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Reconnecting Household With Nature: A Natural Systems Thinking Process for Belonging and
Community

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Danny C. Shelton

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ABSTRACT

This project in lieu of dissertation is a case study of fourteen adult participants. The study serves to determine the contribution that a direct nature-connected activity process makes in helping applicants register their natural senses of belonging and community in relationship with their natural senses of sight and hearing. This process will support the candidate's interest in designing a household and lifestyle that respects ecological values and seeks harmony with nature. The process of this study can be used by anyone, be they homeowner, homeless, renter, or traveler, including parent-guardian-child relationships. Three nature-connected activities of the Natural Systems Thinking Process (*Cohen, et al., 2003, pp. 103-113*) served as the program process of this study. Based on the experiences and findings of participants in this study, participants demonstrate that they need not travel to a distant weekend workshop in order to rediscover their natural sense of belonging and community. The natural areas of one's home or temporary dwelling can restimulate our deep need for household, or ecological belonging and community, and reveal our own unique intrinsic value to the whole of nature, for an expanded sense of self-worth through participatory relationship with all of nature.

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Within this past half-century or more, human preference for indoor leisure, harmful consumer practices, and increasingly abstract technological recreation has created an alarming estrangement with natural systems that support our life (Worldwatch Institute, pp. 1-5). U.S. Census Bureau reports show that “By the time the baby boomers came along, approximately half of our homes were air-conditioned. By 1970, that figure was 72 percent, and by 2001, 78 percent” (Louv, 2005, pp.56-57). Prior to this time-period, people lived without air-conditioning, slept with their windows open, engaged a more direct relationship with the origins of their food, and practiced a more genuine relationship with their natural surroundings (Louv, 2005).

As people’s attitudes of home and household are increasingly influenced by a plethora of technological objectification of self and the electronic media industry emphasizing homes as a financial investment, how do we reestablish a sense of belonging and community with the greater ecological household that sustains us?

Throughout human civilization’s global existence with this Earth, the most destructive premise and issue in human thinking, development, and economic practices is the belief that human beings are separate from and thus dominant over the natural world that supports them. “Whether we believe that our dominion derives from God or from our own ambition, there is little doubt that the way we currently relate to the environment is wildly inappropriate” (Gore, 1993, p. 238). This dominion over nature mentality provides the ambition for humans to think they have the right to manage and control nature, for their benefit alone.

Control of the household's year-round indoor environment has also allowed for the occupants' extended exposure and influences of the electronic and technologic media, recreation, and entertainment industry. This separation and fragmentation of people's sensory relationship with their household's natural outdoor environment has also lead to a decrease in association with one's neighbor. "We are increasingly indoor people whose sense of place is indoor space and whose minds are increasingly shaped by electronic stimuli" (Orr, 2004, p.163).

Along with twentieth century economic and housing developments, connection with place became psychologically associated with controlled environment, to the point where sustainability is now commonly thought of as " the stewardship of the 'house of humans,' specifically, with their production and distribution of wealth" (Naveh, 2000, p. 357). Square footage of built space often equates to a higher economic value of a residential house, for the monetary benefit of the individual owner and the local tax-base. The following statistic gives indication of an economic and human-centered trend, and the value narrowing of household, home, and sense of place, with disregard for the more-than-human natural habitat of place. "New houses in the U.S. were 38% bigger in 2002 than in 1975, despite having fewer people per household on average" (Worldwatch Institute, p. 3).

Description of Terms

The following key terms are italicized here to designate their importance throughout this paper. These key terms will not be used in italics in the remaining text, however.

Belonging and Community. These two terms are used throughout this study to reintegrate the more holistic, inherent, and sensorial human-nature relationship with the more-than-human natural habitat of place and household. By inherent belonging and community, I am referring to being a conscious part of and in healthy participation with the greater natural and ecological community that sustains us. E.O. Wilson states that the basis of “biophilia” is, “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Innate means hereditary and hence part of ultimate human nature” (Wilson, 1993, p.31). Chellis Glendinning calls this natural state of being our “primal matrix” (Glendinning, 1994, p.5).

Household. This definition of household, used in italics throughout this study, does not refer to a built structure designed to separate humans from direct multisensory relationship, participation, and awareness with the integrated organic life-support systems of nature. The ancient Greek word for household is “oiko(s)” or “ecos” and relates household to the greater natural ecology of place. For this study, household refers to the seamless, interrelated, organic and non-organic natural support systems of this Earth. The re-stimulation of direct inherent sensory connection with our natural household, through physical, mental, spiritual, and sensory participation with the natural areas of one’s home or dwelling, can reestablish the perceptual and cognitive value of our inborn human nature, with the whole of the natural community. This can further contribute to a felt sense of belonging in communion with nature, and reduce the value narrowing attitudes of nature, created by the abstractions of storied language and technologically separated recreational practices.

Value Narrowing. Value narrowing is used to indicate the attitudes and behavior of human-centered dominance over nature, economically conditioned attitudes of self and ego, and the conventional definition of household. Specifically, I am referring to the audio and visual conditionings of such attitudes and behaviors through human-centered storied languages and the technological recreational and media industries of developed nations.

Intrinsic Value. Intrinsic value is used in the study to value the uniquely original and primal nature of each person and their relationship with the diverse and interrelated whole of all nature. Respect for diversity of being, and the unique empirical nature of a person's relationship, at any given moment, leads to: "The integrative value of the WHOLE with respect to diversity and additive effects of evaluative beings, makes the whole (a function circle) the intrinsic unit to which VALUE can be given" (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006, p. 27).

Natural attraction (Cohen, et al. 2003; p. 61). This term is drawn from the NSTP learning process and experientially reconditions an individual to conscious awareness of their natural sensory communication relationship with nature, for health and well-being. For example, when we are thirsty, our sense of thirst leads to an attraction for drinking water.

