop. And over the last three years or so, Maureen Crowell/Wind-in-her-Hair has been telling us of the world of Spirit, and has given so many students hope around death and dying where there had been much fear and unknowing. The cyclical understanding of indigenous peoples, the understanding that Life-death-Re-birth is a natural cycle. . . of the seasons, of all existence, and a belief in the guiding presence of our ancestors, were all enormously liberating for the students,



many of whom were losing their grandparents at the time. Invariably, for the African/Diaspora presentation, the student group would create a shrine to the Ancestors where we would all bring in either a picture of a friend, a family member or a pet, that had passed, or something that had belonged to them. . . a piece of jewelry, and guided by Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) and Luisah Teish (1985) or Oscar, we would make 'spirit bottles'/fetishes for protection. We learned that such symbolic ritual is very helpful in our healing. I always scheduled this section for Halloween or Spring Equinox, the time for spiritual re-birth in our culture!

B.M. (2002 and 2004) writes:

*Since seeing Maureen (running fawn/wind in her hair), I have no fear of death. I've found myself completely enjoying nature and feeling tied to all living things on earth. It's given me incredible peace to go out and enjoy something tangible like nature, ....I just believe in the immensity of the moment, the pull of time and space, the beauty of nature, the interconnectedness of everything. When I reach down and feel the soil in my fingers, or taste the air, or smell a flower-that's god. Nothing else. . . .*

*Both times I took this class (595 and 795) I presented on Native American spirituality—I'm not sure how religiously I've made it part of my life, just that I appreciate nature and the **interconnectedness of everything**. That it brings me. . . great peace. That I feel a part of **something I cannot define, yet feel kindred to**. . . **This class helped me feel part of something**. Something **that I could use my senses to see, feel, touch, be, hear, all of it**. I've spent a lot of my life feeling abandoned and alone, and thinking how much life was passing by me, and I wasn't really living. But this class gave me some kind of **hope**. It made me realize how incredibly beautiful life is, even when it is so hard to get out & see it sometimes. **It brought me closer to nature & also closer to females-my own kind that I've had trouble connecting to. I feel semi-part of a universal sisterhood**.*

In a follow-up, I asked B.M. (March 2006) to say/write a bit more on her fear of death, not uncommon in our materialist culture where death is seen as a failure by the medical community! She wrote:

*i had these debilitating panic attacks when i was a teenager. i couldn't sleep, if i thought too much about it, it would send me doubling over and gagging, sometimes even throwing up from all of my worry. i was worried about the eminent truth of one day not existing. being dead. it began when I was 14. a lonely girl named that used to sit at the end of our*

*lunch table jumped off of the 4th floor of our junior high school and landed on the pavement below. . . .*

*that winter i was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes, and had spent a weekend in boston with the endocrinologist. the appointments and tests were constant reminders of how stunted my own life was, with the imminent threats of blindness, kidney failure, heart disease, stroke, gangrene, everything looming over me- like the idea of my life like a dormant volcano, something that was on a timer, something that was stifled. and i did appreciate life and the beauty of everything. but everything reminded me of my death. i could feel my skeleton through my skin and i would shudder. i had a mortal body that was diseased. someday, maybe someday soon, if i neglected my body, i would be dead. the thought used to suffocate me. i had nightmares, night terrors that would wake up my parents. me being not alive. the world carrying on, as it always had, without me and after that, without my memory. the attacks worsened in high school. it started bothering me so badly, that if i thought about it too much, i would make myself throw up. i didn't understand the feeling, i didn't know how to tell my parents how upset I was. i kept a diary, and carried on with life. what else was there to do? i went to college and for the most part didn't have attacks as often, i was distracted with life and school and trying to make friends. i signed up for women's spirituality my sophomore year after my friend dena had spent an entire afternoon with me, making strawberry jam and urging me to take your class. so i had signed up, though i had no idea then how beneficial it really would be for me.*

*maureen (wind-in-her-hair) was a native american spirit guide that came to speak at one of our lectures. she had claimed that she could speak with people who had died, and i admit i was skeptical. i remember there was a girl in the classroom that had had a very close friend of hers die the year before of cancer. maureen delivered a message to this girl that was very personal. she said, "do you remember when after you had heard that he had died and you had thrown yourself onto the bed and cried?" the girl remembered. "well, he says he was with you, watching you, and wanted you to know he wasn't in pain anymore, and that he didn't want you to be sad." and i couldn't speak and no one in the room could speak.*

*there was a difference in the air that day, like there was some electric charge that had never been there before. maureen had said a number of things that day that still reverberate with me. **you belong to the earth, someday you'll return to it. that we all have spirit guides to help us. that we can talk to our ancestors and friends for guidance.** that memory was a powerful thing. she told us that our idea of the afterlife is solely what we make of it. that if in life when and where we were the happiest is where we do when we die. she told a story of an old woman who when after she died described her aunt's old house in the country, where when she was a child, was her favorite place in life, and after she had died that is where she decided to be. i loved that idea. i had tried after that class to remember sometime I could appoint to this moment, sometime that I could say, yes, that would be my heaven. . . it made me feel safer, and not so alone. now when I think of my death, all I can see is the rippling of the water, the swell of the wind that smells like dirt & grass, and the sun coming in from everywhere, golden & calm. **and I am no longer afraid.***

How comforting is such a worldview to so many of the students! We are all part of it

ALL. And,

C.C. (Fall 2002):

*I was deeply affected by the Native American spirituality unit, I was deeply affected by the Native American who spoke during class and this discussion has very much altered the way I view life after death. . . we are one, not two separate entities (us and nature); if we destroy our environment we thus destroy ourselves. Native American spirituality really seemed to center on this.*

African and Diaspora /Voudun: ‘The dead are not dead, they are in the tree that rustles. . . .’

In one of our text Luisah Teish (1985) writes of ancestor reverence:

From the many African traditions. . . comes the belief that those who go before us make us what we are. Accordingly, ancestor-reverence holds an important place in African belief systems. Through reverence for them we recognize our origins and ensure the spiritual and physical continuity of the human race.

Teish (1985) and McCarthy Brown (1991) introduce us to the polytheistic pantheon of the Lwa and the orishas, the highly decorated and colorful altars and the world of Spirit as seen in African/Diaspora traditions. So, what do the students recall, years later?

A.K.O’B (Summer 1994). Today, Ph.D. in History candidate, 2004, New Brunswick, Canada, addresses the experiential, transformative (Wilber, 2000; Steingard, 2005) aspect. She responded to the Questionnaire in 2000—TEN years after she was a student in WS595!

*In particular, I remember the drumming session at the Vermont home of the Priestess Ochazania. Though I pride myself as someone who, through life, has enjoyed many diverse experiences and exposure to many different countries, customs and cultures, I recall that I felt this to be an incredible opportunity to participate in a spiritual experience that otherwise I might not have sought out on my own. Ten years later my opinion on that experience has not changed. It is this kind of experience in the course-making clay figures on the T-hall lawn (I still have mine), meditation at the Aryaloka*

*Buddhist Centre, the experience with drumming & dancing—that I most clearly recall, rather than any specific thing I either read or wrote. . . .*

*Though the course was definitely grounded in texts and not completely reliant on a physically participant experience, such experience gave the course a broader manner in which to reach students on an emotional, as well as an academic level. For many courses, this would be inappropriate, but for a course such as this, I believe this was an integral part of the understanding process, i.e., it gave the students the opportunity to **feel** the spirituality they were studying, rather than merely viewing it through a scholar's impersonal lens. I have always been a 'learn through reading,' academic type of person, and this type of experience was new to me.*

C.H. (1994) Graduate Student—In-depth Case Study:

Answering Q.3: Can you describe any ahas/transformations that occurred during/from the class in terms of your eco-spiritual awareness/growth and how you see the natural world/others/all around you?

*“**Transformations** happened every time I allowed myself to be open to change. I began to live my life more conscious of the moon, the cycles of life, and the cycles of my own body. I became more **conscious of the earth**, the need to ground myself, sometimes to the point of walking barefoot on the earth, or **African dance** with its downward movements to connect with the earth. Through the acts of kindness by the teacher (you Pen), I became more conscious of my need for kindness, warmth, **caring**, in the otherwise cold and **distant “objective” world of academia**. I became more conscious of my need for healing, through bodywork, touch, massage, as the pain would pour out of me at the slightest touch from a healer when receiving a massage (you again Pen). I became more conscious of **my need for a female community** in a world run by men, and my need to learn more **about a possible time and place when women were rulers and goddesses were worshipped**. These affirmations empowered me in my work and in my personal life, particularly when I had to deal with the death of a loved one. I grabbed onto the ceremonies, practices, beliefs, and rituals to get me through the grieving process. **I learned to come out of isolation. I learned the value of community.**”*

*The deep connections I felt to my spirit, the earth, and my fellow human beings served as a muse to inspire the writing. (C.H. Follow-up interview. Feb.20, 2006)*

And out of our class trip-expedition to the hills of Vermont that Summer of 1994, to work with Ochazania, she was inspired to write the following poem. She hadn't been able to write creatively for a long time. It describes her profound experience.

#### Voodoo in Vermont

We move in a caravan towards Vershire,  
north of Concord, then due west,  
on our trek to see Ochazania,

an African Yoruba priestess,  
a healer in the Voudun tradition.  
I thought to myself,  
how funny to be called to Vermont  
For the first time  
By the beating drums of West Africa  
To dance in the wet heat  
Of a New England sun.

Hoodoo Mama welcomes us into her home  
Where the snakes live, holy water sprinkles onto the floor,  
Altars burn in candle fire for ancestors  
She talks to and knows by name.  
I too am Hoodoo Mama,  
“Nani of Marumba” she calls me,  
my womb sacrificed at another altar  
way west of here,  
creating more room  
for the magic of the moon.

We walk up into the woods where  
the priestess kisses the trees,  
in daylight,  
reminding me of a tall willow  
by a pond in Arvada  
that embraced me by night.  
Now the fire of the sun no longer frightens me  
as I venture out by day.  
Great Father  
points his light towards earth, water, and stone,  
penetrating domes of leaves and bark,  
arriving warm as a sweet ling breath  
blowing my hair,  
scattering the seeds.  
We make wishes to the forest here,  
smudging our scents in sweetgrass and sage,  
singing our prayers to the sky.  
Tears crest onto my face  
as I stand at the peace pole,  
fifty years since D-Day,  
yet  
so little peace.

Hoodoo Mama moves down the mountain  
in the direction of the drums.  
The sound from the hollow wood barrels

topped with stretched leather  
awaken a new animal-  
the eagle.  
Hoodoo mama sings:

Dance like an eagle!”  
“Dance!”  
My feet lift off the ground  
knowing that this time  
I am free.

Students who have worked with Oscar Mokeme, diviner and Director of the African Gallery of Ancient Art in Portland, Maine, describe their transformative experiences, their experience/exposure to the ‘mystery,’ as follows:

B.S. Response (April 9, 2004)

*This was a very mystical, exciting, awe-inspiring, visually stimulated event. The seemingly ordinary room enveloped an extraordinary air about it that **transformed it into some form of mystical space**. In the beginning, Oscar presented many of the masks and artifacts and discussed their symbolic uses. He was warm and engaging and extremely knowledgeable about his customs and their mythology. His enthusiasm was engaging and I felt drawn in by not only his exuberance but by his powerful presence and his “learned statesman” attitude. This was a man who was very proud and passionate about his roots and culture and believed without a doubt in it’s inherent structure and stability; not to mention also the artistry, creativity and beautiful symmetry of the dream-like storytelling ideals of it’s people. This culture was definitely **connected to nature and spirit** and was made possible through its devoted reverence to ancestor worship.*

*Listening to Oscar, I felt the void between his culture and our Western culture which so lacks many of these simple, yet profound customs. I felt slightly jealous and sad but I let **his enthusiasm** overrule my malcontent. When he left to prepare himself for his Shaman ceremony, there was an obvious, yet subdued air of anticipation and excitement in the air. There was also a nervous undertow as we didn’t really know what to expect and it was obviously so foreign to most of us. When we first spotted him in the back of the room, moving toward us - shaking and rattling and mumbling and twisting., it was quite unnerving. He was completely disguised and distorted and didn’t even seem human. He really appeared to be some sort of spirit/monster and there was a slight demon-like sense about him. I remember a young child there in the back room, bursting into tears with wide-eyed shock and horror. I can only imagine to her, how frightening real he must have seemed.*

*Once he started to move through the room and the drumming started to get more rhythmic, the fear started to dissipate and **awe and reverence** seemed to fill the room. Everyone was quiet and mesmerized and watching his every move with an almost child-like amazement on their faces. He was chanting and singing and seemed to be “speaking*

*in tongues". Everything on him moved- his straw skirt, his beads, his totems, his bells, but the mask stayed immobile. This huge, grotesque disguise camouflaging his human spirit and conveying a sense of other- worldliness. He danced around the room chanting and gyrating, leading us into a **communal circle**. Everyone was swaying in rhythm to the beat of the drums and watching him intently. He then proceeded to go around the circle, "communing" with everyone on an individual basis. He would stand in front of you saying unintelligible things and making many hand motions. Sometimes he would sprinkle something on you or take some strange object out of his pocket and wave it around you or touch you with it. Everyone was completely intent on watching him and **respecting** his performance. We all just stood and swayed with him waiting for our turn at this personal "christening."*

*When he approached me I was nervous, excited and apprehensive all at once. He undulated around me pressing something into my forehead and sprinkling me with some kind of powder. He was chanting something that I couldn't understand. Even though he was masked, I felt completely connected by his gaze. The room seemed to disappear and there was this **mystical link** between the two of us. I felt as if he was blessing me and I was overwhelmed with **gratitude and humility**. I had ultimate **respect** for him at that moment and **truly felt I had just participated in something magical and ethereal**.*

*I watched him approach others and receive similar reactions. A. looked overwhelmed with **awe** and trepidation and her wide eyed stare and tears brought tears to my own eyes. After he had gone around to everyone, enclosing them in his mystical bond, he retreated back out of the room to become Oscar again and the drumming and dancing quieted down. Everyone just sort of sat there spellbound, lost in their own private reverie. He came back in to answer questions and explain some of his actions. It was very fascinating seeing him transform himself once again into a 'man'. **It was an amazing experience**. One that stayed with me for a long time. When I tried to explain it to others, I felt that it was something much too **mysterious** and special to properly convey it's meaning. It was definitely something that **had to be experienced personally and intimately** and I am so thankful that I was able to do that.*

#### Buddhism – Mindfulness Meditation

Breathing-in I calm my body  
Breathing-out I smile  
Dwelling in this present moment  
I know this is a wonderful moment.

