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Instructional Techniques for Social Work Education: Insights from Deep Ecology in its Norwegian Cultural Complex

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Fred Besthorn, "Instructional Techniques for Social Work Education: Insights from Deep Ecology in its Norwegian Cultural Context"

ABSTRACT

This article briefly examines the historical and cultural context of Norwegian ecological consciousness and demonstrates the viability of integrating its Deep Ecological awareness into social work curriculum and education for practice. It shall address the most salient and practical elements that Norwegian views of nature and conceptualizations of Deep Ecology have brought to global, environmental activism and emerging conceptualization of earth-based awareness. It is designed to assist educators in helping their students to become more fully cognizant that individual well-being and relationships with human and other-than-human beings is deeply influenced by internalized experiences of the natural world.

Introduction

Famed nature writer and activist Barry Lopez counseled that when humans behave as though there is no spiritual dimension to the physical places they occupy, they easily treat nature as an object-imperiled by the exploitative tendencies of human ambition (Lopez, 1998). On the other hand, when nature is genuinely incorporated into the same moral universe that humans inhabit, there is little alternative but to humbly acknowledge our membership in the mystical and sacred universe story.

At numerous levels, environmental and religious communities are beginning to re-examine their historic roots-taking note of shared values, and seeking ways to work together to end ecological destruction (Canda, 2002; Tucker & Grim, 1998; Tucker & Williams, 1998). The current state of thinking about spirituality, religion and ecology in social work is also moving into an exciting new phase with the evolution of new stories of human/nature connections and their relationship to social work practice (Besthorn & Saleebey, 2003; Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006; Schriver, 2003). Many social workers are finding religion, spirituality and ecological consciousness to be important components of both personal growth and professional practice (Besthorn, 2002b; Hoff & McNutt, 1994; Praglin, 2004; Sheridan, 2003; Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin & Miller, 1992). The professional collective is also rediscovering a substantial and sustained interest in continuing to identify linkages between spirituality,

religion and ecological awareness (Besthorn, 2000; 2002a, 2002c; Russel, 1998). The profession's *person-in-environment* models have always centered professional attention on the connection between the individual and their environment (Germain & Gitterman, 1995). This new emphasis on eco-spiritual practice, however, evokes deeper concern for a number of ecological issues including environmental degradation, earth-based awareness and efforts to couple environmental sensibility with transcendent consciousness. Eco-spiritual practice is assisting the profession to more fully realize its historical commitment to person in the context of environment (Hoff & McNutt, 1994; Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006).

One emergent theme in ecologically sensitive social work is the linkage between spirituality and Deep Ecology—a Norwegian founded ecological belief system based on the work of philosopher Arne Naess (Besthorn & Canda, 2002). This new linkage involves social workers and clients in reclaiming a sacred relationship with the earth at a level well beyond abstract appreciation for environmental problems and their technical solution. It is a passionate ecology in the sense of being deeply rooted in an embracing earth consciousness. Deep Ecology is concerned not merely with saving the river but experiencing deep kinship with the river in a way that is ultimately rejuvenating and transformative of both person and society. This Deep Ecological perspective acknowledges that humans belong, from the very core of their physical and psychic constitution, to a constantly emerging cosmic/spiritual process.

Deep Ecology, as a unique philosophical discourse and political movement, offers social work a robust conceptual framework for constructing a more theoretically congruent language of environment. It is consistent with the profession's ethical commitment to attend to a full range of environmental factors that contribute to problems in living and to foster educational innovation that promote a variety of justice-based initiatives.

In the western historical record, Norway has often been called the philosophical and spiritual home of radical environmentalism and, especially, the Deep Ecology movement; as espoused by Norway's imminent eco-philosopher Arne Naess (Reed & Rothenberg, 1992). Norway is a country strategically located in the folds of a modern, industrialized worldview while at the same time being a land that traditionally reveres and mythologizes its mountains, rivers and fertile plains. Its entire history is deeply interwoven with the land, the mystery of nature spirits and a heritage of preservation. Norwegian national identity is so closely tied with nature and its wealth of natural resources that many suggest its pristine sense of civilization and generous social welfare system could not exist without its mystical tie to the natural world (Rothenberg, 1996).

This article briefly examines the historical and cultural context of Norwegian ecological consciousness and demonstrates the viability of integrating its Deep Ecological awareness into social work curriculum and education for practice. It shall address the most salient and practical elements that Norwegian views of nature and conceptualizations of Deep Ecology have brought to global, environmental activism and emerging conceptualization of earth-based awareness. It is designed to assist educators in helping their students to become more fully cognizant that individual well-being and relationships with human and other-than-human beings is deeply influenced by internalized experiences of the natural world. This venture in teaching for social work practice extends the profession's ecological models and helps with orientation. Long-range implications of incorporating Deep Ecological awareness into practice education will be reviewed and assessed.

Social Work and Environment

Social work's person-in-environment models have been guiding frameworks of professional practice since the early 1960s. Social workers separated themselves from other helping professionals by claiming as their particular jurisdiction a unique and dual concern for both person and environment. In practice, however, the person-in-environment orientation has become problematic partly because of the difficulty associated with attending equally to personal and environmental issues (Besthorn, 1997, 2000; Coates, 2004).