Mutual Consent. This term is also drawn from (Cohen, et al. 2003; pp. 65-67) and (<http://www.ecopsych.com/amental.html>), and is a major element of the NSTP learning experience, as well as this study's enrollment program process. Mutual consent establishes a conscious intention to place one's whole being in a relationship of communion and reciprocity with the more-than-human natural energy affinities that support and sustain nature in a self-

organizing, sustainable, and ever changing wholeness. This consciousness is a compassionate intention of willingness to open wholly to the experience through one's full potentialities of the experience.

Self-Evident/Evidence. Both terms are used throughout this study “to validate what we sense and feel” (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 112). It is the inborn ability of each human being to wholly integrate in-the-moment natural sensory attractions with our sense of reason and “compares these findings to our cultural attachments and their effects” (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 112). This primary process of the NSTP learning experience also helps reorient the individual to revalue their primal being, in reciprocity with nature, and helps reduce the process of value narrowing, through the cultural conditionings of electronic media, recreation, and entertainment.

The “Ecos”, Belonging, and Community Relationship

In her article “Advertising, Community, and Self”, Mary Gomes states:

People's experience of consumerism and advertising are related to a sense of emptiness, a loss of connections to community and culture as well as to the self. People feel that the demands of the consumerist culture are in conflict with authentic personal expression (Gomes, Leupold, and Albracht 1998; p.26).

Our senses of sight and hearing are common perceptual pathways to the psychological conditionings of the technological media. “In the developed nations, television dominates the social awareness. 98% of all U.S. homes have a TV set, the average person watches more than four hours per day, and most people get the majority of their information from the medium”

(Elgin, 1989; p.27). If, as Elgin and Gomes state, people's experiences with advertising leave them feeling empty and disconnected with community, can these same senses be re-stimulated, within each person, for an ecological awareness of inherent belonging and community? Can an inherent and primal sense of belonging be revalued and registered as a healthy relationship and contribution to the greater ecological household of nature, of which people are a part?

For the purposes of this study, the intent is to bring this global issue of "loss of connections to community" (Gomes, et al. 1998) and inherent belonging with the greater "ecos" of place into perspective on a per-household and individual scale. Drawing from (Cohen, et al., 2003, pp. 103-113) the Natural Systems Thinking Process (NSTP), this study serves to determine the contribution that an enrollment program activity process makes in helping applicants register their natural senses of belonging and community in relationship with their natural senses of sight and hearing. This process will support the candidate's interest in designing a household and lifestyle that respects ecological values and seeks harmony with nature.

Within the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of household, there is no mention of the greater natural ecology of place, community, or habitat (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_71061.htm p. 1). However, the structure of a house as a place of human dwelling is in fact constructed within a preexisting more-than-human natural environment or habitat. This habitat is home to a greater ecological community, which supports and sustains people that dwell within the house. For example, the soil and geologic foundation supporting the dwelling is an interrelated community of living organisms, which nourish a life and non-life relationship to provide nutrients for vegetation. This, in turn, provides necessary food and oxygen that therefore sustains people, as well as the more-than-human self-organizing natural world around us.

Robert Gilman's article "Finding Home: A look at roots and possibilities for habitat" also indicates a common contrast to the Greek meaning of household and states that,

For most people, certainly in North America, the idea of 'home' connotes a place of safety where we are shielded from weather and intruders and able to find recuperation and nurture. It seems like a wonderful image, yet it has built into it the assumption that 'not home,' i.e. the outside world, is a place of danger, a place where we are strangers (Gilman, 1986, p.5).

For a person to understanding that their indoor home is inescapably connected with the greater ecological household called nature, there is a need for them to consciously integrate their inherent natural sensory communication system back into their immediate sensory perception, cognitive knowing, and thinking process, through direct experience with nature and the NSTP. Furthermore, an individual's participation in the natural community is of primary importance to reestablishing a sense of identity with the natural "ecos". "Ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self" (Thomashow, 1996; p.3).

This program study is referred to as an activity process, and thus a qualitative bounded case study with a mix of "particularistic" and "descriptive" phenomena (Merriam, 1998; pp.27-33). The enrollment program process consisted of three small groups of three to five people, for a total of 14 applicants in the greater Charleston, South Carolina area where the investigator lives, with one applicant in Upstate New York. These applicants explored their senses of sight and hearing through the three direct nature-connected activities (see Appendices), and with the private outdoor backyard or natural areas of their greater ecological household or place of dwelling. Written responses to each activity were posted on the group's Internet e-mail

address so that each participant could read, learn from, and respond to the experiences of other participants in the group.

Overview of Conceptual Framework

The following introductory overview of literature, particularly in the emerging fields of Ecopsychology and Deep Ecology, supports this study's conceptual framework of reestablishing a sense of natural belonging and community with our greater ecological household. A more in-depth and thorough review, however, will be covered in the Review of Literature chapter.

Ecopsychology integrates natural habitat relationships, or ecology, with human psychology, and fosters the healing of human attitudes, concerning separation and estrangement, with the more than human natural world, of which people are a part. "It is this inclusion of both 'ecos' and the 'psyche' which distinguishes ecopsychology from both environmentalism and psychology" (Davis, 2006; p. 1).

In Andy Fisher's *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*, he contrasts Environmental Psychology with the roots of Ecopsychology, as follows,

...precisely because of its continuity with a dualistic research tradition---environmental psychology is simply not capable of disclosing those meanings that concern the more radical field of ecopsychology.....In addition to making for narrow findings, the scientific worldview adopted by environmental psychology quite simply preserves the human/nature split (Fisher, 2002; p.32).

Chellis Glendinning refers to a state of being whole and in full relationship with the Earth community as,

People have a natural state of being. It is variously known as “being integrated,” “human potential,” and “merging mind, body, and spirit.”I call this state of being our primal matrix: the state of a healthy, wholly functioning psyche in full-bodied participation with a healthy, wholly functioning Earth (Glendinning, 1994; p. 5).

The Deep Ecology Movement, originating from the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, is also closely associated with Ecopsychology, Ecophilosophy, and Ecosophy.