The above meditation and *Being Peace* by the Zen Buddhist monk, Tich Nhat Hanh (1987), is always everyone's favorite book. They find the message and the practice accessible. It is most helpful in our stressful world. His meditation became a regular, healing practice. We learn that for there to be peace in the world, we must be peace.

Buddhist philosophy is simple and profound. It begins with ourselves. The doing of the daily practice is key for inner transformation....for quieting the western ‘monkey mind.’

C. C. (Fall 2002 Questionnaire)

*My favorite reading in the class was Being Peace.....it changed my lifestyle because it taught me that sometimes I really need to slow things down, breathe, and realize that my daily stresses are only a result of the pressures of western civilisation. He talked about how we are constantly working towards some sort of goal and when we achieve this goal it is in our nature to feel as though we should keep on rising to the top.....living day to day and not stressing so much about the future has become a way of life for me. Hopefully, I can keep at it.*

M. G. (Fall 2004, enrolled in Graduate School of Education) writes about the pedagogy and the meditation practice and future sustainable living:  
*My aha moment happened through our introduction to Buddhism, but I think I had a lot of little aha's throughout the class, because I was always writing responses to our experiences, which helped me to process and absorb each topic. The practice of meditation, which I first encountered in 595, is a way that I can quiet my mind and **be mindful of my connection with nature**. I am always looking for ways to **live sustainably**. . . (it) gave me a tremendous amount of hope and put me on a path towards peace of mind. . . I am engaged in my community of friends and I am looking forward to bonding with the Waldorf community in Wilton, NH. . . I will be moving into a sustainable, green condo in Peterborough this summer. . . The sense **of community** and guidance of the professor surpassed any other class I have taken.*

Learning the practice of mindfulness-meditation, often for the first time was transformative, both in terms of doing it and feeling the sense/possibility of peace in quieting our busy minds. Not only is meditation seen as a life-saving tool but there is the realization of the wisdom of Hanh's words: to have peace in the world, we need to be peace. It is a simple, but profound, message—the essence of Buddhism,. . . a much-needed message for our times.

E.O. (October 2005) writes:



*At Aryaloka we meditated in a room with a beautiful Buddhist shrine. We sat on cushions and meditated for about twenty minutes. This was my first experience with **meditation and it was very powerful. I felt one with the class** as we all sat quietly in this room and focused on **our breath**. The trip to Aryaloka was a very peaceful one. I learned so much.*

*Today in class there was a group presentation on Buddhism. The students in the group led us in a meditation that I found to be very powerful and peaceful. I was actually able to **clear my mind and focus on my breathing**. My ability to do this demonstrates a **breakthrough** in my spiritual journey.*

V.S. brought up 'immanence' in her discussion of Buddhism. I think the three Gems of Buddhism—the Sangha, the Dhamma and the Buddha could also be understood as Community, Connectedness (teachings), and Immanence (Buddha-nature in all beings), explored earlier in Goddess spirituality and ecofeminism.

V.S. (595 and 795) In-depth Case Study. Follow-up to post Questionnaire Interview, March 19, 2006

*I think the oddest fact that came out of our discussions about class, and what other people had to say about different facets to the class had to do with what was not there. The fact that no one had written about **immanence**. I suppose it is not so surprising in 595, since there can be people from all disciplines, ages and experience. Twenty-five plus may not seem like a lot by UNH standards, but it makes it difficult to have an intimate and meaningful discussion, especially when about something which seems to me so private and personal. I realized I'd really wanted to be writing, talking and*

*Experiencing immanence my whole life but constantly felt frustrated by the constraints of organized religion and well social constraints frankly. We really have a tough time talking about our feelings, any kind of feelings in our culture, let alone religious ones. And I didn't want to have an intellectual debate either. Quite the opposite in fact, and so **I can't emphasize enough the value of the field trips in class. They provided the opportunity to experience what we had been reading and talking about, and writing a response paper gave us a way to process the experience in our own terms.***

*Three years ago at this time, Bush and the government were poised to take us to into Iraq.*

*As the class gathered in the central meeting place of Aryaloka a Buddhist monastery and sat in a circle I couldn't help but recall the pain and suffering of the sixties and the Vietnam War. Some of my class mates talked of brothers, fiancés and friends preparing to go to war and I felt their pain and fear as we sat in a place of light and peace. The buildings are hexagonally shaped round and conducive to a circle, rounded by windows.*

*Aryaloka itself is surrounded by woods but to get there you have to drive through a very suburban slice of America. Looking at my classmates as they spoke I knew in my heart that they could not know what was in store for them. Maybe it's the way it has to be? They aren't going to believe this until they go through it themselves? I thought of all*

*of the political upheavals I had experienced in my life, the protests, and the polarization of our culture. I thought of the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire in order to protest the war. This was an experience once performed, once witnessed that could not be taken back or changed or, I thought forgotten.*

*I am a non-traditional student and so nearly thirty years older than many of them. They are my son's age and I also had my daughter with me that day, who was 11 at the time. I wondered how long it would be before she made the connection that what was happening to all of them, to all of us really, could happen to her brother. When I asked her to recall that day, she only remembers how "neat and cool" Aryaloka was, "full of light" she said, "I wanted to live there". She did in fact seem quite comfortable there, chatting amiably with our host Amala and asking her what she did each day. We all went upstairs to the meditation chamber and I can vividly remember how quiet and full of listening she was. She said she did not like the gong that was sounded every few minutes because it jolted her out of "listening to the quiet". She actually seemed to be more in tune with the experience than most of my classmates, whom after just a few minutes, shifted position, yawned, scratched and twitched.*

*I find meditation the most difficult of any kind of work. I am only beginning to grasp it's challenge, of how it is mostly **about letting go** and that understanding comes from yielding to what cannot be understood or changed **but must be experienced** as what it is. You have to "sit with yourself," no excuses, no layers, no wishes, and no regrets. I recall Pema Chodron's words from "When Things Fall Apart," that when she understood the writings of the existentialists she then counted them the bravest people she ever knew. This puzzled me because I always thought of the existentialists as despairing of finding spirit. If instead they were trying to deal with the here and now and spirit as part of themselves instead of as some externally abstract meta-being, I could finally begin to get what the Buddhists were talking about. We need to stop looking for answers outside ourselves or spirit as something outside of the external world. Meditation is a way to **know spirit** in the external world, not separate from it but physical reality as an expression of the spirit. is the answer in of itself. This was true immanence. From the Latin: "in" and "manere," the original meaning "to exist or remain within." Spirit is not something outside of us or separate from existence. If we continue to project what we feel, what we think on to the outside world, setting spirit or the happenings of reality as something that goes on outside us, it seems we will have to keep repeating the experience in order to understand it. The war is not something outside of us, happening to us, it is inside us, part of us. My daughter **was able to access this experience directly**, I think because she just felt the spirit in that place, the spirit of honesty and responsibility and truth. She didn't ask why Aryaloka existed or if meditating was something that "worked" or proved the existence of spirit. To quote Pema again, "we don't meditate to become good meditators" Meditation is where we start; it is going back to the beginning and yielding to the process of living.*

V.S. is referring to Pema Chodron (1996) *When Things Fall Apart*: heart advice for difficult times, another text used in WS 595.

And, J.B. (December 2005) an undergraduate, also writes of immanence:

*Being Peace also resonated with me. Although Buddhism is different from goddess worship, Hanh also speaks, in his own way, of immanence. . . he explains the idea of dependent co-arising. In his words: 'this is like this, therefore that is like that. . . my well-being, my happiness, depends very much on you, and your well-being, your happiness, depends on me' (pp. 46-47.) Buddhism reminds me that we could not live without the sun or the rain or the trees. **Every being on earth is linked in cooperative harmony, yet some of mankind has forgotten how important it is for us to respect this design. . . as a whole earth community.***

### **Full Circle - Summation of Student's Words**

I will end this chapter where we began, on the theme of immanence. . . we have come full circle. Throughout the weavings of the students' words and descriptions, hopefully, the reader can see/hear what were some of the key themes, experiences, ideas, learnings for the students as they progressed in their journey, individually and collectively, through our semester-long class, as we came to understand what it is to be part of our community, and, of the earth community—at-large.

In the students' study and experience of indigenous people's wisdom towards the earth, I recognized a parallel journey, in many respects to my own, of discovery and of becoming a reflective environmentalist (Thomashaw, 1995).

Both the content of the course (the Goddess, Buddhist practice/mindfulness, Native American and African/Diaspora Spirit(s) and stories), as well as the pedagogical process, were both important in the holistic education for such knowledge(s) grounded in the body.

In this chapter, we have seen some emerging themes of holistic learning, embodiment/the goddess/the Body, caring, connection and community, experiential praxis, and a sense of hope, and joy that may point to a possible model/morphology in the development of eco-consciousness. It is important that the individuals want to

change-they tend to come to a class such as WS 595 as “seekers,” looking for more ‘meaning’ in their lives.

As B.W (Fall, 2001) wrote:

*In my 5<sup>th</sup> semester at UNH I was **searching for a change**. I was tired of partying and the social scene which had torn me apart from myself and my spirituality. I had always felt a connection with women’s spirituality but (since attending UNH) I wasn’t listening to my inner voice and in fact was becoming blind to the things and the lifestyle most important to me. I reconnected with a friend, and together we realized we were both looking for a change in our lives. Taking WS 595 was a step in that direction.*

Again, in analyzing and interpreting the emergent themes, this might be called the HELP model-the learnings/knowledge around Hope, Embodiment, Liberation and Possibility are key. The initial feelings of despair change to hopefulness. Immanence and embodied, experiential education is transformative, as is the praxis and reflection and the development of a Voice (Freire, 1971; Belenky et al., 1986; bell hooks, 1994 ). This process of coming-to consciousness as an eco-citizen liberates them into the possibility that they can make a difference!

To conclude with the words of a student ( Spring 2002), D.R. wrote:

*Whereas I feel that a lot of the education available in western society puts too much pressure on its academic pupils to consume learning through testing and basic regurgitation of ideas, I feel the learning process really needs to be creative at its core, or else we not have the capacity to arrive at new solutions to the ever-widening problems presented by the accelerated growth of the modern world.*

*I became a WS major because of the 595 course. I may go into the environmental fields in grad. school because of it, and it also helped pave the way for the choice I made in deciding my abroad program (Living Routes, Auroville, India). It definitely supported my **growing political activism, and made me use my voice better than I had before in expressing my beliefs.***

In the following chapter, I will look at the responses to Research Question 4 to ascertain what, if anything, the former students have integrated into their lives in terms of eco-awareness and change in their behaviours. In essence, have they become eco-

citizens? And we will take a final look at what I've learned about the model that I have used to guide this journey of my learning from my students with regard to the impact of my pedagogy and any other insights I have gained about this study and methods I've used.

- What were my own intentions, hopes, fears and expectations as a teacher and a change agent? What did I learn?
- What did my students find to be important and helpful in their educational process?
- What might be the implications for future holistic pedagogy in the field of earth-education/ecology and values?
- What issues and concerns could be addressed as a result of this research? What are some of the implications?

In sum, what matters most to the student/respondents, in terms of the HELP model? Is it a helpful device? What may be some of the implications for future use of such an experiential learning praxis/pedagogy in environmental education and the “conscientization” of our students as ecologically aware, responsible participants. . . as eco-citizens?