The persistent tendency has been to focus on knowledge and services directed to the personal domain while the depth of knowledge involving the environment has become constricted (Saleebey, 2001; Kemp, 1994; Besthorn, 2000, 2001). Much of what social work finds wearisome in fulfilling the primary goal of optimizing realization of person and environment constructs has to do with its struggle to conceptualize and act upon both its personal and, especially, its environmental commitments.

This conceptual difficulty is most striking in social work's narrow regard for integrating a comprehensive understanding of the natural environment and its influence on individual and collective development and issues of social and economic justice. While social work's person-in-environment focus is routinely affirmed in the literature and in leading social work textbooks (Germain & Gitterman, 1980, 1995; Norlin & Chess, 1997; Queralt, 1996; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997) with, but few exceptions, these sources have typically had little explicit or comprehensive discussion of the natural environment (Hutchinson, 2003; Saleebey, 2001; Schriver, 2003). The major difficulty with many of social work's primary conceptual sources are their tendency to restrict the definition of environment to limited interpersonal realms (Besthorn, 2001, 2002a; Besthorn and Canda, 2002; Hoff, 1998; Kemp, 1994; Rogge, 1993, 1994a). The reality is that the natural environment is generally ignored, undervalued or simply becomes the benign backdrop for more fundamentally important personal processes (Besthorn, 2002b, 2002c; Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Saleebey, 1992; Hoff & McNutt, 1994).

Theorists Hoff and McNutt (1994), followed shortly thereafter by Besthorn (1997), and several years later by Coates (2004) were among the first social work academics in North America to comprehensively explore the theoretical and practice linkages between radical environmental philosophy and individual and social development. These social work theorists extended the definition of environment to include a deeper connection with the natural world. For them, nature shares a complex and evolutionary link to personal and collective development. They also began to address the implications of nature's degradation and to explore its transcendent and spiritual value for informing social work theory and practice.

Building on the work of Thomas Berry (1988) these early theorists conceptualized the natural environment as spheres of activity made up of interconnected elements. Indeed, human life itself and human collective development are integrally related to, dependent upon, and emergent from the natural environment. The natural ecosystem consists of several interconnected layers including the geosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, biosphere, and noosphere (Hoff & McNutt, 1994; Besthorn, 1997). The first of these refer to facets of the soil, water, air, and biological species which impinge on human survivability. The noosphere, on the other hand, represents a deeper, atavistic, transpersonal and, perhaps, genetically predisposed connectedness with nature which lies beyond physical dependence but

which is a dimension of consciousness that is absolutely indispensable for human development and survival (Besthorn & Saleebey, 2003; Kellert, 1997; Wilson, 1984).

By degrading or destroying any of these elements of the natural realm:

...we destroy ourselves, our irreplaceable source of sheer physical sustenance, as well as the source of our imaginative capacities for experiencing the penultimate realities of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Moreover, without the metaphorical resources from nature, to express those realities, our unique capacity to communicate consciousness of self and other would be severely impoverished, if not impossible. (Hoff & McNutt, 1994, p.50)

This understanding of nature as both physically and metaphysically crucial to survival suggests that nature affects not only our biological existence but the way we relate to anything *other*. Ontologically, nature has consequences for the way we perceive ourselves and how we conduct ourselves in interaction with others. Berry (1988) captures a portion of this perspective with this image:

If we lived on the moon, our mind and emotions, our speech, our imagination, our sense of the divine would all reflect the desolation of the lunar landscape. (p. 11).

Unfortunately, social work theory has had difficulty articulating the implications of a radical perspective of natural environment even though the profession conceives of itself as situated in a unique interface of both person and environment (Besthorn & Canda, 2002; Besthorn & Saleebey, 2003; Kemp, 1994; Schriver, 2003). Social work's failure to attend to the relevance of nature exists at the same time that cultures all around the world are sensing a growing awareness of a deep alienation between humans and natural systems. The perception is widening that humanity must transform its way of relating to nature, must change its exploitative and extractive economic enterprises, and must again define itself in terms which include a resonant relationship with the natural world (Bello, 1996; Brown, Flavin, & French, 1998; Cobb, 2000; Mander & Goldsmith, 1996). This complex interdependency of humans and nature represents a primordial connectedness which endures beyond cultures, religion and time itself (Abram, 1996; Berry, 1988; Berry and Swimme, 1992; Kellert, 1997). Even while the philosophical assumptions of modernity have obscured our memory of this tie, a need is being expressed globally to find a way to regain entry into nature.

Though Hoff and McNutt's (1994) and Besthorn's (1997) work expands the environmental constructs to include human transaction with the total planetary ecosystem there is continued need to conceptually develop these original ideas. This paper will suggest ways social work educators can utilize radical environmentalism (Dobson, 1995), particularly that of deep ecology, as an organizing framework for teaching students about emerging ideas in ecological activism, eco-spirituality, social justice and ecologically sensitive practice. It will review several techniques designed to involve teachers and students in the process of relating ecological awareness to these areas. The first involves a journaling exercise that helps sensitize participants to the way personal ownership of property despoils our connection to natural places by negating the idea of the common ground (Lovell & Johnson, 1994; Thomashow, 1996). The second strategy involves a reflective approach referred to as a political genogram that helps participants recognize the relationship between personal political identity, power, and an ecological justice orientation (McLaughlin, 1995; Thomashow, 1996). A third approach involves the utilization of a focusing exercise called an eco-confessional to help students identify those activities

and ideas which increase a sense of ecological guilt and thus inhibit their ability to connect spiritually with the natural environment and to act in a just manner toward it (Fleming & Macy, 1995; Thomashow, 1996).