The over-arching aim of cross-cultural ecophilosophy is to have a comprehensive, long-range, global view of our situation as planet Earth dwellers. Critical to this undertaking is insight into the values we embrace and into the quality and type of relationships we create with one another and with the natural world. Education helps us to achieve this larger understanding necessary for wise actions (Drengson, 2001; p. 2).

Drengson further states,

....we say that ecosophy is ecological wisdom, as derived from the ancient Greek roots “ecos”—meaning place, and “sophia”—meaning wisdom. We emphasize that there is not just one ecosophy that all humans everywhere must accept. There are very many ecosophies and the possibilities for articulating new ones are almost unlimited (Drengson, 2001; p. 5).

To be a part of anything, there needs to be a communication system for relating with it. The intrinsic value of each individual’s sensory nature-connected experience, and their unique ecological wisdom, in any given moment, is this communication system. This inborn organic sensory communication system establishes a self-evident awareness of belonging and community with the greater ‘ecos’, and is the basis for the conceptual framework of this project.

Personal Interests

From an experience when I was a young boy, overlooking a large field and distant woods, I deeply felt and knew what my lifework would be. Navigating cultural biases and stereotypes against nature and valuing my own human-nature relationship, has been the most challenging and confusing process of this life-path. Over the past 18 years, I have developed and offered a Natureskills program process, as a freelance naturalist, here in the Charleston, South Carolina area and in parts of North Carolina. This program process ranges from guiding small groups of people on outdoor natural sensory experiences with nature, to establishing a 501C3 tax exempt nonprofit called The Institute of Ecological Sustainability. The purpose of this nonprofit was to encourage individuals to reexamine their choices about the way they live and relate with the natural world. Small group educational discussion courses, workshops, and field trips were offered to introduce local residents to concepts of Bioregionalism, Deep Ecology, Ecologically Sustainable Living Practices, and Voluntary Simplicity as a way of Ecologically Minded Living.

Throughout this same time period of sharing nature-connected experiential program processes with area residents, I listened to and felt a growing consensus among participants. Emptiness, lack of belonging and community, and hopelessness with how they could improve their quality of life with nature around them, were the most consistent comments and feelings expressed in discussion. Among the central cause of these feelings and expressions was the scale of urban housing development and devaluing of the natural world around them, coupled with personal feelings of objectification through the advertising media and real estate industry. Each person felt a powerlessness and frustration with the destruction of natural habitat around them, and overwhelming shock at population growth in the area. Many often expressed deep sadness and loss. My own personal feelings of value narrowing and diminished natural systems

quality of life and diversity, along with the collective feelings of individual participants, led me to create this qualitative and phenomenological case study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A wide range of literature supports the study presented here. The following is intended to integrate the study presented with the reviewed literature, and demonstrate both support and contrast within the following topic areas of this study.

- The nature-separated self; some cultural ways in which we can become psychologically and developmentally nature-separated.
- The term value narrowing, as it relates to the nature-separated self and ego.
- The ecologically minded contributions of Place-based education, Bioregionalism, and the Deep Ecology Movement, as they relate to this study.

The nature-separated self

What are some of the cultural operatives, which can contribute to the development of a psychologically or spiritually nature-separated self? The first two sections presented here, will review some of the literature surrounding these operants, and compare and contrast the term value narrowing, as used in this study. The last two sections will review evolving educational and lifestyle processes that contribute to integrated ecology and reconnecting household, as they apply to this study.

In the mental and spiritual realm, the counterpart of technology is culture, which modifies and even supersedes human nature in the same way technology modifies physical nature. In thus mastering nature with technology, and mastering human nature with culture, we distinguish ourselves from the rest of life, establishing a separate human realm (Eisenstein, 2007; p.6).

Our inherent connection with what we as humans hold in common with nature, and therefore our mature development, has become destructively compromised through the value narrowing attitudes of Western cultural conditionings and practices, Gruenewald (2003) and Shepard (1995). As mentioned in the Introduction of this study, Gomes, Leupold, & Albracht (1998) reveal how our intense exposure and fascination with the psychologically manipulative and market driven technologic media contribute to an empty, separate, and narrowed value of self.

John Scull is a clinical psychologist and ecopsychologist. In his article “The Separation from More-than-Human Nature”, he offers an overview of the many proposed reasons for the nature separated self, ranging from agriculture, Western civilization, written language or “literacy-based language” (Scull, 1999, p.3), and exploitive industrial economics or capitalism. Scull also notes how advertising and economics, as they contribute to the nature-separated self, appears in the literature of ecopsychology, “That proximate causes such as advertising and economic incentives separate us from the natural world; that the consumer society is more a cause than a result of the psychological separation from nature” (Scull, 1999, pp.5-6). Scull also cites Cohen (1997), in reference to “seeing the separation (new-brain stories) as a consequence of literacy” (Scull, 1999, p.3).

In Andrew Schmookler’s article, “Why Are We DeVouring The Earth”, he makes the following statement of American culture,

Our cultural fetish of economic growth is a clue that our consumption is not nourishing us. And our national cult of growth is a sign of the triumph of hope over satisfaction, of the life of promise over the life of fulfillment (Schmookler, 1990, p.22).

Theodore Roszak suggests that, “Some ecopsychologists believe that, as with compulsive gamblers, the depression that drives people to consume stems not from greed but from a sense of emptiness” (Roszak, 1996, p.23). By contrast to this emptiness, studies of human development into maturity show that regularly spending time in direct sensory and cognitive relationship with nature improves quality of life, reduces stress and emptiness, Chawla & Cushing (2007), Clay (2001), Moore (1997), and Votluka (2006).

Value Narrowing

The following comparison and contrast of key elements in Schumacher (1973), Drengson (2005), Tolle, (2005), and Livingston (1996), gives support and perspective to the term value narrowing used in this study. Niche is, “the role that an organism or species plays in its community through the organism’s occupation of a physical space and the use of resources in that space” (Freeman, 2008, p.1).