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION:

#### FULL CIRCLE AND THE FUTURE

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

In the preceding chapter, we have witnessed the movement of the students from 'seeking' to empowerment, from lonely, isolated individuals in our highly-individuated society of "may the best man (sic) win!" to a feeling of connectedness and the possibility for change and action. It is a moving from I-to-We, a transcendent feeling of being part of Indra's web, the webbedness of all life on Earth.

In this concluding chapter, I will first address in the Findings section the responses to my Research questions, which are as follows:

- (1) Given that the planet is in crisis and that students feel overwhelmed and powerless from the overload of information, and from the collective angst---what is it that enables them to feel empowered to make choices and changes, through their semester-long course in Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions?
- (2) What is the praxis/pedagogy that may help to develop the awareness that they have the power to choose, to act, and that they can make a difference in the world?

- (3) What might be the developmental steps in a coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity or responsibility as a member, an eco-citizen, of the earth community?
- (4) Is this 'consciousness' lived-out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

Secondly, in the Conclusions and Recommendations, I will address what the answers tell me about my pedagogical model? Was it effective? What did I learn of the students' learnings and what mattered most to them, both in terms of the pedagogy and the content of the course. Does the HELP model appear to be effective? What else did I discover to be important to the students? Do I need to adapt my approach in the future. And, finally, I would like to address what might be further worthwhile study to pursue from this beginning research on this particular praxis for empowerment?

I will, again, use only the students' initials, with the year they were enrolled in WS 595/795, in parentheses, followed by the nature (questionnaire or in-depth interview) and date of the description of their 'lived experience.' Again, I have chosen to 'bold' the characteristics mentioned that I see as appertaining to my suggested model of holistic pedagogy, embodiment and empowerment, liberation and possibility.

### **Findings**

First, taking Research Question 1, what have I learned from the respondents, largely through the (36) questionnaires, and further through the six in-depth, follow-up interviews? (Five taped and one via e-mail, as the former student is now in California.)

I came to view that issues of coming-to-voice (through presentations, discussion and reflective writing), of knowing that we (women) have an ancient and powerful

history, and learning to use useful, transformative tools (ritual, chant, drum, movement), were all instrumental in enabling the students (men and women) to feel empowered.

Let us check in with some of our students, today. . . some of them ten or more years later, to hear what they say around these topics.

B.S. (2003 and 2004), 595 and 795 in-depth case study. Graduate – came to the class registering her crisis and soul-searching and through the praxis of writing and discussion she came to find more meaning such that she re-evaluated her job and made a lifestyle change. This is an excerpt of her application letter to graduate school, January, 2006:

*It had been 20 years since I was in college. . . . The material I was learning was both thought—provoking and emotionally effective. **It propelled me into not only intense mental stimulation but a subsequent search for soul and a crisis of faith as well. It brought to the forefront women's issues & women's history and introduced me to ideas and facts that I had never been exposed to before.** Because it coincided with my emergence into my 40's, these issues had a profound effect on me. I was awakening to my true identity and sorting through the turbulence of less meaningful selves. **Life itself took on new meaning** and I was ready to dispose of outmoded belief systems and unimaginative ways of being.*

*One of these ways of being was my sales career. After being in sales for so long, I was becoming completely burned out by the shallowness of the profession. Nothing seemed to matter there except the bottom line. At the end of the day, how I concluded if it was successful or not was by how much money I had made that day (if any). It started to feel like nothing **more than greed and consumerism** to me and I felt both deadened and unfulfilled. It seemed to be in total opposition to what I was feeling in my heart and my soul—this desire to do more, **to be more, to bring meaning and substance into life.** I kept hearing the words of Joseph Campbell in my head: "follow your bliss." It seemed the times I was most blissful was when I was learning something new, capturing its essence **and then either writing about it or discussing it with others.** I took another class the next semester (WS 795) which went deeper into the same subject matter and I felt myself relax into enlightenment again. I kept toying with the idea of grad. school but couldn't quite commit to the lifestyle change that would demand of me. Though I was relatively unhappy with my job, I wasn't capable yet of letting it go and moving on to something else. This past fall. . . I felt ready. . . I needed to pursue these interests in women's studies further & more deeply. . . . I want to get my master's so that I may teach.*



A.A. (Summer.1991), Peace and Social Justice Activist, (2006)-in-depth interview. Here she addresses the ‘priestessing skills’ she now uses in her peace and social activism work. Indeed, Starhawk is her role-model and she has met her at several demonstrations against globalization, around the country.

*So much from the class has become part of me and my life. The grounding that we learned—both specific exercises in rituals/class meetings, and the general grounding that comes from being more in touch with the Earth and one's body - continues to be integral to my life. Through my 20s when I was having a very difficult time emotionally and with my health, being able to get grounded and connected to myself and the Earth was so healing.*

*Now, in any difficult situation—from a march in DC against corporate globalization policies where we are surrounded by hundreds of police, to doing a civil disobedience action in Newington, NH, to having a disagreement with someone in a meeting - **being able to ground and remain centered** is essential to my being able to be effective. **The priestessing skills** that I began to recognize and learn in the class I also use a lot. I have done some priestessing in pagan groups over the years, but I use it even more in other work at this point. The structure of **the ritual**, and how to move the energy of the group along comes into play for me whenever I am helping to lead any group. **As a leader at times in my activist group**, the dances I lead in the community, and any support group settings that I have been one of the leaders of, I think very specifically of how to "priestess" the group so that people can get the most out of it.*

*As far as other experiences... after this class ended, **I continued with my learning and development of my earth-centered spirituality**. I continued to read, joined a women's ritual circle, went to witch camp, did yoga, learned to garden/farm, became more active in environmental **issues as an activist**.*

WOW! This once-upon-a-time shy and soft-spoken, young woman, is now a leader and a change-agent!

N.T. (Summer 1992) writes (2006) of how naming and spiritual knowledge gave her the tools to be a better cancer nurse and parent:

*Earth-based religions class was an eye-opener for me. I thought spirituality and religion were one and the same. Not so. This class **gave me a consciousness, awareness and a vocabulary** that I never had before. I have raised my children better because of this awareness. I feel a lot of our present day illnesses are due to a lack of Spirituality in our everyday lives. So I try to live each interaction with Spirit in mind. I am a cancer nurse and I find my patients need to know how to lead a more meaningful life, in whatever time they have left rather than a quantity of life. Spirituality is in the everyday words and meta-messages behind the words and in the everyday actions and message the*

*actions imply. And the lack of spirit in the words and actions is a symptom of the beginning of many different types of diseases. Depression being the most obvious to identify directly. I do not preach this philosophy but rather live it. Actions speak louder than words and the words are hollow without the action. This is Earth-based.....that the action reveals spirit. **This simple concept, quietly moves me in gigantic personal and private ways to live a full life.***

C.H. ( 1993) In-depth Interview on what she learned and the tools that she has incorporated into her life and work so she does not feel so isolated in academic life. In the following, we hear that the Pedagogy (of caring and connection) is as important as the learning the 'tools; both empowering in terms of being able to make choices and changes (Research Question 1). Teaching and learning as community service is very important to her.

*The importance of **service** and how you have to get out of self and serve others, particularly if you struggle with depression. And you know isolation and loneliness, so what's the cure for that and here again, AA taught me that loneliness is a choice, that the best way to deal with depression is to get out of self and serve others and when I left the AA community, that's one of the things I chose to take with me. And your class reinforced that cuz **I watched how you didn't just teach, but serve, you know your sense of service, because the first time I met you, you were not in class but what I did was call you and you sensed that this was an isolated, lonely person and you called me back, a total stranger, and you said, you know, we're having a full moon circle at my house tonight, if you'd like to join us and I did so. . . .***

*Oh, it was such a powerful moment for me and even when the class was over, I mean we maintained our friendship, we **still maintain the ritual and ceremonies** and we share our beliefs **and our hopes and dreams**. And you know what else you did, just like you offered to do just now, I'm going to introduce you to people and you've always been, and the corporate word is a good networker. . . You bring people together, you're also really good at knowing who to bring to the dinner table and on what occasion, and who to bring on another occasion. Because I know maybe there have been gatherings that I haven't been a part of but that was also thoughtful and kind because you always know how to discern. OK, what purpose of people would work best in this situation. You're good at that and you know what groups of people work well together and what might not be conducive to a pleasant evening. So, yeah, you're good at that, so those are thing, my **daily meditation**. . . so the service piece, with service of course . **I went on to incorporate community service into my curriculum. My whole dissertation was about the integration of community service and composition.** When I went to Bulgaria, I interviewed community service into my curriculum and now that I'm at Mt. Ida, I've integrated community service so that is definitely something I have to say. . . its roots in my spiritual practices and beliefs that were kind of reunited in me though the AA*

*community, but definitely reinforced when AA just felt like toxic to me. I could still take that piece with me, but I didn't know what to do with it, but then I started coming to your class and reading all these things and experiencing community in the class and then I realized I have to continue that, I've got to find a way to integrate my spiritual life into my academic life. What was the whole reason I came to your class was how can I integrate my spiritual life which is the importance of service into my academic life and how could I integrate ? . . .how could I use my spiritual life to empower me on a personal level cuz I was struggling with so much isolation and depression and it all kind of came together. I could deal with my depression and integrate my spiritual life and my academic life through these different ways of knowing, through these lessons on service.*

Spiritual tools and sustenance are helpful to her in her academic life.

Now, let us turn to Research Question 2 with regard to the holistic, engaged pedagogy that I use in my teaching. How do the students feel that it has helped them develop an awareness that they can also choose to be and act differently and make a difference in the world?

#### Teacher-as-Midwife

First, I would like to talk of the teacher-as midwife, as it is evident from many responses to the Questionnaire, seen above throughout the Model chapter, that this aspect of care and compassion, modeled by the teacher, is encouraging of similar development in the students, as part of our caring, collaborative community. I will include some responses around this in my discussion of the HELP model.

I wish to model 'care' (Noddings, 1984), empathy and collaborative learning; teachers can be encouraging facilitators and not the scary authoritarians as most of mine were growing up. My expectations are that the students would flourish and come to their own insights in their own time, within the supportive crucible of our class-community. Although there was a set syllabus (see Appendix F), there has to be adequate flexibility with regards to the interests and concerns of the class.

Midwife teachers are the opposite of banker teachers. While the banker teachers deposit knowledge in the learner's head, the midwives draw it out. They assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 217).

Freire (1971) says banking education anaesthetizes and attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness. Midwife teachers do not administer anaesthesia. They support their students' thinking, but do not do it for them or expect students to think as they do. Like Freire's partner-teachers, midwife- teachers assist in the emergence of consciousness. They/we expect the students to speak in their own active voices. This is similar to Ruddick's (1980) 'maternal thinking' where the midwife-teacher preserves the students' truth, their newborn thoughts and then fosters the students' growth. It involves complex moral decision-making. It is part of my feminist, teaching practice to help the students come-to-voice and use it! Similarly, I feel it is important for the students to have women role-models, so the majority of our teachers are women and most of our texts are by women.

Now, turning to Research Question 3: What did I learn? I think the key ingredient in coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity as part of the earth-community is the feeling of being part of 'something larger' that was re-iterated over and over in the responses. The concept/experience of embodiment and immanence, highlighted in Chapter 3, is all part of this understanding.

J.I. (1996) A male student, wrote Spring, 2006, of his felt connection:

*Personally I draw the most spiritual significance in my life through the world around me; the earth and its creatures. It makes such simple sense to me, even though it is comprised of the most complex relations and processes. **I believe that I am a small part of a much larger picture. . . a much larger organism.** My church or temple is the earth and I feel a strong sense of community with all the other of the earth's parishioners regardless of what they believe spiritually. I believe that all of the earth's religions in their purest essences are trying to teach people to live just lives and to feel a part of*

*something larger than one's self. I feel like many people need or believe they need the more rigid framework of organized religion. I think there is something in human nature that keeps us on a righteous path even without organized religion, but for many people religion can be their greatest feeling of belonging in a large and often confusing world*

M.W. (1996) in-depth interview, March 6, 2006, recalls a key learning-moment, ten years later. . . and describes the 'embodied knowledge' that seems to be an important characteristic of this ecological identity.