Norwegian Historical and Cultural Backdrops to Deep Ecology

The modern Scandinavian country of Norway (taking its name from *Norvegr* or northern way) is today known for its scenic beauty and a collectivist social democratic society which emphasizes solidarity, equality and a communitarian spirit. According to the United Nations Human Development Report, Norway is ranked as the number one place in the world to live based on a number of indicators involving health, wealth, social services and social outlook (Williams, 2001; Zahl, 2003). The country's legacy as one of the early outposts of Viking culture is memorialized in the prominence paid to seafaring explorers, intertribal quarrels, adventure, small-scale farming, commitment to one's family and neighbors and a very strong orientation toward a rural and earthen-based lifestyle. This legacy has shaped its image of itself and its social and economic policy (Andersson & Bexell, 2005). Norway confronts the rest of the world with seeming contradictory contrasts of outdoor adventure, grey-black hues of monotony, rugged individualism and communal accord. Modern Norway, in ways often very distinct from its Nordic neighbors in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, has maintained its uniqueness as a society. It is a society rich with verdant landscape and a deep conviction to hold fast to its social-democratic tradition. It is these intense contrasts that give life in the North such great power and why this small country with just over four million inhabitants creates such curiosity. Without the complex mix of collective commitment and individual reserve and "without the sea and the mountains, the darkness and the sunshine" the complex character of the inhabitants would defy explanation (Ogrizek, 1952, p.160).

Norway's topography and culture are in many ways quite different from its Norse neighbors and other European countries in the central and southern confines of the continent. It consists of an extraordinarily narrow strip of land running for nearly 1600 miles along the extreme west side of the Scandinavian Peninsula from its southern tip to Cape North, located well above the arctic circle. There are huge mountains, separated by deep and sparsely populated valleys almost entirely cut off from each other particularly during winter snow pack and the isolation of dark and seemingly endless arctic nights. Sheer cliffs and rock faces jut out over the meandering fjords that pierce their way deep into the land like a writhing mythological monster. Far into these sea-carved crevasses are small villages and towns that have grown up in seclusion and whose only conveyance between one another was, and still is, by sea.

Norway has remained much as it was left by the geological upheavals of eons past. Human intrusion and built artifices are rare except in populated urban areas. These natural features create a country that is very rich in story and mythology and a people who are very patient, very hard-working, and as frequently as possible turn to nature to find both physical and psychic sustenance (Lindow, 2001). Norwegians are generally known for their stout, rugged, and often acutely internalized, relish for life. They are also known for their great physical strength, their loyalty and for their deeply metaphysical, artistic and, at times, melancholic preference to confront their destinies with a reticent stoicism that embraces rather than turns from both the light and shadow of existence. Speaking of a national spirit and soul intimately tied to the land and place; Norwegian social historian Ogrizek (1952) again observes that his fellow citizens are nearly incapable of:

...compromise and half-measures, because they are the image of...the imposing landscapes, where eye and mind never find rest; this all-powerful scenery that requires our total submission and complete union without which we shall never gain knowledge...or at best, achieve it only superficially. This land requires much of us; it insists that we give ourselves up entirely, becoming one with it; in exchange it lavishes upon us the noblest, the purest and the most lofty emotions....These northern souls are fashioned of the same stuff as the glaciers, the rocks, the mountains, the island and the seas of their land; this is why they are of such great worth, and this is what makes them so full of interest, so inexplicable, and often so impenetrable, enigmatic. (p. 156, 158)

It is difficult to understand the Norwegian experience without at least making transitory reference to its Viking lineage and their pagan/earth-based mythological tradition. The term Viking comes from an Old Norse term *viks*; thought to be a small outpost in southern Norway where early Norse raiders sailed forth in search of adventure and plunder (Fritzhugh & Ward, 2000). *Viks* literally means a bay or harbor. The southern adversaries of the Norsemen called them the *bay men*. It was often said of them that they were going *a-viking* in search of conquest and trade. Gradually these people came to be known simply as Vikings.

The territorial expansion of the Vikings from their homelands began in the last decades of the eighth century and lasted for about four hundred years. In this period Norse influence spread to the European continent, the British Isles, Russia, Ireland, North America and as far east as present day Turkey. The Vikings brought with them a culture rich in art, religion, intellectual life, craftsmanship, agricultural skill, and shipbuilding prowess. Pagan, earth-based spirituality was also one of the most important parts of daily life in early Norse culture. Traditional spiritual practice was comprised of a belief in a large number of gods and goddesses, giants and elves and a considerable number of earth-inspired deities. Pre-Christian Norse spirituality had two primary unifying cords. One was the focus on fertility and the corresponding rites of birth and death. The other was on earth-based worship, ritual and practice (Lindow, 2001). Frey, the God of Fertility is often depicted as a large erect phallus while Odin and his son Thor were the God of War and the Thundering God of purification. All the pantheon of ancient Norse gods and goddesses were closely aligned with the earth-water, sky, fire and multiple varieties of sacred animals and legendary descriptions of half-human and half-animal beasts (Lindow, 2001).