Nature, therefore, creates a natural economy through self-regulation, which benefits all life and non-life necessary for ecological sustainability. People are a human species of animal occupying a very large variety of niches on this Planet Earth, yet our ways of thinking and behavior indicate an increasing exception to and separation from natural economy, ecological sustainability, and healthy community or household. E.F. Schumacher expands on our human-centered economic problems in his book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. In chapter two, “Peace and Permanence” Schumacher (1973), hypothetically discusses a world of potentially unlimited fuel, which has been the attitude of most Americans until very recently. This attitude of unlimited resources and economic growth is consistent with value narrowing,

because it completely ignores the ultimate problem of pollution and demonstrates disregard for ecological well-being through our interdependence with our household. Schumacher states,

We find, therefore, that the idea of unlimited economic growth, more and more until everyone is saturated with wealth, needs to be seriously questioned on at least two counts: the availability of basic resources and, alternatively or additionally, the capacity of the environment to cope with the degree of interference implied (Schumacher, 1973, p.30).

Drengson (2005) and Tolle (2005) both discuss ego, as related to value narrowing. Drengson states, “A person can fail to identify with their ecological community, when they identify too narrowly with an insecure, small ego-self” (Drengson, 2005, p. 41).

In Tolle’s chapter two, “Ego: The Current State of Humanity”, he discusses the full range of our human condition and obsession with our narrowed and distorted sense of self, through ego. First, he explains how our use of words can so easily become a fixation and habit of labeling, and thus how we lose the “mystery with a label” (Tolle, 2005, p.25). Tolle goes on to say that this word labeling is but a “surface layer of reality” and that,

Underneath the surface appearance, everything is not only connected with everything else, but also with the Source of all life out of which it came. Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to God, to the Source, to yourself (Tolle, pp. 25-26).

Next, Tolle explains how when we develop the habit of quickly attaching word labels to everything in our awareness, “the more shallow and lifeless your reality becomes” (pp. 26-27). This shallowness is directly related to the meaning of value narrowing, in this study. Tolle

expresses that we need and have to use words and thoughts, and that “They have their own beauty—but do we need to become imprisoned by them” (p. 27)?

In his section on “Content and Structure of The Ego”, Tolle explains how we develop habits out of the content of our environment, such as a child losing their toy, and how this content creates association, “The unconscious compulsion to enhance one’s identity through association with an object is built into the very structure of the egoic mind” (p.35). This imprisonment, and compulsion that Tolle uses to explain our egoic use of words, attachments, and identity with a human-centered cultural industry, is the predominate root of the problem, demonstrated in this study.

Finally, Tolle states,

The people in the advertising industry know very well that in order to sell things that people don’t really need, they must convince them that those things will add something to how they see themselves or are seen by others; in other words, add something to their sense of self (Tolle, 2005, p. 35).

As Tolle goes on to explain, simple awareness of our egoic patterns and habits is the beginning to freeing ourselves from value narrowing and therefore, the necessity of this study.

Finally, the following perspective, demonstrating value narrowing, is offered by Livingston (1996), and will conclude this section. John A. Livingston states that a sense of community is essentially “an awareness of simultaneous belonging to both a society and a place” (Livingston, 1996, p.132). Livingston’s use of the word “place” is inclusive of natural landscape and ecological relationship. He further elaborates on our elitist and separate sense of self as individuals in the following.

Awareness of self as individual, self as (same-species) group, self as (many-species) community inheres in all of us animals. The major differences in this respect between ourselves and the healthily integrated bears, monkeys, and coyotes is that our cherished individualism, celebrated at the expense of other (shared) selves, has left us stalled at an immature stage of social development. They remain whole. They know in their bones and viscera that they belong. We are taught that we do not (Livingston, 1996, pp.138-139).

Livingston concludes his discussion with,

It is possible for the individual human being to retrieve the natural awareness of belonging to something infinitely broader and richer than the narrow enclosure of our belief systems, to rediscover (it was there all the time) a self that freely and joyfully identifies with myriad nonhuman existences (Livingston, 1996, p.139).

For reasons mentioned in the above section, such as psychological association and preoccupation with the abstractions of technology and industrial society, our immature development through a shallow sense of self as ego, and nature-separating cultural stories, regular lifestyle practices for integrating conscious participation with direct sensory nature-connecting processes are missing in a large part of the human population within Western cultural thought and practice. Therefore, both the questions raised in this study, and the findings demonstrated through the experiences of the participants without the facilitator's rhetorical interpretation, become self-evident. The simplistic design and direct accessibility, to even the smallest of natural areas (a patch of soil and sky), for engaging the program process of this study, allows for the open participation of anyone having interest in conscious application of the NSTP, and reintegrating their whole being with household.

The last two sections of this literature review will focus on the educational, regenerative, and healing applications relative to a self-worth through belonging and community and household, and the overall need for these unique educational applications in helping to reintegrate awareness of our inherent human-nature relationship.

Household: The home-based nature-connected relationship of place, peace, and well-being with all things.

We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect (Leopold, 1949, p. viii).

This section will compare and contrast the contributions of Place-based education, Bioregionalism, and the Deep Ecology Movement, as they relate and apply to the program process of the NSTP in this study.

According to Woodhouse & Knapp (2000), place-based education is:

-inherently multidisciplinary.

-inherently experiential.

-is reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than 'learn to earn.'

-connects place with self and community. (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000,p.3).

Place-based education is concerned with educating and preparing people to live and work in sustainable harmony with their cultural and ecological community of place, region, or household. In his book, Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities, David Sobel explains place-based education as, “one of the core objectives is to look at how landscape,

community infrastructure, watersheds, and cultural traditions all interact and shape each other” (Sobel, 2005, p. 9). Place-based education, however, places an emphasis on child and adolescent education, but is inclusive of adults. In his article, “Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are”, Gregory Smith outlines an agenda for the transformation of our educational system, which is inclusive of adults and community.

Agencies and organizations outside of the school, including businesses, must come to see themselves as partners in the education of children, and they must be willing to accept interns and provide multiple learning opportunities for younger members of the community (Smith, 2002, p.11).