*I remember him (our N.A. teacher) talking about the drums and the heartbeat, and the heartbeat of the earth and how a lot of times women are not the drummers because they have that heartbeat inside of them and the men are doing that, are trying to recreate that beat for themselves as well as for the rest of the tribe and then I will never forget, just thinking about **that connection that we as women have to the earth as people have to the earth. Just getting more in touch with that, that female aspect of it and taking that with me into wanting to work with herbs and wanting to work with feeling the herbs with the earth and really coming to that conclusion that that's what I was drawn to, that was what I wanted to do, finding the feminine in the earth and also in with working with all the lessons that it has to teach us as far as healing and the incredible herbs that it produces.***

*That was definitely a key moment. . . and just being in that class where it was discussion, there was no judgment, there was respect amongst all of the people in the class and I felt like you very much so enabled that to happen, through your involvement.*

Now, let us move to Research Question 4: Is this (eco-) consciousness lived-out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

D.R. (Spring, 2002) tells of her plans, after graduation, August 21, 2005:

*I am working for the Appalachian Mountain Club this fall,. . . . I would love to focus my energy toward Civil Rights politics, women's rights in an ever-tightening Right administration, Environmental Policy and Protection etc. . . . **I now associate with communities of similar-goal-oriented individuals, which helps me to launch my ideals/ideas into reality through day-to-day practice, whether it is eating from local sources and farms, or other loftier things, like political marches and the like.***

J.D. (Fall 2003), a Senior, April 1, 2005, writes:

*I'm still here at UNH and plan on taking an extra semester next fall to finish up my women's studies major **and gain two environmental conservation minors in forestry and sustainable living.** I recently got accepted for an internship on an egalitarian organic farming community! **I am very interested in true sustainability and having my actions match my words.***

Both are showing their commitment to sustainable living/work.

And, to Question 8 (of the questionnaire): Are you engaged with a community?

They reply:

D.R. (Spring 2002, above)

*Yes, my friends and I are a community of concerned and politically active people who try to live by our ideals. SAGE is one group of people I can say are some of the most genuinely active members of campus/NH I have yet to meet. We aren't just all talk, as I feel many organizations can be. . . . **We are the powers that will change the world, and there unlimited possibilities for us.***

J.D. (Fall, 2003 above)

*I am part of the SAGE (Students Advocating Gender Equality) community here on campus and recently directed and produced a benefit production of Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues." I am very excited to gain a different kind of **community experience** this summer in Missouri on the organic farm!*

They are both walking their talk! And, we see that a supportive community helps sustain a sustainable lifestyle.

Indeed, here are a cross-section of respondents who show commitment to living-out their 'conscientisation,' today, but often it is 'easier said than done' and further longitudinal studies are needed to address this question. This research is but a start in regards to what is needed to sustain a sustainable lifestyle. This is research worth pursuing.

Here are two graduates who are undecided and honest about their future:

C.C. (Fall, 2002)

*Right now I'm working for T.M. jewelry. I'm using this time and this job as a segue into the real world. . . to try and figure out what I want to do with my life and **what I can offer this world.** This year has been insane. . . with graduation and then the passing of my father one week after graduation. . . I have come face to face with reality and am currently attempting to find out what it is I really want. As time passes, **I am realizing***

*more and more that I am not cut out for the corporate world. Instead I'd like to pursue art. . . Perhaps everything I have learned will be translated this way. . . (the class) broadened my horizons and allowed me to think outside the box. . . not only this, but it has taught me to really appreciate being a woman: that we are wonderful, powerful creatures.*

E.B. (Summer, 1997) Awaiting Ordination (Harvard Divinity School graduate).

In-depth interview, February 10, 2006

*I do much better living sustainably when I'm living near/with/or in community with others who are **attempting to live sustainably** as well – and having our values and lifestyles be a topic of conversation. This seems to make a difference for me. When I visit people or are in communities that aren't as aware/mindful of sustainability issues it can be more of a challenge to continue or implement practices. I generally feel better when I'm eating healthier, not consuming hazardously, creating less waste, and disposing/recycling/reusing that waste. **I think once one has had the experience of witnessing others living sustainably and having such an experience, it is something one can't 'unknow' and there is always a pull, tug to return to such a way of living.** Although I know there are so many ways for us to live more sustainably no matter where we are, sometimes I idealize places that are far off the grid and want to go live there – **yet, my nature is also to stay engaged with the wider webs and connections and places that I've already inhabited – and seek some sort of middle ground.***

*Continued education is imperative – continuing to stay connected to the ideas I first encountered in 595 – which I did in a lot of my continued studies. Now, that I'm out of school, it can take more of an effort to stay connected.*

It is important to find like-minded communities/people to support and maintain a sustainable lifestyle. ('Sustainable' in this context means living consciously, not compromising our earth and her creatures, with regard to the future 'seven generations.)

### **Revelations and Epiphanies: What Did I Learn from what the Students Learned?**

#### The HELP Model

Having addressed my Research Questions I think it is helpful to look further at my suggested HELP model and its characteristics to see whether what I found in answer to the above questions pointed to its efficacy in terms of what mattered to the students in their process of becoming eco-citizens. HELP is my acronym for (1) Holistic pedagogy, (2) Embodiment and Empowerment, (3) Liberation, and (4) Possibility.

I looked to the wise, insightful words of the students for the highlights of their experience and what was important to them. M. W. (in-depth interview; Appendix H) describes her steps toward self-discovery, of how the sense of community was key, and she became aware of her impact on the earth.

I think M. W. elucidates many of the characteristics of the class that all the respondents (36) of the questionnaires wrote about. And these are the aspects that led to my model. In the interview, we hear of the importance of the intimacy, trust, respect and support of the class-community—M. lived with seven of them and is still in touch with several of them, ten years later! The reflective writing was key in her process of developing her own Voice.

She remembers the Vodun mambo and the Native American teachers and the teaching of the special connection women have to the earth and that ‘women have the heartbeat of the earth in them,’ so only the men need to drum to re-create that for all the tribe. M. talks of coming out of teen angst and how she was encouraged to ask questions: ‘what do I want to be in my life? How do I want to be in this world, so I can positively affect those around me?’ She decided to pursue healing. . . .’a lot of healers came out of the class, and after being an organic gardener for many years. (I would see her at the Farmer’s Market every Saturday which is how we re-connected.) She is now enrolled in a hands-on Nursing Program. It is interesting to note that the friends she has stayed in touch with are also pursuing alternate, holistic-health, lifestyles.

And, like several other respondents she said the only tension she felt was in the inner struggle, the re-evaluation of how to relate to the world so you “can put yourself back out to the world in a very helpful, sustainable way.”



And, in terms of my Research Question 4, M. W. has made very conscious, sustainable choices over the last ten years since the class. It was delightful to meet and catch-up with her again, over a cup of tea, with a tape recorder, to hear about her most interesting life. And, she is dating our mailman and living in a handmade home built out of recycled wood! I am so impressed and so proud of her, as I am of all my students! They inspire me! They are the changes and the future!

To recapitulate and summarise the main characteristics of the learning from WS 595/797—what were the most mentioned and salient aspects and does the HELP model reflect these? As I go over the ‘results and survey the lists of topics and responses and the matrixes and the diagrams trying to capture the ‘essence’ of the learning, there are common, recurring themes. What mattered most to them, in terms of the Model? As Belenky et al (1986) ask as one of their questions, in their ground-breaking, phenomenological survey: ”What idea(s) most helped (the women interviewed), to see things differently? .At the risk of double-fitting them into my Model, I proffer the following.

### Holistic Pedagogy

Our WS 595 classroom is organized as a spiritual, whole-system class functioning as a complete organism where we/they experience a great degree of interdependence, service, responsibility and accountability. Performance is evaluated on whole class participation in weekly dialogues and every other week, a small group work and present collaboratively on a topic of their choice from the syllabus. Their presentation includes facilitation of discussion of the texts together with an experiential piece that is inclusive of the whole class. The syllabus is organized such that one week we ‘learn and do’ with a

practitioner/teacher from an indigenous/wisdom tradition and the alternate weeks we follow this experience up with the processing and the Student-group Presentation including the text readings. The weekly, written response papers are an important piece of the processing and reflections are shared throughout the term. This way, students experience ‘what it is like to operate from a self-transcending, evolutionary, sacred and spiritual way of being—a way that makes a possible difference for person and planet as well as for each individual student.

Also, the instructor and students share responsibility for learning and teaching, and the traditional controls are absent...the exploration/interests of the group can lead anywhere—it is a dialogically-interwoven, vibrant community of learners-the ‘learning paradigm.’ Of course, boundaries are necessary and as the teacher/facilitator, it is important to keep the discussions around the topic and texts of the day.

What mattered to the students around the holistic pedagogy of the class? Not all of them responded to Question 10 of the Questionnaire. But those who did, had these comments to make.

W.R. (Spring 2004) WS 795, Graduate/artist, February 2005

*I think the one thing that stands out the most is the encouragement of the freedom of expression. We could really pour ourselves out there if we wanted to. I could say it was an alternative learning experience.....would that all classes were this way. I suppose you could call that approach ‘empowerment’ because you knew whatever you said or did would be considered. It made one want to do more, to beat one’s chest, if you will. It felt like we could change the world. A real attitude adjustment. If I see anyone that took the class now—there is a kinship experience. We should have a reunion. We bonded.*

L.E. (2002) wrote, March 20, 2005:

*P—‘s holistic approach with the class included everyone. It was always a feast for the senses, breaking down common, academic boundaries. It was a **collaboration** not a competition for grades, and each voice was given the chance to speak. Acceptance and positive energy permeated the room, and the atmosphere was conducive to self-*

*expression, artistic creativity and self-acceptance. I felt empowered by my own voice and the voices of my peers in a class dedicated to self and community-discovery, not just relay of academic info. This class set-off a spark in me of healing & insight into what makes me feel content, accepting, motivated and excited about life. I wish the whole world could take the class!*

And,

T.H. (Spring 2001) wrote in Questionnaire, September 10, 2004:

*I remember absolutely loving the class. It really shattered the way I thought about a lot of things but did so in a very gentle and joyful way. I remember never wanting to miss a class & never hoping class would end. It also stuck with me the teaching style P-used. I really enjoyed having a group present a topic & then the following class going on a field trip or doing something more hands-on relating to the topic. It was a very holistic way of approaching education & I can remember with great joy everything we learned. P—really taught our whole selves and not just our brains. And also allowed us to teach each other. I experienced the class through my whole self, my mind, my body, my heart & my soul.*

Of course, the characteristics are intertwined and we see them inter-woven throughout the writings of the students- issues of empowerment and voice and peer education. I noticed that ‘joy’ was often part of the learning-experience, too. . . somehow learning has become separated, often, from the excitement we had when we were children, when everything new was wondrous and the days were never long enough!

### Embodiment

I would agree with the environmental educators who analyse the kind of knowledge, values and activity that reconstructs ecological consciousness towards an ecocentric worldview paradigm. It is important to educate towards an ecological ‘me.’ To change our relationship to nature (presently in crisis) we need to change our consciousness with the values of holistic philosophy and humanistic psychology in education. Biocentric global education reconnects the aspects of a human being. The learning experience is more personal, intimate, in the encouragement of self-discovery.

Such education enables students to explore their inner ecology, to cultivate their attunement to their senses and body rhythms and develop embodied relationship with the natural world-contemplation and therapeutic art, dance, breathing, exercises, yoga, meditation should become valued features of the learning process where knowledge is recognized and internalized in a myriad ways. I know my students would agree.

K. G. (Spring, 1998) writes:

*(I) suddenly felt consciously familiar with much of the earth-centered and women's spirituality material that I had never studied. Yet it struck me as a kind of remembering of an unconscious repository. . . thus sparking a kind of recognition of inner wisdom. . . such as the understanding, underpinnings of meaning in the use of rituals, and a better comprehension of the historical context of the major religions. . . .*

And, J.I. (1996) a male student, one of four in this particular class, wrote, Spring 2006:

*The Earth Centered Wisdom class was unique in a couple ways. First the class covered religious traditions not otherwise available for study at the university, and secondly, the class provided a departure from the all-too-often detached scholarly approach to religious studies where the students sit in the lecture hall each day and takes notes on the notes that the professor jots down on the overhead projector. These lecture style classes did have their intellectual value, but they were void of providing any tangible notion as to the **feeling of incorporating a sense of spirituality into one's everyday life**. The Earth Centered Wisdom Class **allowed a level of participation that connected the student with the spiritual experience**. On a personal level I think it helped me to begin to adopt a new all-inclusive perspective about the value of spirituality, a realization that you do not have to subscribe to a specific religious sect or agree to adhere to a specific religious doctrine to have a spiritual connection to our surroundings and selves.*

*The legacy that the class left me with, now **ten years after the fact** is a major building block in my general outlook and understanding of life. **I feel a very strong connection to the earth. I feel comfortable in my role as a part of a much larger natural and organic process of life and death. I feel empowered and capable of achieving things that might make a positive impact on the earth and its inhabitants. I am motivated to try to make a positive impact on the earth because I feel that I have the ability to do so. I have come face to face with human suffering and the suffering of the natural world. The thought of having the ability to make a positive difference is an inspiring motivation to live life to its fullest. On a day to day basis I live in as sustainable a manner as I can.***

He also writes of feeling empowered, and of feeling part of a larger, natural, organic process. This is, indeed, an aspect of embodiment and immanence that seems to

be an important step in the development of an eco-spiritual identification with the earth-community. And J. I. met his partner in the class and they have been together since—  
another comment on the friendships and community built upon in the class and beyond!