Modern Norway still reflects some aspects of its ancient roots in spirit beings and in deep care for the natural world. Organized religious participation in the Lutheran State Church of Norway is still quite low except on ceremonial occasions (Zahl, 2003); while at the same time many Norwegians still hold a kind of religious passion for an ecological/spiritual orientation to life. In short, many Norwegians still have a great affinity for nature-as a living, in-spirited presence. They still feel a unique bond with the sea, forest and mountains despite the harsh climatic conditions. Many have suggested that there is perhaps no other country in the world where there is this intense and pervasive spiritual and experiential connection with the natural world (Reed & Rothenberg, 1992; Skogen, 1999; Vail, 2001; Williams, 2001).

There are several spiritual/ecological constructs which are especially relevant to understanding the cultural background of modern Norwegian ecological constructs. The first, involves the spiritual investiture of common landscapes. According Reed and Rothernberg (1992) land and landscapes are understood as having deep spiritual/existential meaning and significance. Much like indigenous groups

around the world, many Norwegians share a wide-ranging belief that the land is a sacred place. Nature and divinity are one and the same. Natural environments are a spiritual sanctuary. A second concept is a belief in the free and open right of entry into both public and private lands (Andersson & Bexell, 2005). This is referred to as *allemannsrett* or open access to nature. Many Norwegians hold to it with an almost religious fervor. The rule of *allemannsrett*, now codified into Norwegian law, can be traced back to the Viking period. The rule specifies that the public has broad rights to roam freely in the open countryside on foot, on skis, on bicycles, in canoes; and to stay on these lands temporarily, including in some cases private property, as long as no damage is done to the landscape. A third construct is national participation in *friluftsliv*; or the belief that all citizens ought to take part in outdoor recreation because of the restorative and healing powers of being actively involved in natural landscapes. *Friluftsliv* is not yet codified into law but represents a powerful set of collective norms about how to behave in nature. Unlike many of its Scandinavian neighbors, Norway maintains an expressed preference for non-motorized and low-impact use of nature such as quiet walks, cross-country skiing and nature-based meditative experiences. Fridtjof Nansen, a founding father of modern Norway, insisted that the pursuit of quiet, reflective and individually-oriented activity in nature had a kind of religious virtue and helped develop moral character (Abramhamsson, 1998). Finally, many Norwegians have a general aversion to the idea of the commercialization of nature (Seippel, 2001). They, normally, do not believe that nature should be thought of as something that can be sold and consumed. Many Norwegians have a traditional commitment to the idea that clean air, clean water, pristine forests, picturesque mountains and pastoral valleys cannot and must not be held up for sale or exclusive private use. This has been a common refrain among Norwegian intelligentsia and rural denizens alike. Recently, however, the contradictory nature of Norwegian ecological ideas have been tested and challenged by the international environmental community with regard to country's offshore oil exploration initiatives and its exploitative whaling practices (Browne, 2002). Norwegians are especially fearful that nature-hungry, or so-called *concrete*, peoples from the more populace parts of Europe such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy will progressively invade Norwegian nature and turn it into a kind of modern amusement park (Dryzek, Hunold & Schlosberg, 2002; Vail, 2001). This has led to a situation where serious conflicts have arisen and will no doubt arise again.

It is in this complex, and at times paradoxical, history and culture that deep ecology began and is still being refined as a philosophical and political legacy of a country with many ancient spiritual and ecological heritages. The terms Deep Ecology were coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in his 1973 article *The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements*. In the essay, Naess attempted to describe a deeper and more experientially grounded approach to human development by explicating the important connection between human and natural ecological systems (Devall and Sessions, 1985). He makes a distinction between shallow and deep ecology movements. From Naess' perspective, there is a difference between an environmental movement which is concerned with global ecological problems because of their impact on human economic development and movements which are more deeply concerned with issues of ecological equality in humanity's fundamental relationship with nature. It is a difference "in the depth of our philosophical and practical attitudes" (p. 96). Since this seminal article other theorists, including Naess himself, have amplified and expanded upon his original conceptualization in an attempt to provide a thorough grounding for a new (and yet quite ancient) experiential and spiritual philosophy of nature (Barnhill & Gottlieb, 2001; Devall, 2001; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Drengson, 1995; Fox, 1990, 1995; Gottlieb, 1996; Katz, Light & Rothenberg, 2000; McLaughlin, 1995; Naess, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1995a, 1995b; Rothenberg, 1996; Sessions, 1995).

A Review of Deep Ecology

Deep ecology has had a variety of historical and theoretical contributors. Merchant (1992), for example, notes a number of religious, philosophical and scientific influences on deep ecology. These include: (1) alternative Western religious traditions, particularly that of Saint Francis of Assisi, and the early modern Transcendental Movement; (2) Eastern philosophy, such as that described by Daisetz Suzuki; (3) Eastern religious traditions, for instance Taoism, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism and the works of Gandhi; (4) Native American traditions from such leaders as Black Elk and Luther Standing Bear; (5) alternative Western philosophy represented in the works of Giordano Bruno, Gottfried Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza and George Santayana; (6) radical scientific critiques of modern ecology, particularly the work of Paul Shepard; (7) radical sociological and philosophical critiques of the dominant western worldview in the work of William Catton and Riley Dunlap and Martin Heidegger; (8) the new physics represented in the work of Fritjof Capra, and (9) the new systemic challenge to the mechanistic model of nature predicated upon the wholistic, self-organizing character of systems as represented in the works of David Bohm, Ilya Prigogine, Edward Lorenz, Charles Birch and James Lovelock.