Smith’s statement of adults being “partners in the education of children” raises the question of just how such adults, in a predominately exploitive economic paradigm, would be integrating ecological values into the child’s education. Such communication, integration, and education of household, through all age groups, would likely send conflicting messages to children, in such an incomplete educational and ecological lifestyle process. Such an incomplete community education process could be interpreted by the children as only important while they are of a certain age, but once an adult things revert to a “learn to earn” exploitive and nonecological lifestyle. Gruenewald (2003), however, address such an educational practice with accountability.

Gruenewald (2003) takes the position “that ‘critical pedagogy’ and ‘place-based education’ are mutually supportive educational traditions” (p. 3), and suggests that these two traditions be merged together. He contrasts the two as follows,

Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit.

Critical pedagogies are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education. Chief among these are the assumptions that education should mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy and that an educational competition of winners and losers is in the best interest of public life in a diverse society (Gruenewald, 2003, p.3).

Bioregionalism is a social ecology movement that also puts into practice a human lifestyle of place integrated with ecology. Dodge (1990) states,

Bioregionalism is simply biological realism; in natural systems we find the physical truth of our being, the real obvious stuff like the need for oxygen as well as the more subtle need for moonlight, and perhaps other truths beyond those (Dodge, 1990, p.5).

Dodge further explains,

A central element of bioregionalism—and one that distinguishes it from similar politics of place—is the importance given to natural systems.....A natural system is a community of interdependent life, a mutual biological integration on the order of ecosystem”(Dodge, 1990, p.5).

Gary Snyder (1990) states,

Bioregional awareness teaches us in specific ways. It is not enough to just ‘love nature’ or to want to ‘be in harmony with Gaia.’ Our relationship to the natural world takes place in a place, and it must be grounded in information and experience (Snyder, 1990, p.18).

With regard to the value narrowing philosophies of Industrial Civilization, Kirkpatrick Sale comments on what a bioregional model of economics would be.

An economy, in other words, that would not be a different thing from the ecology, as it is today—they both stem after all from the same Greek roots, oikos, for household—but would be meshed and linked with it, thoroughly compatible with it (Sale, 1991, p.69).

Literature and ecological lifestyle practices within the Deep Ecology Movement have made a large contribution to this study because of the emphasis upon a non human-centered ecophilosophical approach to ecological sustainability, and to the intrinsic value and worth of all beings, living and nonliving. Deep Ecology is often referred to as a questioning of ourselves, and thus developing an ecological consciousness, or ecosophy. Bill Devall and George Sessions state,

Deep ecology is a process of ever-deeper questioning of ourselves, the assumptions of the dominant worldview in our culture, and the meaning and truth of our reality. We cannot change consciousness by only listening to others, we must involve ourselves. We must take direct action (Devall & Sessions, 1985, pp.8-9).

Deep Ecology Movement founder Arne Naess identified two cultural and global responses to our environmental responsibilities. Naess referred to these two responses as the “Shallow Ecology Movement” and “Long-range Deep Ecology Movement”. Drengson (2001) interprets Naess’s reference to these two movements as,

The short-term, Shallow Ecology Movement relies on quick, technical fixes and pursues business as usual without any deep value questioning of long-range changes in the

system. The long-range Deep Ecology Movement takes a broader view, looks for the long-term solutions and pursues deep questioning and new patterns of change and action (Drengson, 2001, p.4).

The “Shallow Ecology Movement” is one that is human-centered and considers nature as being for the use of humans, whereas “the Deep Ecology Movement is based on platform principles that emphasize the need to respect the intrinsic worth of all beings, humans included, and treasure all forms of biological and cultural diversity” (Drengson, 2001, p.4). Arne Naess also created the word ecosophy, which has to do with developing our own ecological wisdom and harmony through our deeper questioning in direct relationship with nature. As previously quoted in Drengson (2001), potential ecosophies are unlimited in uniqueness and diversity, due to an individual’s collective experience and development. Naess referred to his personal ecosophy as “ecosophy T”, Naess (2002) & Drengson (2005), which was developed over many years. In his article “SELF-REALIZATION: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World” Naess (1987), Naess offers his philosophy of “Self-Realization”, which he felt was a necessary concept in developing his “ecosophy T”. Naess explains that the necessity of maturing and developing beyond the shallow egoic and social self, “Because of an inescapable process of identification with others, with growing maturity, the self is widened and deepened. We ‘see ourself in others’. Self-realization is hindered if the self-realization of others, with whom we identify, is hindered” (Naess, 1987, p.35). In *Life’s Philosophy: reason and feeling in a deeper world*, Naess further explains self-realization through identification with other beings.

But there is something that deserves the name ‘the greater Self.’ That embraces everything with which you identify. To identify in this way gives emotional reactions in the domain of sympathy and empathy. A process of identification is created by the very

fact of your feeling something of yourself in something else. Not that it need resemble yourself, but there is something about it that you recognize in yourself ((Naess, 2002, pp.113-114).

It is this concept of Naess's self-realization through "ecosophy T", that parallels and contributes to the theoretical framework and value of this study. While Naess has spent many years as a mountaineer, and one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, his personal development of "ecosophy T" is very much related to his direct experiences with and in nature, through a self-realizing identity. Mutual consent and the NSTP, establishes an experiential process of potential identity for the individual to develop their own self-realization and uniquely diverse and evolving ecosophy.