And, another young man, M. H. (1997), now an Outdoor education leader with troubled youth, remembers in correspondence, dated May, 2005:

*I was going through my spiritual awakening and was searching for truth that resonated with my heart. I was looking for more balanced philosophies than the masculine religions. I had already taken Intro to WS with you and wanted to learn more. I remember the sacred space that was created every time we gathered. I remember many altars, songs and tears we shared. . . **the education on the divine feminine has affected every area of my life**, how I educate my students, and my relationships with the women in my life. It really helped me get in touch with my feminine side & this has been invaluable.*

*Many aha's and deep internal transformations. . . changed the way I see the rhythms of nature, the power of our lunar cycle, and how I interacted with women. Helped me explore **my deep connection with nature and the spirits** found in the woods. . . **the joy and feeling of universal connection I feel in nature**. . . I am motivated out of **LOVE for creation** to dance on my path. . . The responsibility and trust of my family/tribe/community motivates me to do a lot of things.*

Again, expressions of 'joy and love for creation' are, and should be, a part of the learning process. This was rewarding to hear! Our men desperately need such reminders.

M.G. (Fall 2004) simply says:

*I love that the metaphor of **the earth as mother** encourages people to respect our planet. . . The practice of meditation, which I first encountered in WS 595 is a way that I can quiet my mind and be mindful of my connection with nature. I am always looking for ways to live more sustainably.*

For both women and men, embodied realizations of our connectedness to nature through their/our senses is an affirming revelation indeed. Appendix I is an example of this in a beautiful, evocative description by a student (B.S, 2004, graduate student in-depth case study) of her process of creating her Group Presentation on The Goddess. . . it is full of excitement, eros, sensuality and love and the memory of our ancient history shines through—as it did in the joyous participation of all of us who participated, including our

one male graduate student, who, in fact, was one of the co-presenters! In, fact, 'Eros' or biophilia in engaged, educational pedagogy is another promising topic I would love to do further research on.

With her description, it felt like we were all part of the Eleusinian mysteries of ancient Greece. . . profane time became sacred (Eliade, 1959). B.S. describes how creativity and the senses, 'eros,' were important to include. . .

*As we have seen and heard, the Goddess and the learning of her ancient history was the most affirming knowledge in terms of being woman incarnate-as-body and an integral part in all Creation.....an embodiment of the earth, of Life. Indeed, reverence and respect for the earth and, by (androcentric) association, women, is needed for the healing of all.*

I chose to include this entire piece in the Appendix because, I felt it showed so beautifully, the whole range of the 'characteristics' of the HELP model. B.S. reveals the power of learning of the ancient goddess, as a Catholic woman, through creative eros. . . and life-affirming beauty and music and art all as a celebration of this life-force, of nature. We see how the holistic approach empowered her group into the realm of possibility. . . a feeling of liberation. . . which segues well into the next piece of the model we are looking at!

### Liberation

The re-iteration of the empowering coming-to-voice in a safe, discovery-oriented classroom, speaks to their liberation: overcoming the silencing and oppression, and with new-found hope and possibility, the (mainly) women are liberated into becoming change-agents and activists in the world.

We need leaders who acknowledge their relationship to the group and who are accountable to it and they need to show love and compassion through their actions and

dialogue. Such loving acts transform domination, . . . in this case domination of nature, and women.

So we need to develop innovative ways to teach sustainable citizenship, linking policy-makers, business people and young people as students of governance for the long-term future. We see the students in the study largely going into the helping professions and being in service to others.

Again, looking to the words of C. H., B.S. and M.W (three in-depth case-studies) above, we see/hear how the pedagogy of empowerment, discovery, creativity, and coming-to-voice, enabled them to name their world and move forward in a creative and courageous way, with excitement and hope.

C.H. is currently incorporating embodied & spiritual pedagogy into her reflective-writing praxis, B.S. has left her 'meaningless' job of seven years and is heading to grad. school excited to teach others in an expressive, experiential way. And, M.W., who dropped out of school, has found her passion in the healing profession, combining both holistic and traditional medicine. Indeed, hearing from so many engaged students, gives me hope for the future as most of them are pursuing careers that are making a difference such as midwifery, ministering, organic farming, coordinating non-profit organizations, the Peace Corps, art, nursing and teaching, or furthering their education.

### Possibility

I have witnessed, through the 'lived experience' of the (37 or so) student-respondents that such empowerment through education and coming-to-Voice liberates us into a place of hope and possibility—the antidote to the paralysis and existential angst

that the students began with. Now, their existential courage, as informed eco-citizens is called-for.

Again, the 'lived experience' of the students speak to possibility and the future.

C. H. (1994) in-depth interview

*Magic is a change in consciousness, is transformation, is a gift of the class. I still hold on to it.....I've learned I don't have to be a victim of my circumstances....I can create....reality. If that's not **Empowerment**, I don't know what the h- is!*

A.A. (1991) in-depth interview:

*There is a large and needed place for teachers, elders, people who specialize in an area and can then share their knowledge. But **I see this as a partnership for learning and sharing** that does not discount what the other person brings to the relationship versus the authoritarian relationship that is so common to us.*

J. I. (1996) writes (Spring 2006):

*I am motivated to make a positive impact on the earth because I feel that I have the ability to do so. . . . The thought of having the ability to make a positive difference is an inspiring motivation to live life to its fullest. On a day to day basis I live in as sustainable manner as I can but I hope to be able to focus more on leading a completely lifestyle in the future. We ( his fiancée was also in his class-where they met, ten years ago) are trying to create forms of ecologically-sound hostelling and lodging experiences. I want to encourage cultural exchange and help the different people on the earth realize the things we have in common as humans and as a part of the earth & its process.*

It is interesting to ask why these particular aspects of the students' learnings that they selected are important to them? First, they are young adults preparing to go out into the world and they have the opportunity to address their questions of meaning, in WS 595. They have grown up and have experienced and been part of a highly relativistic, post-modern world. . .where anything goes. This fierce cult of individualism has led to isolation and nihilism at large and a loss of community. Further, our 'secular city' of extreme post-Enlightenment materialism does not include the world of Spirit and we are in a crisis of meaning.



Hence, the students are part of the collective that is searching for more. . . the appeal of fundamentalism, perhaps, is not pluralist or multi-faceted enough for educated minds looking for tolerance, understanding and compassion? Rationalist, linear modes of knowing are ‘ecologically dysfunctional’ and learning ways of knowing within traditional indigenous communities is a vital element in the recovery of the earth, where emotion, subjectivity, caring and intuition are the principal ways of knowing. And, our indigenous heritage opens up worlds of possibility around the part that we play in our earth-community and around the notion that there’s a world of spirit-helpers that we can work with; we are not alone. This experience seemed to be an important characteristic in becoming more hopeful.

Ultimately, for female students, and males, looking for more than the limitations of their rigid, gender stereotyping, learning of the ‘erasure of women’ under patriarchy, liberates and empowers us to become leaders, once again. We can envision a Partnership of men, women and all sentient beings, and behave as eco-spiritually aware citizens. The model and practice of shared, egalitarian learning makes sense. We are in this soup together. . . we can co-create new ways of being together. . . the old ways are not working. As Belenky et al (1986) put it: “...we believe that the collaborative, egalitarian spirit so often shared by women should be more carefully nurtured in the ...lives of all men & women” (Preface).

J. Z. (1992) writes:

*....For me **the essence of eco-spiritual learning** in class is that there are many ways of expressing, celebrating and cherishing the human feelings of **LOVE, WONDER and CONNECTION** with the natural world. Each way is valid and beautiful, an inspiration to embrace the compassion and magic of the earth and nature of which we are so blessed to be part of.*

To me, this captures the essence of an eco-citizen!

As I say, the students give me HOPE and they are teaching me their Model of HELP: Hope, Eros in Education, Love and trust in the pedagogical praxis of Possibility.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **Some Future Directions**

In drawing to a close, I cannot help but be heartened and encouraged by the chorus of students uplifted voices throughout this research of my pedagogical praxis towards eco-spiritual learning. It has been a pleasure to work with them in WS 595/795 over the last fifteen years and if it were not for their engagement and enthusiasm for the process, none of this exploration would exist! It is for them, our future, that I have produced this piece of research, hoping to make a difference in the academy, and to bring the body and the soul into the secular-sacred halls, to enliven us all. There is a crisis in the classroom as well as in/reflecting, the world-at-large. There is room for a conversion in our divided and individuated world of angst, alienation, violence and war. The herein-described process of becoming a part of a community, feeling the connectedness of love and compassion, towards others and oneself, and learning and discovering the freeing, feeling of embodiment in an experiential and often, joyous, way appears to effect a growing identification with 'something larger' and give meaning and hope.

Indeed, 'hope' is one of the characteristics that emerged, often between the lines, in the 'students' words, in the exploration of my pedagogical model. I think it would be worthwhile to pursue the manifestations of such hope and possibility and it would be interesting to do more follow-up, longitudinal studies, to see what further changes in the

mindsets and behaviours might be happening with regard to their eco-spiritual evolution and their role/identification as eco-citizens.

It would also be important to pursue the aspects of eros in engaged pedagogy and the dimensions of ‘tension.’ It was interesting to me to learn that generally, the students, when asked whether they experienced any tension throughout the semester, said they did only in so far as they were challenged to re-evaluate their ideas and values. It could be useful to explore the implications of encouraging critical thinking and inquiry in our world of unilateral and simplistic politics and viewpoints, especially around globalization and the continued imperial, maldevelopment of the earth’s resources and her peoples and all her creatures.

I am excited, also, by the possibilities of further collaboration and exploring the idea of co-teaching and co-researching other empowering, pedagogical models and what tools and dimensions might be added. It would be important to include artists, scientists, international policy-makers, and young educators, including former students, in this development. How might the eco-spiritual model, explored in this beginning research, be expanded to include other facets, suggested by the students, implicitly, in some responses, to my research questions, such as the use of intentionally engaging/developing their ‘spirituality’ in the pedagogy? What motivates our need for a spiritual dimension?<sup>12</sup> The conversion to becoming an eco-citizen does seem to include such a spiritual transformation—the YES! YES! of W. James.

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<sup>12</sup> These are indeed important questions in the light of various, dangerous evangelizing that has been done/taught in the name of ‘religion.’ In my case, the approach is one of comparative religions and there is a feminist epistemology of critical inquiry and dialogue, where all views are heard. One of the outcomes is to foster increased understanding, tolerance and compassion for all peoples

What did I learn from my research? Overall, I discovered that the students appreciated the class such that they were willing and able to write about it a decade or so later. The resounding memories were around the experiential pieces that helped the texts make sense. The collaborative learning was also a key piece where they ALL contributed to the learning process and did not look solely to the teacher or outside experts and texts, of the authoritarian model of education. It was these cherished memories of actual practice that meant the most to the students over the long term. Their responses were most evocative in their recollections of field trips to the vodun mambo in Vermont and the Buddhist center and the masks and the spirit-bottles of the Yoruba and Igbo traditions. Learning of other cultural traditions opened some of the students up to travel and study abroad, and many plan on working in other countries around the world in the future.

It was rewarding to hear of the lasting effects of the holistic pedagogy and of the students ongoing journey of discovery and contribution to society in meaningful and sustainable ways. There were myriad accounts of how they were integrating these methods into their own teaching, healing, parenting, nursing, ministry and several had left their 'successful' careers for more significant training and professions where they felt they could 'make a difference.'

My HELP model appears validated in my study. Earlier in this chapter (p. 143) I have written about how the students' written responses addressed the themes of holistic education, embodiment and empowerment, and a liberation into possibility. In their 'own words' they reiterate the importance of these aspects of the holistic pedagogy that were transformative in their eco-spiritual development.

And, in answer to my research questions, the topics of holistic, experiential, embodied learning, and the liberatory pedagogy helping the students become aware of more possibility for themselves, were key in trying to understand the process of becoming an informed, responsible eco-citizen.

Research Question 1: Given that the planet is in crisis and that students feel overwhelmed and powerless from the overload of information, and from the collective angst—what is it that enables them to feel empowered to make choices and changes, through their semester-long course in Women’s Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions?

Issues of coming-to-voice through presentations, discussion and reflective writing, of knowing that women and the earth have an ancient and powerful history, and learning useful, transformative tools (meditation, ritual, drum, dance), were ALL instrumental in enabling the students to feel empowered to make changes and choices, to act.

Research Question 2: What is the praxis/pedagogy that may help to develop the awareness that they have the power to choose, to act, and that they can make a difference in the world?

The pedagogy of experiential learning was highlighted over and over again in the responses—they loved learning this way. The teacher-as-midwife, who elicits knowledge rather than the teacher-as-banker who deposits knowledge to be saved is a metaphor for the creative, birthing process that occurs in a holistic, collaborative educational setting. The class became a possible microcosm of the society-at-large where through developing a sense of community they became empowered to speak and act.

Research Question 3: What might be the developmental steps in a coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity or responsibility as a member, an eco-citizen, of the earth community?