Sessions (1995) suggests that the emergence of deep ecology was also influenced by the *political activism* of the 1960s, particularly that of the so-called Environmental Revolution. The rise of deep ecology paralleled escalating environmental concern. Both grew out of the newly emerging science of ecology and an unconscious desire of many not only to protect the environment but to develop an experiential and spiritual relationship with it. This need to reconnect with nature was popularized in Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethics* (1949), and Rachel Carson's pivotal book, *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson's book dealt with the use of pesticides and their impact on small animal life, but her ultimate concerns went far deeper. She was in fact questioning:

...the direction and goals of Western society, including the human competence and "right" to dominate and manage the Earth. More generally, she posed a philosophical challenge to the anthropocentrism of Western culture. She claimed that "the 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man". (Sessions, 1995, p. X)

There are several core concepts of deep ecological thought which act to consolidate the beliefs of many who identify themselves as deep ecologists. The first is related to the idea of an expanded sense of self consciousness. Fox (1984, p.196) argues the "central intuition" of deep ecology is that there is no ontological divide in the field of existence. That is, the world is not divided into subjects and objects nor is there any separation in reality between the human and nonhuman realm. Rather "all entities are constituted by their relationships. To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of a deep ecological consciousness" (p. 196).

McLaughlin (1987, p. 2) agrees with this, arguing that the heart of deep ecology is the cultivation of "ecological consciousness" by which he means deep ecology's insistence upon bringing "to the fore the normative question of how should I be, rather than addressing the more abstract and impersonal questions about the nature of value, the structure of moral argument, and so on". Later McLaughlin (1995) adds that deep ecology's heart-expansion of self toward ecological consciousness-is the primary basis for "rejecting consumerism" which for him creates and sustains "the loss of traditional ways of forming one's identity and their replacement by material possessions" (p. 263).

In his 1973 article *The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements*, Naess suggests that cultivating ecological consciousness involves moving away from a view of "humans-in-environment" to one of self as part of a "relational total-field" (p. 96)-a maximum self-realization. That is, rather than experiencing ourselves as separate from our environment and existing *in* it, we begin to cultivate the insight that we are *with* our environment. Being with environment means appreciating that we are part of a complex totality of interconnected relationships, and that these phenomenological connections with human and nonhuman others are the very essence of ourselves.

Naess (1988) distinguishes between his concept of maximum self-realization and that commonly used in modern society to mean the "competitive development of a person's talents and the pursuit of an individual's specific interests" (p. 263). From this view, an inherent conflict exists between developing a sense of individual self and cultivating bonds with significant others, family, community and the more-than-human world.

Naess points out this conflict reflects Western social theory's dualistic, egoism-altruism distinction. According to this view, altruism (care for others) is a moral imperative developed by suppression of selfishness, by sacrificing one's own self-interests in favor of others. Naess challenges this by proposing that one can cultivate connections with others, with family, with nature, without losing some part of self. In fact he suggests that maximum self-realization arises only in the context of maximum diversity "by an increase in the number of ways in which individuals, societies, and even species and life forms realize themselves" (Bodian, 1995, p. 30).

As one develops an ever-widening identification with the whole, there is no need for a self-sacrificing, moral altruism; a need to sacrifice self in preference to nature, since the interests of those with whom we identify, nature included, may be seen as one's own interests as well. Self becomes most fully realized not solely when self-interest and wants are met, but rather when one begins to identify with more-than-ones-self. By reconceptualizing the developmental process in this way, Naess challenges the shallow theories of self differentiation and the inherent conflicts arising from competing needs amongst separatist egos. Maturing involves a process of widening one's sense of self and identifying with others-family, friends, communities, one's own species, all sentient species and all more-than-human life expressions.

Deep questioning is a second core theme of deep ecology. For Arne Naess (1995, 1995b) cultivating a total view of human-to-human and particularly human-to-nonhuman relationships necessarily requires engagement in a process of deep questioning. In a 1982 interview, Naess argued:

The essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions...ecology as a science does not ask what kind of a society would be the best for maintaining a particular ecosystem-that is considered a question for value theory, for politics, for ethics. As long as ecologists keep narrowly to their science, they do not ask such questions....in deep ecology...we question our society's underlying assumptions...We are not limited to a scientific approach; we have an obligation to verbalize a total view...In general, however, people do not question deeply enough to explicate or make clear a total view. (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 74)

Naess makes clear that deep ecology's approach to a broad range of environmental and socioeconomic issues involves integrating one's intuitive take on person/other relationships and manifesting these by

questioning "deeply and publicly, insistently and consistently" (Naess, 1995b, p.75) the dominant economic and political paradigm within which burdensome social, economic and environmental problems reside. Naess does not insist upon preferential treatment of nature while ignoring human suffering. Indeed, Naess insists upon fundamental change in structural inequality including social, political, economic, and ecological injustices. But, he rejects the short-term, problem-oriented approaches of shallow environmental and social activists as solutions which ultimately fail at the task of long-term social and ecological transformation. These approaches are stop-gap measures. They experience the same suffocating *quarterly-consciousness* mentality (a singular and almost obsessive focus on the critical importance of quarterly economic indicators) of the current global economic system. Naess, explicitly connects a rejection of the person-in-environment image-toward a relational, total view-with both epistemological and political activism-a deep questioning of the knowledge and institutions which maintain an abstract, overly intellectualized, and exploitative notion of social and environmental structures.