In summary, place-based education, bioregionalism, the deep ecology movement, and the NSTP contribute to reweaving a sense of ecological place back into human cultural practices through an art and method of awareness, ecological identity, and value of the non-human natural world, which sustains all things. The study presented here, focuses on beginning at the natural place we dwell, or household, in developing an art and method of ecological lifestyle through the NSTP. The art and method of the NSTP used throughout this study is intended to bridge the psychological gaps, in human-centered culturally conditioned thinking, that attempt to maintain separation of being and belonging with nature. Applied Ecopsychology, using the NSTP, removes the separation of observer and observed, and sensorially bridges cultural objectification. Rather than continuing to psychologically think that we as humans are supposed to manage or steward our environment of place for future generations of humans, the NSTP restimulates our inborn sense of belonging and community through perceptual and cognitive knowing, or self-evidence, that we are wholly born and made of nature. Therefore, we as humans begin to learn,

through the NSTP, how to appropriately manage our human-centered and cultural storied way of thinking. In essence, the NSTP reintegrates our inborn natural ecology into a more healthy cultural participation, through Applied Ecopsychology and Integrated Ecology.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study employed qualitative case study methods to determine the contribution that an enrollment program activity process makes in helping applicants register their natural senses of belonging and community in relationship with their natural senses of sight and hearing. The study serves to help support the participant's interest in designing a home and lifestyle that reflects ecological values and harmonizes with Nature. John Creswell defines qualitative research as,

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

The term project and program will be used interchangeably to emphasize the overall project of the program activity process. The program is referred to as an activity process, and thus a qualitative bounded case study with a mix of "particularistic" and "descriptive" features (Merriam, 1998; pp.27-30), because it includes particular key elements of NSTP, such as Natural Attraction, Mutual Consent, Self-Evidence, and Validation of the participant's inherent natural sensory connections, as important decision-making information. The descriptive features are the unique experiences of the participants, and their richness of diversity with the Reconnecting Household process.

Design and Data Collection Process

Harmful consumer practices and the abstract technological media entertainment industry, particularly in the United States, have estranged people from their natural belongings. In their article “The All-Consuming Self”, Allen D. Kanner and Mary E. Gomes state,

Fantasies of endless comfort and convenience, of every wish instantly becoming the world's command, are part of a syndrome that psychologists call narcissism. Narcissism is characterized by an inflated, grandiose, entitled, and masterful self-image, or 'false self,' that masks deep-seated but unacknowledged feelings of worthlessness and emptiness....Psychologist Philip Cushman has explicitly linked narcissism to consumer culture in the United States (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p.79).

Can nature-estranged abstract thinking, and destructive consumer practices and behaviors, be reconditioned through our natural senses of sight and hearing to register awareness of one's greater ecological belonging and community, using the NSTP in the outdoor natural areas of one's place of dwelling? This thesis question, along with the intrinsic value of each individual's perceptual and cognitive self-evidence, will serve to determine the contribution this study makes toward helping the participants register their natural senses of belonging and community in relationship with their natural senses of sight and hearing. The richness and reverence for the diversity of empirical perspectives among the project participants is central to this project, and thus serves as the framework for reconnecting household with “ecos” within the thought processes of the individual, for a revaluing of belonging and community.

Sight and Hearing

In humans, a variety of internal sensory pathways function as modes of communication with the surrounding ecosystem. Perception is “a single unified awareness derived from sensory

processes while stimulus is present” (Random House College Dictionary, 1979). Cognition is the action or process of knowing and/or consciously understanding what has been perceived by the senses (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/cognition>).

It is only through the senses that we experience what it means to be fully human. It is only through the engaged senses that we are able to feel desire and intimacy, the great longing to be fully, wholly, and utterly in the world.....Cultivating our perceptual capacity is fundamentally related to both the quality of our personal lives and restoring the quality of life on the planet. (Sewall, 1999; p.14).

The study of organisms and their ongoing relationships with other life and natural elements that make up the organism’s environment, habitat, and/or ecosystem, is the basis of ecology. Furthermore, “Ecology--from the Greek oikos (‘household’)-- is the study of the Earth Household. More precisely, it is the study of the relationships that interlink all members of the Earth Household” (Capra, 1996, p. 32). From atom to organism and community to ecosystem, life and non-life interrelate through sensory affinities and/or molecular bonds. “A community is comprised of all the various populations interacting in a area” (Lee, 2006, p.1). “An ecosystem extends a community by involving also the abiotic environment, that is, the physical and chemical environment” (Lee, 2006, p.1).

This study fits the definition of a qualitative bounded case study through the unique process of the NSTP nature-connected sensory activities in the natural areas of one’s home, dwelling, and household. The sequence of nature-connected activities focusing on the senses sight and hearing, was selected to allow a gradual re-stimulation of senses with the sensory language of these household natural areas. “The average person, watching television for five hours per day, is physically engaged with---looking at and experiencing--- a machine. To that

extent, the person is not relating to anything else in the environment” (Mander, 1992, p.76).

Therefore, such long-term exposure to the hyper-stimulation of indoor electronic and technological recreation could create attitude conditionings such as human dominance over nature, or value narrowing, with regards to human-nature relationships and perceptions.

In her article “The Skill of Ecological Perception”, Laura Sewall discusses the need for developing a five part perceptual practice. She states the importance of our visual sense as,

Fifty percent of the cortex of the brain is thought to be devoted to processing visual information, indicating a profound, evolutionary commitment to vision as a means of joining inner and outer conditions. From a pragmatic perspective, this means that perceptual practice can ameliorate cultural conditioning and psychic numbing by reawakening our senses and intentionally honoring subjective experience (Sewall, 1995, p. 203).

Developing a nature-connected consciousness requires sensory stimulus in-context and direct participation with nature. Laura Sewall refers to this development as, “skillful perception necessarily includes emphasizing perceptual practices that help us to extend our narrow experience of self” (Sewall, 1995, p.204).

As with vision, our auditory sensory system is extremely influenced by modern technological media and recreation, given the amount of time that the average person is exposed to such a sensory and cognitive link with a technologically abstract relationship. When considering the conditioning effects of what we choose to listen to, we need only recall the lyrics of a love song or the harsh words of criticism, to understand how permanently embedded in our memory these culturally created auditory messages can have on our emotions and behavior.

In Diane Ackerman's chapter on "Hearing", she states, "Many hymns would thrill us even if they didn't have words, but, with words, they're a double score: emotional music tied to emotional messages (Ackerman, 1990, p.206). Referring again to words and music, Ackerman further states, "I believe that, in time, they led to two forms of organized sound---words (rational sounds for objects, emotions, and ideas) and music (nonrational sounds for feelings)" (Ackerman, 1990, p. 214). Ackerman refers to Deryck Cooke's book on music theory, *The Language of Music*, and quotes Cooke as follows,

both awaken in the hearer an emotional response; the difference is that a word awakens both an emotional response and a comprehension of its meaning, whereas a note, having no meaning, awakens only the emotional response (Ackerman, 1990, p. 214).