The main characteristic in coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity, as part of the earth-community, is feeling part of something larger, that was reiterated often in the questionnaire responses, and especially in the six in-depth interviews where we could go deeper. The aforementioned concept/experience of embodiment and immanence added to this understanding.

Research Question 4: Is this “consciousness” lived out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

I found, amazingly, indeed, all the respondents are living out their learning and ecological-awareness by working in meaningful careers; some have changed jobs, some are in school, and some admit it is harder to ‘walk the talk’ if you do not have a supportive community, but that it is difficult to ‘unknow,’ as one student put it.

So, my HELP model was a useful, analytic tool, or beginning model, in understanding some of the pertinent steps involved in a coming to ‘consciousness’ as an eco-citizen. There were other elements that emerged from the responses, such as Hope and Eros, Love and the power of Praxis, whereby the students showed me yet another model of HELP.

Here are some of their insights on Hope, for instance. Hopefulness and a sense of possibility were an added surprise that came out of my analysis, and sitting-with the writings of the students in their responses to the questionnaires. Here are some examples, mostly written to part of Question 2, but also woven throughout their other responses:

C. A. (2003) – *I have a huge sense of hope, which is why I have chosen to do what I am going to do as a primary healthcare provider.*

B.M. (2002) – *I’ve spent a great deal of my life feeling abandoned and alone, and thinking how much of my life was passing me by, and I wasn’t really living. But this class gave me some kind of hope. It made me realize how incredibly beautiful life is, even when it is so hard to get out and see it sometimes.*

J. K. (1997) male , written in 2005– *The most memorable experience was going to the Buddhist monastery/ retreat. I remember leaving with such a feeling of hope and optimism. I practice these meditations regularly, still.*

Later, he talks of a gift of a stone he received after he choked up trying to talk about his deceased father . . .

*I still have the flint and I cherish it. It is a reminder to me that everyone feels sorrow and loss. That the world isn't as cold and lonely as it sometimes seems. It is also a reminder of you and your class, of everything you taught us. Thank you for that.*

P. H. (1993) – *I do know that I would say that class was pivotal in my coming to a more authentic voice, and finding hope and possibility in changing my life to better match the woman I was becoming. I loved that summer; it changed my life!*

She is still in close touch, 13 years later, with several of the friends she made in that class, as a couple of them are now parents and one is an international activist working for peace.

And E. B. (1997) – In-depth case study, in response to questionnaire (Question 10) wrote:

*'Ignorance is bliss,' but education can be hope—even while learning about great danger and despair in the world, we learned about both the hurts and the hopes of the world in class.*

To a follow-up question on hope, she wrote:

*Often what gives me hope are the stories of those who have gone before me—generations of women who have paved the way for me. I went to the Religion and Feminist Movement Conference at HDS three years ago and was so moved to see in person many of the people we read in 595. Hearing their stories again in person among so many other scholars, people of faith, and teachers of several generations really inspired me. 'Story' gives me hope and the ways that we listen and learn from one another. My own spiritual practices and relationship with the divine give me hope—not naïve, flaky hope, but really sustained hope that generations beyond me will (first of all, exist!) and that they will experience the beauty and bounties of the earth and their own bodies.*

It would be informative to look further into the power of 'story' and embodied spiritual practice. Further, reading between the lines, there are signs of Hope! For instance, a

student struggling with bipolarity, and who is now in chiropractic school, ten years later wrote:

*I learned inspiration, glee, appreciation, awareness of responsibility, gratitude, empowerment, connecting, understanding, peace . . . .*

And as a mother, J. S., who took the class with her daughter in 1998, writes:

*It was also interesting to seem to be witnessing the next generation having an awareness of and being part of the leading edge of a transformation in mankind and social changes.*

It would be interesting and worthwhile, given the predicament of our times, to do further studies on the possibilities of hope in overcoming our ‘learned helplessness’ and fear and denial.

This leads me to inquire what I might do differently in the future, now that I see that such hope is also an important element in such transformative education in becoming eco-citizens who can and want to make a difference. It would behoove me to introduce the students to instances and inspiring examples of women and indigenous peoples’ grass roots movements that have altered the course of events such as the Chipko movement in India, the Ojibwe land-reclaiming in Minnesota led by Winona Laduke, and Julia ‘Butterfly’ Hill, who single-handedly has saved the redwoods in California.

And it is important to address current challenges in our ‘global village’ today, such as the position of the women and the farmers and fishermen in Bandah Aceh and Sri Lanka after the devastating tsunami. My son’s midwife in Bali was in Aceh, a neighbouring island, for six months assisting the women—she has a website. Indeed, in my higher level Women’s Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions 796, the students did explore such topics in their research presentations. Further, it would be important to work with, learn from, and collaborate with those ‘out in the world.’



With hope, erstwhile overwhelmed students felt they could effect change in their own everyday lives, and by modeling changes in attitudes and behaviors to those around them, they came to see a world of possibility.

My work and teaching is, hopefully, a way to empower our future generations and leaders, politicians, policy makers, business people, teachers and parents to develop a Voice and to activate them to eco-citizenship through a practice of embodied learning and reflection.

I believe it is crucial that we include more holistic, collaborative pedagogy in the training of teachers at the college level, and earlier. We need to bring the heart into the classroom. Our students crave authentic teaching/teachers where we share our experiences and stories and show that we care. The midwife-teacher facilitates learning and encourages the process to happen naturally in a joint exploration of inquiry, and the birth of new knowledge(s) where the body is no longer denied. Here, in this model, knowledge is revealed rather than acquired.

American education has become grounded in disconnection, a reflection of our cultural mythology at large, especially with the separation between the spiritual and the material. We learn to see the world as made up of separate objects of matter, rather than as an interconnected whole. We learn that plants, animals, the earth, are all ‘substance,’ having no spirit and no inherent rights, and therefore free to be owned, manipulated and consumed. We consume information and ideas: more is better and means more power. Our feeling of separateness leads us towards consumption, addictive behaviours, depression, suicide, violence and environmental destruction. We feel disconnected and apart from others. We must bring the sacred, that is, awareness and wholeness and

respect, back into education. This can be cultivated by mindfulness, love and compassion. By experiencing this non-dual quality of the universe, of being-in-relationship, we begin to understand the view of the sacred, which brings us to a greater sense of presence to the repercussions and meaning of our lives and actions.

Seeing the world as sacred does not require any particular religious framework. We need to regain the experience of intimacy and community in our increasingly globalised world. We need to root education in the practice of openness, attentiveness to experience and sensitivity to the world and all her creatures. We need to ask ourselves: Are we and our planet happier, healthier because of education? This work requires us all to examine and move beyond deeply-embedded, harmful, detached, objectifying perceptions towards compassion, love and inter-relationship. The heart and the sacred must be added to the head and addressed in our graduate schools of higher learning.

Indeed, this is another important area to explore with further research and collaboration as to how this may be done.

I hope to share what I have learned in this research project, both in publications, and in experiential settings. . . of course! It would be most rewarding to collaborate with my former students and our indigenous and wisdom teachers, as well as other members of the international community, so the experiential learnings can be carried forward, worldwide. The goal is to transform the way people look at themselves and their relationships in the world, from a fragmented to an integrative perspective. This emerging paradigm is also ecological, evolutionary, spiritual and global.

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the Soul.....  
And sings the tune without words  
And never stops.....at all.

Emily Dickinson

My students give me hope—thank you!

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

May 20, 2002

Penelope Morrow  
Women's Studies, Huddleston Hall  
36 Richmond Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801

**IRB #:** 2740  
**Study:** Eco-Citizenship = Praxis for Empowerment  
**Approval Date:** 05/10/2002

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or [Julie.simpson@unh.edu](mailto:Julie.simpson@unh.edu). Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Simpson".

Julie F. Simpson  
Regularly Compliance Manager

cc: File  
Paul Brockelman

## Appendix B

### Research Questions

1. Given that the planet is in crisis and that students feel overwhelmed and powerless from the overload of information, and from the collective angst—what is it that enables them to feel empowered to make choices and changes, through their semester-long course in Women’s Spirituality and Earth-Centered Religions?
2. What is the praxis/pedagogy that may help to develop the awareness that they have the power to choose, to act, and that they can make a difference in the world?
3. What might be the developmental steps in a coming to awareness of an eco-spiritual identity or responsibility as a member, an eco-citizen, of the earth community?
4. Is this “consciousness” lived out years later? Is it possible to sustain a sustainable lifestyle?

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire

Earth-Centered Religions & Women's Spirituality: Interview for P. Morrow's doctoral research. PLEASE call if you have questions: 431-2259.  
pmorrow@cisunix.unh.edu

Hello again, dear former students! I am conducting follow-up interviews for my dissertation research and would be most grateful if you would spend some time answering the following questions for me and replying asap! Thanks so much.  
Penelope

1. When did you take WS 595/795? What brought you to the class? What was going on in your life at the time?
2. What do you remember/stands out about your experience in this class? What has been most meaningful?
3. Can you describe any ahas/transformations that occurred during/from the class in terms of your eco-spiritual awareness/growth and how you see the natural world/others/all around you?
4. What motivates you in your relationship to creation/nature? What, if anything, woke you up/re-awoke you?
5. What was the subject of your class presentation/research and how have you integrated it into your life? Or not?
6. What else from WS 595/795 have you integrated into your everyday life-experience? What other classes, information, experiences, helped this process?
7. What are you doing now, professionally, personally, regarding spirituality and/or sustainability?
8. Have you made any lifestyle changes towards living more sustainably since the class?
9. Are you engaged with a community? How?
10. Could you address any of the following with regard to your experience of the class, referring to any of the headings: Holistic Approach, Empowerment, Peer Education, Coming to Voice, Possibilities and Hope, Accessibility of Professor, Community, Interconnectedness, Collaboration, Written Responses, Challenges, Healings, Sustainable Lifestyle, etc.?

11. Where did you face the greatest tension or conflict during the class? What was it about? Was there resolution?
12. What from WS 595/795 has been most meaningful? Worthwhile? Positive? Helpful?

Appendix D

Permission Form

I hereby give my permission to use my writings from WS 595/795 and/or my interview responses in Penelope Morrow's doctoral dissertation. I understand she will be using initials only.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Sources Cited – Student Respondents

#### In-depth Case Studies

- A. A. (1991) Women's Studies and Psychology  
January and February 2006. Questionnaire and follow-up e-mails. In-depth taped interview February 13, 2006.
- C. H. (1994) Ph.D. candidate in Reading and Writing Instruction, Education  
June 2004 Questionnaire #1; February 14, 2006 Questionnaire #Z; taped interview February 6, 2006.
- E. B. (1997) English  
October 2004 Questionnaire; February 7, February 9, and February 10, 2006 follow-up e-mails.
- M. W. (1996) Biology  
March 16, 2006 in-depth, taped interview.
- B. S. (2002 and 2004; WS 595 and WS 795) Special Student – Graduate sociology  
February 6, 2004 and April 9, 2004 class responses.
- V.S. (2002 and 2004; WS 595 and WS 795) Special Student – Graduate Theatre  
Fall 2002 and spring 2004 responses. February 25 in-depth, taped interview with follow-up e-mails.

#### Questionnaires/Interviews (in order of appearance):

- D. M. (1998) – Biology; October 18, 2004 Questionnaire.  
J. D. (2002) – Environmental Conservation; April 1, 2005 Questionnaire.  
D. R. (2002) – Women's Studies and English; August 21, 2005 Questionnaire.  
C.G. (1995) – Graduate Nursing; March 24, 2005.  
A. C. (1995) – Environmental Conservation; Interview Spring 2000, spring 2006.  
W. R. (2004) – MALS Program, Art History; February 2005 and Spring 2004 class responses.  
A. B. (2002) – Psychology; February 5, 2006.  
J. Z. (1992) – Art, October 2002.  
K. C. (2004) – Psychology; December 2004 class response.  
K G. (1999) – R.N. and poet; February 2004; March 2006 e-mail.  
C. A. (2003) – Women's Studies and Family Studies; March 3, 2005.