The third core theme of deep ecology is that of *biocentric equality* (Naess, 1995, 1995a; Devall & Sessions, 1985). Biocentric equality holds that all natural entities in the ecosphere have intrinsic value and have an equal right to flourish and grow, and reach their individual self-realization within the greater Self-Realization of whole-earth development (Naess, 1988). Biocentric equality views natural entities as morally independent of their perceived usefulness for human purposes. This underscores one of the most significant assumptions of deep ecology-the intrinsic worth of all natural things. From this assumption flows deep ecology's ideas of non-anthropocentrism, tolerance of different views, open relational communication with nature, the inclusion of animals and plants in the community and creating the need for heightened preservation and conservation efforts (Naess, 1995).

Intrinsic value maintains the qualities of richness, complexity, diversity, and symbiosis in the evolutionary cycle. "It involves a re-visioning of life and evolution, changing from understanding evolution as 'progress' from 'lower' to 'higher' forms to understanding evolution as a magnificent expression of a multitude of forms of life" (McLaughlin, 1995, p. 87). Naess (1995a) is adamant that the principle is a:

...deep seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life...a kind of understanding that others reserve for fellow men [sic] and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life...an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom...Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves. This quality depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life. (p. 4)

Biocentric equality suggests that humans should live in ways which have minimum impact on the rest of nature, and that humanity's role is that of "plain citizen" (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 68) rather than that of "master-slave" (Naess, 1995a, p. 4) which has contributed to alienation of humans from nature and themselves.

Social Work, Nature and A New Agenda

A deep, ecologically aware social work, one informed by the radical perspectives of deep ecology, can become a transformed profession. The professional emphasis would shift from a limited person-in-social

environment centered dynamic to one of expanding interrelationships in complex environmental domains. This means an acknowledgment that humans are, *in fact*, involved in a deep, experiential connection with the earth that extends beyond the bounds of mere instrumental association (Kellert, 1997). The implication: how social work understands the essence of being, the character of human development, the essence of suffering and well-being, and what it values as appropriate for its knowledge base and pedagogy must be conceptually reoriented to recognize the existence of a powerful phenomenological, intuitive and spiritual element that binds humans to the natural realm (Abram, 1996).

Fully recognizing and appropriating this connection means more than simply adding another theoretical framework to the way social work understands human identity and the human condition. It challenges the core assumptions and distinctions that have principally shaped the *social work agenda*. For the most part, the modern western socioeconomic worldview rejects the language and experience of intuitiveness, deep insight and spirituality. It is especially suspicious of attempts to articulate a phenomenological connection between a reanimated nature and resacralized humanity (Coates, 2004). Social work is in large measure a professional reflection of the modern mind-set. Up until very recently, it has become predominantly a profession of mechanisms, technique, secular rationality, and linear causality (Besthorn, 2002b; Hoff & McNutt, 1994; Saleebey, 2001)

Social work has gradually grown suspicious of knowledge and experiences which cannot be quantified or rationally derived (Saleebey, 1992). It has endeavored to free itself from the so-called imprecision of philosophy, the irrationality of spirituality, and the messiness of political action in order to secure for itself the status of scientific profession. The result is a profession that tends to distrust the language of mystical connection, reverence and intuition and has failed to fully embrace the often chaotic and thankless work of justice making. Direct knowing, intuitive grasp, and subjective experience of *the other*, especially nature, has been replaced with a reverence for numbers, mechanistic metaphors and individualized treatment plans (Besthorn, 2001).

Social work has often kept from itself and from its clients the explicit reasons for the modern sense of alienated existence. A deep ecological social work demands that the profession must no longer ignore that it has, sometimes unwittingly, cooperated in creating a disenchanted world and desacralized humanity characterized by a kind of synthetic, spiritually muted, alienated feeling and lifestyle. A social work profession informed by a deep ecological perspective clearly identifies the modern proclivity to sever the sensorial bonds between humans and nature as the quintessence, the epicenter of an alienated humanity (Clinebell, 1996; Macy & Brown, 1998; Shepard, 1982).

Alienated, desacralized humanity has led to a broad range of ecological problems, but it also extends to individual and social problems including emotional, familial, economic, and class issues (Chard, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Durning, 1992). A deep ecological perspective suggests that the profession can no longer look at these in isolation or separate them from the domain of human/nature relationship. A deep ecological perspective recognizes that just as humanity and nature need to be interrelatedly understood, so too must modern social, political and economic realities. That is, issues of environmental degradation and concerns for a reanimated human/nature consciousness cannot be separated from those systemic forces which function to maintain all forms of injustice, whether toward nature or other human beings.