Dr. Michael J. Cohen's Institute of Global Education, and his Applied Ecopsychology and Integrated Ecology degree program using the NSTP (Cohen, et al., 2003), is uniquely suited for this project for two reasons,

(1) It uniquely demonstrates, through decades of research, how human created language and literacy can abstract, overshadow, and discourage our inborn natural knowing. Through industrial civilization, which seeks dominion over nature for the economic profits of humans, these behaviors and mentalities systemically encourage and condition us to live in a storied world of mental separation with natural processes in the moment.

In Cohen's *Reconnecting With Nature: Finding wellness through restoring your bond with the Earth* he states,

When we react only to the images, memories or projections that play in our mentality, we fill the moment with feelings and reactions to stories, old pictures, and the sensations attached

to them. We relate to past experiences, not to the realities and potentials of the immediate moment (Cohen, 1997, p.24).

(2) Respect and value for each individual's unique diversity of natural experience are of foremost importance. This allows for a peaceful pluralistic versus hierarchical and dualistic, right or wrong, educational experience. "Pluralism is closely related to diversity, and the differences we find among the rich array of total views are a potential source for much creative insight (Quick, 2006; p. 64).

Each of the 14 participants' unique intrinsic value and perceptions of nature-connected relationships were of central focus in this study. An introductory and consent letter (Appendix A) was sent to applicants, explaining what the project was about. This letter included prerequisite reading material to aid in understanding the NSTP sensory activities. A before and after program question survey was also included (See Appendices B & C). There were three separate groups in this study, lasting from March 2006 through February 2007. Once voluntary consent was received from each participant in the group, an initial first week group gathering was scheduled for demonstration, questions, and concerns. Following the initial week-one gathering, the three activities were sent to each consenting participant via group internet mail, at one activity per week, for a total enrollment program activity process period of four weeks per group. No emphasis, suggestion, or expectation was placed on altering, modifying, adding to, or expanding any architectural or natural landscape features of the individual's dwelling or household natural areas.

The three nature-connected activities, used in this study, were selected and paraphrased from (Cohen, 1997; pp. 22, 32-33, 85-86), to facilitate key NSTP elements of understanding, valuing, and registering "Natural Attraction" (Cohen, et al. 2003; p. 61), self-evident validation

(Cohen, et al. 2003; pp. 111-113), and mutual consent (Cohen, 1997; p.22), for this study (Appendices D, E, & F). Permission to paraphrase and use these three activities was obtained from Dr. Michael J. Cohen, and reference to Cohen's work is cited in each activity.

Participants had seven days to do each activity and write their direct nature-connected experiences using guide questions at the bottom of each activity, and post this write-up to the group at will. Exact times that each participant took for each activity was not recorded or emphasized, due to the unique NSTP of relating with nature. Participants were encouraged to take their time and allow for their own unique experience, without tight time constraints on any activity. With the question of how much time could be expected to complete each activity, the facilitator suggested two to four hours per activity, on average. This allowed for learning and respecting the "Natural Attraction" diversity of natural sensory experience without time distractions, among all three groups using the NSTP.

Participants

The study consisted of 14 participants, including myself as facilitator. Participant ages ranged from 26-62, with 12 females and two males, who individually explore their natural inborn senses of/with nature, particularly sight and hearing, using three uniquely selected NSTP nature-connecting activities, with the private outdoor backyard or natural areas of their greater household or "ecos". Thirteen of the participants lived in the Charleston County, SC area, with one living in Upstate New York. Two of the twelve females lived in rural John's Island and Wadmalaw Island areas of the Charleston County. The male ages were 52 and 58, and female ages were: one at 26, five ranging from 41-47, five ranging from 51-57, and one at age 62.

Each of the participants had a history of consistent and intentional interest in nature, ranging from solo rock climbing in wilderness settings, shamanistic apprenticing and advanced learning, holistic and non-conventional veterinarian practice, to teaching art and alternative health practices. These participants volunteered from a response to the introductory letter sent to several local internet group networks, such as The Charleston Spirituality Network, the local NIA dance network, Women's Center, and several environmentally-minded groups. All participants who requested to participate in the study, as defined in the introductory letter, were accepted unconditionally, regardless of age, sex, or any other reason. Several participants had children and, only on occasion, shared the activities with the child.

Anticipated Outcomes

Anticipated outcomes of this study were to determine the contribution that a unique NSTP could make to individuals reconnecting with their inherent and primal (first) household/home or "ecos", through their senses of sight and hearing. Sight and hearing senses, and the unique NSTP nature-connecting activities, were selected as sensory bridging techniques because of the common reliance upon these two senses for interacting with indoor electronic media and entertainment recreation.

For the purposes of this study, NSTP sight and hearing sensory activities were used to reconnect individuals, through direct natural sensory experience, with their relationship to the greater natural community of their homes. The use of these activities, therefore, was to determine if these three nature-connected sensory bridging techniques could help the participant register an expanded and less abstract sensory awareness relationship with the outdoor natural

areas of the backyard and/or natural areas of their home or dwelling. Ultimately, this nature-connected sensory program process is intended to help the participant rediscover a less fragmented sense of community and belonging, through their inherent relationship with nature.

One of the central focuses of this study was on the intrinsic value of each individual's unique and direct sensory "Natural Attraction" experience, and therefore to inspire a revaluing of self-worth through the individual's inherent belonging with the greater ecological community of which they are a part.

Future Audience and Studies

As a first time student of qualitative case study research, I remain open to learning how to improve upon such a study. Among the possible improvements are:

- A less personalized and more concise introductory letter and activity explanation.
- A broader solicitation of participant volunteers.
- More experienced use of qualitative case study methods, such as pre and post course survey questions.
- Integration of whole household family participation, for a more rich diversity of experience of sensory natural attraction in the outdoor natural areas of a given household area.
- A more balanced gender variable.