- L. E. (2002) – English, march 20, 2005.  
S. M. (1998) – MALS; February 13, 2996.  
J. C. (2005) – History; Mid-term essay, 2005.  
B. W. (2001) – Women’s Studies and Environmental Science, March 21, 2005.  
M. G. (2004) – Art and Women’s Studies; Spring 2006.  
A. O. (1994) – History; Fall 2002.  
J. P. (1991) – Economics; march 13, 2006.  
B. M. (2002 and 2004, WS 595 and WS 795) – Art and Women’s Studies; Spring 2005,  
follow-up e-mail March 2006.  
M. S. (2004) – MALS; Spring 2004.  
K. R. (2004) – Physics; August 18, 2005.  
E. O. (2005) – Women’s Studies and English; October 2005 class response.  
J. B. (2004 ) – Counseling; December 2005 class response.  
N. T. (1992) – Nurse; March 2006.  
J. I. (1996) – Religion; Spring 2006.  
C. C. (2002) – English; February 2006; February 22 e-mail follow up.  
T. H. (2001) – Anthropology; September 10, 2004.  
M. H. (1997) – Outdoor Education; May 2005; personal correspondence.  
J. K. (1997) – Outdoor education; March 19, 2005.  
P. H. (1993) – Women’s Studies and English; March 21, 2005.  
J. S. (1998) – Special Student, Graduate; February 26, 2005

## Appendix F

### Course Syllabus: Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Wisdom

Women's Studies Program  
203 Huddleston Hall, 862-2194  
Office Hours: By appointment

Fall 2005

#### Women's Spirituality and Earth-Centered Wisdom

Lecturer: Penelope Morrow

Women's Studies 595W (02):  
Friday, 1:10 - 4:00 Hamilton-Smith19



#### Course Description

We will look at several pre-Judeo/Xian religions, or earth-based, immanent spiritualities/cosmologies that give us insight on our present ecological madness/crisis. This course will be about theory and praxis, an experiential and creative process as well as learning through the written word. We will experience different spiritual practice and healing ceremonies. The on-going project will be to create your own stories using a journal, dreams, poetry, sculpting, collage, music, and movement, with a final presentation at the end of the course. We will hear from an inspiring range of women leaders/teachers/practitioners/healers. Weekly responses will be required, 1-3 pages, with a mid-term Review (5 pages): Oct. 21 and a final due Dec. 12. Women's ways of knowing, as well as that of indigenous peoples, offer us a moral compass and insight into our time of crisis of values. Attendance and participation are a requirement to building a community (after one absence your grade will be affected), are required. You will work collaboratively on researching and presenting a religious tradition. (10 page paper). As a writing intensive course, a minimum of 15 pages of formal writing is required.

**Bibliography** (In order of usage in class schedule) Books available at Durham Book Exchange, Main St. Durham {\* means REQUIRED, @ means On Reserve in WS Office and many are also on reserve for two hour usage in Dimond Library, RECO means Recommended (some available at DBE), \*\*States of Grace is out of print but available at Amazon Used Books, A Libris or other used book sites online.] REF. Gibaldi, Joseph: *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*:

- \* The Earth Path, Starhawk
- \* The Once and Future Goddess, Elinor Gadon
- \*States of Grace, Charlene Spretnak (Recommended-out of print available A Libris or Amazon Used Books)
- \*The Spiral Dance, Starhawk (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition)
- \*Jambalaya, Luisah Teish & Jump Up, L. Teish
- \* Being Peace, Thich Nhat Hahn
- \*My Name is Chellis & I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization, Glendinning
- \* Voices of Our Ancestors, Dyani Ywahoo

\*Packet Available at Durham Copy, Main Street

*Recommended Reading:*

- ® Missing Mary: The queen of Heaven & The Re-Emergence in the Modern Church, C. Spretnak.
- ® Dream Work, Jeremy Taylor
- ® Casting the Circle, Diane Stein
- ® The Politics of Women's Spirituality, ed. Spretnak (Anchor 2<sup>nd</sup> edition,)
- ® When God Was a Woman, Merlin Stone
- ® The Chalice and the Blade, Riane Eisler
- The Gnostic Gospels, Elaine Pagels
- Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg
- For Her Own Good, Barbara Ehrenreich
- ® Gyn/Ecology, Mary Daly
- A Gathering of the Spirit: Women Teaching in American Buddhism, ed. Ellen Sidor
- ® Women in Buddhism, Diana Paul
- ® When Things Fall Apart, Pema Chodron
- ® Re-Weaving the World, ed. Diamond and Orenstein
- Mama Lola, Karen McCarthy Brown
- ® Of Water and Spirit, Malidoma Patrice Stone.
- Dark Mother Rising, Lusia Teish
- African Religions, Benjamin Ray
- Ifa Will Mend the World, Wand'e Abimbola
- West African Traditional Religion, Kofi Opoku
- ® Grandmothers of the Light, Paula Gunn Allen
- The Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen

*INTRO :DREAMS: SPIRITUALITY and CREATIVITY*

Sept. 2

Introduction Curriculum & Syllabus

Discussion of The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature - Starhawk

VIDEO: "Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci"

Students choose research projects

Sept 9

**BACKGROUND - WHAT HAPPENED?**

**Readings:**

PKT

Dreamwork, Jeremy Taylor  
And Dreams & Fantasies p. 25-30

PKT

States of Grace, C. Spretnak  
Intro & Chap. 1 The Saving Grace: On the Relevance of Wisdom Traditions to Our Times

PKT

The Chalice & the Blade – Riane Eisler p.42 A.

PKT

The Gnostic Gospels - Elaine Pagels p. 48-64

PKT

Women's Popular Religion– Will Dever p.43

R.

Missing Mary –The Queen of Heaven & Her Reemergence in the Modern Church –C. Spretnak

**Meditation**

**Group #1 Presentation**

**THE GODDESS – Historical and Archeological Evidence.  
Patriarchy and Before**

Sept. 17

Meditation

Video: **The Goddess Remembered**

2:30-4:00p

Group Presentation & Discussion

**Readings:**

PKT: The Promise of the Goddess-Gadon.p64

PKT: The Raiders of the Lost Goddess – Knaster p. 84

\*The Once and Future Goddess, Elinor Gadon

Reco R (WS): "Discovering a History of Power" (Part I, pp. 3-71)  
Appendix (pp. 541-573)

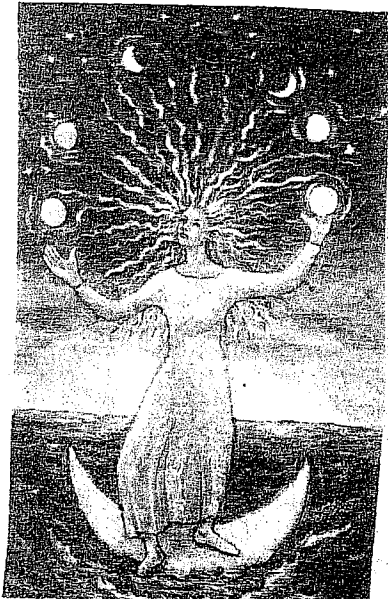
\*When God Was a Woman, Stone

Reco.R (WV): "The Goddess as Metaphoric Image" (p. 111)  
"God as Mother", McFague (p. 139)

Reco R The Language of the Goddess, Gimbutas (avail. In Women's Studies Office)

\*The Spiral Dance, Starhawk

\*States of Grace, (ch.4) C. Spretnak



Sept. 23rd

MIDWIVES, WITCHES & HEALERS I

Katherine McLaughlin: Nurse Midwife,  
Portsmouth & Durham., and Molly Connoly, Doula

**Readings:**

PKT "Do As You Will, And Harm None" – C. Richard p115

The Burning Times – Starhawk p. 119

Gyn/Ecology: European Witch burnings M. Daly

**Autumnal Equinox Celebration**

MIDWIVES, WITCHES & HEALERS II

Sept. 30th

Meditation  
Group Discussion  
Video: "Burning Times"  
Student Group presentation  
Discussion

**Readings:**

The Once and Future Goddess, E. Gadon, pp.233-38 +  
Chap. 11 The Spiral Dance, Starhawk

**Pkt. For Her Own Good**, Ehrenreich: "Healers & Gentlemen Doctors" chap. 2

"Feminist Witchcraft: Controlling Our Own Inner Space" (p.213)

"The Healing Powers of Women" (p.280)

"Expanding Personal Power through Meditation"(p.294)

"Response by Z. Budapest: The Vows, Wows and Joys of the High Priestess or What  
Do You People Do Anyway?" (p.535)(1<sup>st</sup> edition)

® The Women's Wheel of Life, B. Davis & Carol Leonard (In WS Office)

**OBOS:** See index on Midwives (On Res in WS)

Notes:



**BUDDHISM: NO-GOD, COMPASSION & INTER-BEING**

**Field Trip Buddhism I**

Oct. 7

Meet at the Bagelry for trip to Aryloka Buddhist Center.  
1 Heartwood Circle, Newmarket (659-5456)  
Amala, ordained priest, Western Buddhist Order

Readings as Below, especially "Being Peace"  
PKT : Rita Gross Essay and Buddhism After Patriarchy p.62

Notes:



ISIS NURSING HORUS

Oct. 14

**Buddhism II**

Meditation  
Small Group Discussions  
Group Presentation

2:30-4:00pm

**Readings: [Both classes on Buddhism]**

\* States of Grace, (ch.2) C. Spretnak

Reco \* Being Peace, Tich Nath Hanh

Reco /R A Gathering of Spirit: Women Teaching in American Buddhism, Sidor

Reco /R Wherever You Go, There You Are, Jon Kabat-Zinn

\* When Things Fall Apart, Pema Chodron

PKT Buddhism After Patriarchy – Rita Gross p. 62

The Five Wonderful Precepts – Hahn p. 174

Notes:

ECO-PSYCHOLOGY: TRAUMA RECOVERY & WISDOM OF NATIVE  
CULTURES TOWARD HEALING

Oct. 21<sup>st</sup>

Meditation

*Video: Australian Aborigines*  
2:45 – 4:00pm Group Presentations ~

Readings:

- \* My Name is Chellis & I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization,  
Glendinning
- \* States of Grace, (Chap 1 & 6), Spretnak

R Eco –Feminism: Re-Weaving the Worlds, ed.  
Dimond & Orenstein

PKT: Power, Authority & Mystery – Starhawk, p. 183

\*The Earth Path - Starhawk

Mid-Term Response Due: (5 pps)



## AFRICAN RELIGIONS

October 28th

Meditation  
Group Presentation

3:00 - 4pm Guest Lecturer: Dr. Funso Afolayan, Yoruba History Dept. -UNH  
And/or Oscar Mokeme, Director of Museum of African Tribal Art, Portland , Me.

### Readings:

PKT: Ancestor Reverence p. 198  
Jump-Up, Teish  
Women's Surrogacy Experience p.202

\* Jambalaya, Teish

Rec.

Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World, Abimbola

(R) Of Water & Spirit, Malidoma Patrice Some

God is Inside You, Alice Walker (hand-out essay)

® Mama Lola, Brown (recommended)

® Yoruba Sacred Kinship - Pemberton & Afolayan,  
Festival for the Ancestors chap 4.

® Dark Mother Rising - Lusia Teish

Nov. 4th

## AFRICAN RELIGIONS II

Meditation

1:10-3:00 pm

Small Group Discussion  
of Readings Above

3:00-4:00pm

Drums & Dance with  
John Coyne & Ned Rollins - Drummers  
Carol Grady - Dancer



Notes:



Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> No Class Veteran's Day University Holiday

Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>

NATIVE AMERICAN WISDOM

Meditation

1:15-2:45pm Group Presentations

Readings:

PKT Renewing the Sacred Hoop – Ywahoo p. 226

R (WV): "Grandmothers of the Light", Allen

\*States of Grace, C. Spretnak

(PWS): "On Common Ground", Todd (ch 3)

R "Politics of Women's Spirituality: Native American and Feminist Spirituality "Approached in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth"(essay)

\*Voices of Our Ancestors, Dyani Ywahoo, VT.

**Maureen Crowell – "Wind in Her Hair"  
Penobscot, Milton, NH**

Thanksgiving "POTLUCK ( Bring a snack to share)

**WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 23  
CLASSES FOLLOW  
F RIDAY SCHEDULE**

Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>

**POLLY MOAK- artist, Kittery Maine  
ART & COLLAGE :Art as Spiritual Process  
(bring in materials)**

November 25<sup>th</sup> -Thanksgiving Holiday --No Class

Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>

**CREATIVE PROJECTS AND FULL CIRCLE I**

Final Projects/Creations/Research/Dream Journals/Art Work

Dec 9

**CREATIVE PROJECTS II**

Final Projects/Creations/Research/Dream Journals/Art Work

Video :FULL CIRCLE

*Closing Circle*

*FINAL DUE Monday Dec. 12th*

*NOON,*

*Women's Studies Office*

*Huddleston 203*

~Blessed Be ~





## Appendix G

### Case Study Interview #1

V.S. ( 595, Spring, 2003 and 795, Spring, 2004.) Graduate student – In-depth interview.