There is strong ecological and social justice logic inherent in deep ecology which must become a core activity of social work. Deep ecology's seminal focus on interrelationship suggests that struggles against

oppressive, systemic forces which denigrate nature are intertwined with struggles against all forces which also oppress humans. The oppression which keeps realization of a dynamic, harmonious human/nature relationship out of consciousness is connected to other forms of human oppression including economic exploitation, racism, sexism and patriarchy. Oppressive social institutions are an expression of an alienated collective psyche while at the same time they also structure and preserve an alienated collective psyche. Though human oppression and oppression of nature appear to exist in separate form, struggle against any one in isolation cannot be effective. Concern for any oppression necessitates concern for all oppression.

The environmental and social justice logic of a deep ecological social work portends nothing short of radical change in the social, political, and economic structures of modern, industrial society. Adopting this new ecological framework changes the identity of conventional social work. It recommends a profession that must return to and significantly expand upon its progressive, activist roots.

A revitalized ecological social work establishes the foundation of a new socio-political mandate. It suggests the profession has an obligation to examine all oppressive political, social, economic and environmental structures of modern society and the policies which extend them. It requires that social workers become professionally involved and personally committed both within and outside the confines of office, agency and academy to implementing change.

Pedagogical Considerations for Social Work Education

There are many skills and instructional activities to help begin the process of sensitizing students to the relationship between a deep ecological awareness and social work practice. What follows has been adapted from different sources (Cohen, 1997; Cummings, 1991; Fleming & Macy, 1995; Lovell & Johnson, 1994; Macy & Brown, 1998; McLaughlin, 1995; Metzner, 1999; Spretnak, 1990), particularly the work of Thomashow (1996), and represents only a small fraction of the kinds of pedagogical exercises that can be tailored to various social work settings. They are designed to challenge core beliefs and practices and to create a context for deeper reflection that can be applied to multiple arenas of practice.

One of the most effective techniques is to ask students to reflect on the meaning of individual ownership of material goods versus collective responsibility for the natural world. This exercise begins by asking students to make an exhaustive list of everything they own. In a culture obsessed with individualism, consumption and accumulation of personal wealth it is especially difficult for people to reflect on their possessions because possessions make up such a *taken for granted*, normal and expected part of our lives. And, this is precisely the point of the exercise. As students begin to organize their lists they are compelled to focus, perhaps for the first time, upon how their individual, emotional and cultural identities and activities are reflected in the possessions they own.

Students are then asked to write a short interpretive essay and attach it to their property lists. The essay is to address the perceived psychological, spiritual, and political/economic implications of property ownership. Since possessions have many symbolic meanings and they are often associated with whom we are; this exercise will frequently raise a number of intense and sometimes confusing feelings. One of the most common is the deep astonishment participants experience over the sheer volume of their possessions as well as a sobering realization of the high cost-of acquiring and then maintaining this

mountain of stuff-to them, the environment and disadvantaged populations both in this country and abroad.

After students have the opportunity to communicate their perspectives with others in the class, the instructor should engage the entire class in a collective discussion of core themes that many will have already addressed in their personal essays. This begins by asking how private ownership of personal property conveys power and does the process of acquiring private ownership lead to exclusion and exploitation? This question will often lead to some discussion about how material goods involve exploitation and extraction of natural resources leading to pollution, degradation and depletion of the commons (air, land, water), since every owned object is fabricated from resources derived from the commons. The connection is also made with how obsession with private ownership leads to economic and political elitism—a kind of exploitative power that excludes marginalized voices and insulates dominant commercial cultures from the realities of their consumptive practices. The message begins to take root that mass accumulated wealth in the west is extracted from the ecological commons which is shared with all other sentient beings (human and nonhuman alike) and at whose expense it is often derived.

A second question that may be asked of students is to reflect upon how property, particularly ownership of private land, provide us with and/or keep us from developing spiritual meaning and collective accountability for the land? Personal property and material accumulation contributes to a sense of individuality but also to growing personal alienation and separateness between us and others. Excessive emphasis on private ownership acts as a barrier to collaborative effort and communal responsibility. But, as people begin to identify *with* their property and with the ownership of their property they begin to see that all property begins as an earth resource shared in common. And, earth resources are not just for the personal satisfaction of individuals or the benefit of a select few but represent a deeper, phenomenological interrelationship involving human, plant, animal, land and ecosystem interactions. In a very real sense, the land we own or reside on and the possessions we acquire, which come from this land, connect humankind to the profound and necessary diversity of life. They are a sensual reminder of the interconnectedness existing in the ecological commons. Property can reinforce our separateness or it can reiterate the interdependence of ecosystems and the ecosocial and sociopolitical limits associated with the commons.

A second instructional exercise is designed to help students understand that deep ecological awareness emerges and is maintained in a political context. Individuals and collectives define themselves in relation to the power roles that exist in their contextual space. As suggested, issues of social and economic justice are inseparable from ecological justice and all three are intimately associated with the ways of power—how it is distributed and whether it is used as an implement of oppression or an instrument of good.

A first step in assisting students to understand the complex relationship between power and human/ecological well-being is to help them articulate their own political identity. Since political identities are forged in the context of family, students are asked to construct a *political genogram*; a kind of diagrammatical portrayal of their family's political history. This exercise helps distinguish between different factors which impinge upon their political identity. For instance, it draws attention to partisan belief systems or ideologies that families hold and which comprises most every child's initial exposure to the political makeup of the world. What one first knows about capitalism or socialism, free markets or

state regulation, conservative or liberal, right or left, elite or underclass all begin within the political values and climate of one's family.