*To change the world, you must first change yourself – Seth*

*One thing I saw and felt and came to know that was common to all of the readings, and an integral piece of the entire course: from the guest speakers to the experiences and all of the field trips, was the absolute necessity of communicating this awareness and this information in the context of a community. As each group made their presentation on a religious tradition I saw how, no matter what their individual background might be, the experience of studying and passing on their knowledge to the group stimulated a kind of awareness of themselves as being part of something larger. We discussed death and loss in the middle of a snowstorm listening to the descendent of a speaker for the spiritual tradition of the MicMac people. We shared our connection to global struggle in the middle of a Buddhist temple. WE shared food, song, chant and and questions. We shed a tear for sisters who spoke truth to power and were burned at the stake for their connection to life of community.*

*The awareness of eco-citizenship must be fostered in a community of some kind even if it is only the short term and artificial community of the classroom. In western culture it may be one of the only places where it can be. In the sixties, it was said, if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem,. Now we know we are the problem. Traditional Chinese medicine has a saying: the body doesn't lie, and in a very real and immediate sense the earth is our body and she is ill and in a state of disease with the universe. Global warming is happening and whether it is caused by industrial development and pollution is becoming a moot point. Modern quantum physics substantiates that every atom and every molecule has been or will be a part of every other; it is a new language of spiritual expression, **there is no separation between us and the universe.** This affirmation is what I took away from this class and the challenge to **speak my own truth and remember my responsibility to add to the light and knowledge of the universe.***

*As a younger student I sought to find a way to express the shining immanence of the universe I felt and saw all around me. It is so easy to be distracted in our culture, to mistake conformity for unity, fear for spiritual awe, substitute meaningful interaction with virtual interaction. The experiences of these courses awakened my sleeping longings*

*for the better people and the better earth I want and dream could be. Desire is not enough, there must be a way to foster and nurture connection and awareness of the web of our lives. The healing comes not from outside me, and not from something or someone outside me but in finding **myself a part of everyone and everything I can perceive.***

*"The earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth." Chief Seattle*

## Appendix H

### Case Study Interview #2

M.W. (1996) in-depth interview. March 6, 2006, refers to every aspect of the Help model in her taped interview:

*I kept in touch with a number of people. Yeah, and then I ended up going to herb school after that. I dropped out the semester after the fall of 96. . . just really realizing that it kind of set the stage for me to look at myself and **what do I want to be in my life**, where is my passion, what do I want to go after, and it's always been herbs, and I had never felt that, um, I could do that, and I could step away from college, . . . kind of that expectation, that you go to college after high school and so I think kind of **finding my own path and having the encouragement and empowerment from taking the women's studies course and saying what do you want to do**. You have the power to do what you want to do. . . really*

*. . . coming into it, I was 19, right out of high school and coming into the course, I finally had excitement about going to college, um, with my sisters, my older sister (who took the course the following semester), and my twin sister, **but still coming out of that like angst, teenage high school** years like you want to separate yourself from your parents, you don't know who you are quite yet, you're still trying to figure that out and taking that course, I felt like kind of, let me, allowed me to let go of some level of angst because it was. . . **Seeing your passion as a teacher and your openness and your availability as a teacher to your students**, um, I think I learned to put down a level of a certain guard that I had always carried around with me and just became much more open to who I was and what I wanted in the world and that I saw the big picture. I definitely felt that that was a really good changing. . . there's so many. . .that I can remember.*

*I remember when **I started journaling**, I started really writing and communicating a lot through words, a lot more so than I had I guess. . . being with my twin sister, I was always kind of the quieter one, she was outspoken, 'I'm going to do what I want, I'm a strong woman,' . . . you know. . . the quiet one. And I feel like **I really kind of came into my own voice**. . . and started journaling and doing a lot of the writings for the class and **gaining positive feedback** from you about those writings and asking me **to further myself with those writings**. . . so I felt like journaling is a huge thing that came out of that for me as well as just stepping into my own voice and. . . Who I was and that separation from your twin sister like we are two different people and there's such beauty in both of us.*

*I still see J. and J. (both in the class) at least three or four times a year, we actually ended up living together as roommates, there were seven of us living together, um, a couple of years after that. . . .and he is still a good friend, I just saw him a couple of months ago, him and J. are together. . . right now J's working at a health food store.*

*I definitely remember, um, **the writing** for me was a huge piece I definitely feel that really kind of spurred me into something, but **I also remember some of the guests** that you used to have, especially, a Native American who you had come in and do some drumming with us and I will never forget him talking about how women don't do the drumming. I remember him talking about the drums. . . **a sense of community**. . . have kept in touch with. . . remember A. . . . B. took your class also yes and I still see her all the time,. . . she has her landscaping. . . more **perennial planting business and**. . . and get more into her garden,*

*I think (the **writing**) **helped me really to find my voice**, I feel like communication has always been something that I've struggled with, as far as expressing my feelings or expressions or emotions and writing helped me to put it on paper and then helped me to really pull it out of me and then turn it into words as I grew into who I was cuz I grew into more myself. . . it was just these steps that needed to be taken, I think being in your class really allowed those steps to flourish in a very comfortable, safe environment.*

*And it was interesting, I think it was like your last question, where did you face the greatest tension or conflict during the class, was it, what was it about and what was the resolution and I'm thinking about the class as itself as a whole, and there was no tension conflict resolution, per se, between me and the people in the class. I think it was more of an **internal struggle that a lot of us went thru, I think in talking to some people afterwards, I think it was a level of really looking into yourself and how you relate to the world and that sort of conflict, I didn't know if conflict would be the right word but that sort of learning in the class that you have and finding a way to resolve that on your own so that you could put yourself back out to the world in a very helpful, sustainable way**. . . . Yeah, I think it was, I definitely remember in some of my writings being like an internal struggle but feeling positive about it. That feeling of this sort of diving into yourself not in a dark way per se, because it's a very positive thing and you might be looking at some of the quote/unquote dark/light aspects of who you are in your internal struggle but it was such a positive diving into it all, umm, and just really trying, kind of taking a peek at **how do you want to relate to the world, how do you want to be in this world, who do you want to be in this world and how do you want to effect the world** because it's just a big piece of who we all and. . . we all have an effect on every single thing and everybody around us and having to find out who you really are vs. ? . . . **so that you can positively effect those around you and the world around you in the way that you were meant to and just trying to figure out your core first. . . and you can assume your impact and what that impact is.***

*I think one piece of it was gaining that comfortable ability with myself, looking at it. . . what else do I want to do, I want to be working with herbs, I want to be working with people, always felt like I had good interactions with individuals and I think that*

that's even what took me **into nursing school** as well, it's so much about patience, interaction and being an advocate for somebody else. I think, you know, realizing my level of patience with people right now like I bartend a couple of nights a week to get myself through (Nursing) school and I'm, you know, it just makes me look back on how I'm always involved in work scenarios, community scenarios that are so much about people, whether it is bartending or not which I can not wait to get out of great and then. . . but I think just realizing that **I want to work with people**, I want to effect people and I want to, umm, be somebody in other people's lives that will look at the big picture and will not judge them on a single action or a single. . . and kind of **see them as a whole being**, um, and taking that into medicine and really see how herbs work with individuals and **that healing aspect of life**. . . . Umm, I mean, B. even, she is definitely working with herbs, A., my sister is a nutritionist and also works with herbs, . . . I want to say, I remember there was the first time I had ever actually heard about Reiki too but maybe there was actually someone in the class who was doing Reiki.

**But I think a lot of healers in one way or another came out of that class, . . . and that was another piece of the class too. . . just lets do this, and let's get up and move, get out of your seats, . . . I just remember being absolutely amazed by this woman, (Ochazania) I think that she had come to the class first and then invited us to her place in Thetford and I still have a framed picture of all of us sitting on the front porch.**



## Appendix I

### Case Study Interview #3

B. S. Spring 2004

*Final Project-The Creative Life-force*

*This project was rather difficult at first because of its complexity and abstract ideas. I was teamed with M. and A. and we were each trying to bring forth an interrelated yet personal awareness of how this was so. We were all in tune with the idea of nature as feminine and vice versa and how this had become so devalued in modern society. We were all equally aware of how different this was in ancient history and we wanted to try to capture a sense of the past in positive accord with the present and future. We were also looking at the three components of mind/body/spirit and correlating these with what we had already learned in class and what we wanted to present. M.'s part was more about the about the mind He chose to do a group meditation with chanting and breath work. A. and I were pretty equally divided between spirit and the body. She did a presentation on Anita Ruddick and The Body Shop, educating us on an environmentally friendly, organic, holistic approach to business where spirit and nature and humanity are as equally important as profit. I chose to look at the sexual/creative force of nature - how **this feminine perspective was life enhancing, how "eros" was misinterpreted in today's society and how woman as 'the goddess' was revered and honored in ancient societies.** I wanted to look at the "image" of woman as goddess, as divine, as something positive.*

*I had been reading a lot of literature on the devaluation of the body as evil and how this belief was prominent in most monotheistic religions. **As a former Catholic woman, this was apparent to me but was now becoming completely unacceptable as a way of thinking.** I started to seek out art and literature where this was the opposite, or where there was now a backlash against this way of thinking. Because of this interest in art and mythology, **I was attracted to the symbolism and metaphor of feminine divinity.** I had also read with much interest a book W. had loved called "When the Drummers were Women." It was 'a spiritual history of rhythm' and about the mother goddess cultures of ancient Europe. It was amazing. Not only did she discuss past cultures where **women were not only respected but actually empowered,** she gave a fascinating discourse on the technology of rhythm and how it affects everything in nature. How everything in nature is rhythmically tuned in and when it isn't how out of sync we are. She talked about the pulse of life and the pulse of awareness and how sacred these concepts are. She ties **feminine rhythm to the nature of earth rhythm and argues for their inherent worth.***

*She uses these sacred concepts of rhythm, the history of women as spiritual priestesses and her musical vocation as a drummer and weaves together an incredible, passionate story. She influenced me greatly during this project and I had many of her concepts and ideas in mind when I was **creating my own**. I was most attracted to this idea of woman as spiritual priestess and as a conductor of natural rhythm. I agreed completely that we as a society are out of sync, we are not in rhythm with our own nature and certainly not the earth's. Part of this was because of the **imbalance of feminine power in our societal and personal psyche**. This imbalance was becoming intolerable to me and to many other women - including yourself, who introduced it to me in the first place. Through my project, I wanted to bring attention to this problem and then hopefully show an alternative way of being - **the way of balance and feminine rhythm and sacred power**.*

*Because of my interest in symbolic art and primitive goddess culture, I decided I wanted to do an interactive art piece with the class. **One in which we would all participate as part of a sacred ritual**. As women, we should honor our own feminine divinity, our direct relationship to nature and the earth and the beauty and sacredness of our own creative and life-giving bodies. **I felt as if we were all modern day spiritual priestesses and this classroom was our church**. What better way to honor you, ourselves and this opportunity **for awareness and redemption then a sacred ritual** manifesting these ideas. I also wanted to celebrate the beauty of women and the divinity of **this beauty**. In modern society, this concept of beauty has become so distorted. The 'feminine ideal' has become something completely unattainable and ridiculous. We are under so much pressure to live up to certain societal standards that it makes most woman physically sick. It makes me emotionally sick as well because I see how pervasive it is and how it affects women of any age.*

*I wanted the women of our class to feel beautiful, no matter what society determined. I also wanted to celebrate the idea of **adornment** and masquerade. That it was okay to pamper ourselves, to indulge in feeling alive, **to appreciate our sensuality and sexuality**, our desirability as sexual creatures. We are not evil seducers, we are the creative fulfillers of life. Because of us, the cycles and rhythms of life continue and grow. **This feeling of sensuality**, this idea that we are sexual beings is powerful and profound. I wanted to honor that aspect and **rejoice** in it's essence. I brought to the class, many beautiful items of adornment - jewelry and scarves and belts and robes. Abbey brought beauty products- lotions and creams and oils . We sat in a circle, lit candles, put on soft music, pampered our skin with lotions, adorned ourselves in beautiful attire and **celebrated our inherent sensuality as women**.*

*I also wanted to reintroduce the idea of spiritual priestesses. In ancient times, women were the ritual practitioners. They led the processions and ordained over the ceremonies. They were as spiritually and culturally important as men. Many of the ceremonies were symbolic and metaphoric and reenacted the great myths of their people. This **storytelling** appealed to me as well as the idea of symbolic art so I decided **on a interactive art piece as part of our ritual**. **I wanted us to recreate cave art**. To paint*

*symbols of femininity, divinity and life. To have a blank canvas, and then **within the ceremony, create our story as an art piece.** I brought in a huge piece of heavy white cloth. I had red and brown paint, symbolizing blood and the earth. I tried to use mostly organic materials as I was trying to capture ours and the earth's natural essence. I had gone to the beach and collected many natural materials that I thought would make good painting and scratching tools - soft twigs, fluffy seaweed, flinty shells, and smooth rocks. I draped the canvas over a line of desks. The paints and tools were laid out for everyone to choose from. Rhythmic drumming music was playing in the background. Everyone gathered around and started to paint. It was fabulous. We were all dressed up in scarves and belt, like gypsies. We were **swaying to the music**, dipping our twigs, shells and fingers into deep red paint and gliding it across the canvas. The images were wonderful - vaginas and breasts and hair and spirals. Everyone chose their own small space and created their own personal totem. Red and brown were everywhere and the canvas started to bleed with texture.*

***I looked around and marveled at what was being created. This was definitely a celebration.** Beautiful, sensual, spirited, meditative women dancing around a table, dripping blood and creative energy onto a white canvas, memorializing their place in the world as a divine and natural feminine being. On that day, **the Goddess was not only remembered but alive and well and enveloped in love.***