The political genogram also draws attention to the student's political temperament and the kind of values and behaviors they bring to confrontational situations such as avoidance or provocation, negotiation or belligerence, accommodation or intimidation, collaboration or self-reliance. The political genogram also prompts reflection on the kinds of political action customarily utilized in the implementation domain of political activity. Political actions may range from apathy, letter writing and voting to grassroots organizing, civil disobedience and violent protest.

Once students have completed their political genogram they are asked to break into small groups of three or four and discuss their findings. They are asked to pay particular attention to the often contradictory political messages that helped shape their political identity, especially the ways in which western culture encourages appreciation of free speech, social justice, fairness and equitable treatment and yet at the same time discourages critical challenges to prevailing authority and institutionalized discrimination except within very limited and acceptable ways. This instructional technique ends with a collective discussion of how one may use awareness of family political histories to extract the best qualities and synthesize them to support the student's own budding political identity. The point is not to dwell on the pain, anxiety, contradiction or absence of political meaning or to use those as an excuse for political inaction, but rather, to understand the powerful dynamics of political histories to create a more constructive situation for the emergence of ecological and social justice oriented political activities.

A final activity that can be useful in helping students integrate a spiritual awareness with deep ecological sensitivity is an exercise known as the eco-confessional. Many theorists and professional helpers have noted (Leopold, 1949; McKibben, 1989; Soule, 1990; Windle, 1995) that one of the primary requisites for responsible social or ecological action is for individuals to acknowledge their personal responsibility for the harm afflicted on planetary systems. They must also find ways to relinquish the guilt and grief which keeps them perpetually trapped in shame and inaction, unable to move beyond feelings of despair and powerlessness.

As its name implies the "eco-confessional" is designed to help students tell personal stories of ecological irresponsibility and to relate their feelings as they contemplate the impact of their action on the environment, others and their own sense of personal integrity. The exercise is also designed to provide a ritualized mechanism of mourning, cleansing and renewal. The purpose is not self flagellation but deep insight into how to turn what is often a deep sense of guilt and grief over the harm inflicted upon the natural world into responsible action.

This exercise is not appropriate for every context and is best done in a well-established group framework where levels of trust and acceptance have been shaped by a climate of mature self-reflection. The goal is to foster as open a collective discussion and interpretation as possible. The eco-confessional shares connections with many religious and spiritual traditions and provides a rich ceremonial experience for beginning the process of healing and reconciliation. The eco-confessional recognizes that unless or until people acknowledge their feelings of guilt and grief, and seek reconciliation there is little chance that they will move beyond a crippling tendency to scapegoat or find fault and be spurred to responsible action. As students confront their personal culpability they begin to think of ways to avoid thoughtless choices in the future, to work diligently at understanding the conditions and structures that lead to

environmental and social irresponsibility and to develop personal and collective responses leading to individual and political healing.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11th and the ensuing war in Iraq our culture has taken precious little time to reflect on its dominant values and collective activities. It seems the most that pundits and political commentators can agree upon is that in the weeks and months following 9-11 the world has changed and will continue to change in ways unprecedented since at least World War II. In this same pivotal period it has also become painfully clear that global markets and international corporate capitalism continue their march across the length and breadth of the developing world. There have been some differentially positive outcomes associated with this drive toward worldwide economic hegemony, but it is also increasingly evident that the negative impact to local economies, ecological systems, environmental protection, worker's rights, individual freedoms and human health and well-being, especially in the developing world, has been quite profound.

While the West seems in the grip of deep uncertainty and insecurity about the future, many in the global south are creatively struggling to find ways to integrate new economic and social realities into ancient customs in a fashion that does not destroy the collective nurturing systems-both ecological and human-that have existed for generations. In the midst of this boiling caldron of contending demands and competing dreams the social work profession, especially in the US, must again find its voice to *speak out* against a consumer-oriented, profit-driven, unregulated and often unjust global market system that has tended to create many more losers than winners in the competitive drive for greater control of world capital. And, social work must also begin to *stand with* other professionals, community associations, grassroots organizations and global advocacy groups to facilitate collective empowerment-to assist marginalized peoples everywhere to gain access to needed change that refosters commitment to the health and wellbeing of human communities and ecological systems.

This article advocates for profound changes in the way U.S. social work goes about its principle tasks. Deep commitment to deep ecological justice are critical and inseparable places to begin. It is no longer possible to separate human suffering from ecological suffering. The evidence is mounting each week of the close association between human health and ecosystem health. Hurricane Katrina is only one of a myriad number of recent catastrophes around the world that confirm this connection. Social work can no longer afford to miss the message that *as the environment goes so goes human development and security*. We ignore this reality to our great peril, the peril of those we serve and to the lasting peril of the planet.

A growing number of social workers from around the developed and developing world are beginning to sense this essential fact and are beginning to formulate coalition-building strategies that place social work in the place of being a key ally in developing new social, political and ecological movements to stop the pillage of natural environments and human communities. It is time for the U.S. profession, steeped as it is in the language of environment and dedicated to the principle of justice, to find ways to link with these efforts and to apply the principles of deep ecology to new forms of struggle and solidarity to protect planet and people.

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