FINDINGS

Introduction

The following findings provide a thorough representation of participant experiences for each activity and demonstrate contribution to the studies purpose. Although the experiences of each participant listed below presents a lengthy and individual account of experience that covers many pages, this detail is valuable in demonstrating and respecting the intrinsic value of each participant's experience, without the facilitator's editorializing and/or biased interpretation. It allows for the participants to be fully respected for their experience, as they uniquely experienced it, and thus determine the contribution of the program process. It was the decision of the facilitator to fully present such lengthy dialogue in order to factually and authentically maintain the self-evident integrity of the program process, where each participant completed the activity. A brief discussion, focusing on the uniqueness of the particular activity as demonstrated by the participants, will conclude each activity.

Ecological Re-stimulation of senses: Activity One

This activity, Blindfold & Silent Sensory Nature Walk Experience (Appendix D), was selected as an introductory process of re-orienting natural inherent sensory awareness to outdoor natural areas of the participant's home and household. Blocking vision, except for the camera activity, and not allowing verbal communication, was an important part of re-stimulating other inherent senses. The purpose of this activity was to encourage discovery of other senses that are often numbed or dormant, due to the hyper visual and hearing stimulus of electronic media and recreation.

Lynn, Activity One, Group One

Lynn is a 54-year-old female who lives on an eight-acre area of woods in rural John's Island, SC. She has been an environmental science teacher for 32 years and has shared her love of nature with all her students. She recalls how "As I grew up, my dad and I would visit natural sites such as the dunes of Long Island and the woods of Maine. We mostly sat and observed. My contact with this appreciation was lost between the ages of 20 and 50 (not completely) due to the rush of life and the pursuit of material things and raising a family." The following are her responses to activity one and guide questions.

I noticed that much of my attention went to relaxing and trusting walking with my eyes closed. The other thing that I noticed was that when I opened my eyes, the colors and images were vivid and more colorful.

I learned that we are so caught in the rush of life. I experienced the vividness of seeing after quieting the eye/brain connection. Also, everything I touched without seeing felt much larger. When I used my eyes it was smaller. The indentations in the tree bark felt huge with my eyes closed. Putting my arms around the tree and feeling its energy made it feel bigger.

Self worth was not affected in any positive way this time. If anything, self-judgment came in through thoughts of not taking the proper time.

The exercise gave me a realization that there are so many living things in the yard that I never notice.

Robbie, Activity One, Group One

Robbie, a 42-year-old female living in the Old Village area of Mt. Pleasant, SC., has been a Special Education and Resource teacher for the past 12 years. She has had a unique

background of experience as a Peace Corp teacher in South Africa, and a Girl Scout Camp director for many years. One of her most meaningful experiences was in undergraduate college at Depaw University in Indiana, where she took a life-altering course on the human-nature relationship. Her responses to guide questions and experiences of activity one are reflective of the value she places on the human-nature connection.

1. Amanda led me gently by the elbow around my backyard. My eyes trustingly remained closed except for a slip at the boxwood.

2. I learned that I love the twin oak trees that grow in a upwards "V." I learned that locquat fruit smells citrusy even though it still wears its protective, fuzzy green jacket.

3. My self-worth? New perspective? That my senses have the ability to bring me joy and as long as I have my senses I am able to interact and love what's around me. My ability to love what's around me gives me self-worth.

4. The cool, moist, young feeling of spring is present in my backyard as well as in the rest of the Lowcountry.

5. Because I was attracted to the "V" trees, I see that I love my attitude of standing with my arms up and open to the sky.

6. I do feel connected with the Lowcountry, and I feel blessed that a little piece of it provides me (and other brave suburban creatures) sanctuary.

Robbie's reference to "Lowcountry" is the area along the South Carolina Coastline and inland for about sixty miles.

Amanda, Activity One, Group One

Amanda is a 53year old female living in the Old Historic District of Charleston, SC. Her previous nature-connected experiences include the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming during her high school years, extensive travels in rural France, a NIA dance instructor emphasizing natural health through movement, and organic gardening and floral design.

Dan lead me blind-folded on a sensory adventure through the yard. He had me touch, listen and "take a picture" with my "shutter" eyes. I found this tour to be very exciting and illuminating. I was excited to take the tour before it even started as I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to allow other senses besides my eyes to be heightened. My guide was trustworthy and accentuated my adventure.

I learned that with practice being blind-folded could be more visionary than by using eyes. By being blind-folded the other senses were brought forward as if to balance the trauma of closed eyes. I easily let go of the mind to understand the language of the senses.

My self worth is expanded in trustworthy, loveable ways as it relates to Nature as that is the nature of Nature. Therefore my nature is natural...only a little slow on the uptake.

I can't say this exercise has helped me relate to my backyard except that in general I always feel better in it than in the house. I prefer living in a natural setting than in an enclosed one or perhaps an urban one. By establishing relationship with my courtyard I feel more grounded and therefore better figure out more ways to involve myself with it. I want to hang a bird feeder.

My sense of hearing and touch are equal in their communicative powers. Being blind-folded has more vision than vision with the eyes. Having all my senses in tact, I guess there's a lot to be said for insight. Mine is good in it's own time.

The language of the senses as it responds and listens to Nature is really a blend of all consciousness. We are a part of it and it us.

Stephaney, Activity One, Group Two

Stephaney is a 45-year-old female living on Sullivan's Island, SC. Her profession is very much involved with natural holistic mind, body, and spirit health. She is a Black-belt NIA instructor and trainer, Yoga practitioner and instructor offering classes on the Sullivan's Island beach-front, and has an extensive interest in nature-based spiritualities, as well as an avid interest in kayaking, bicycling, and hiking.

On my own; on the beach; I live on the beach and am often dismayed that I don't really ever go to the beach to 'sun'. I often walk on the beach, but rarely pack lotion and a lawn chair, so that is what I did. I decided I was going to sit in 'sensory mode' with my eyes closed when I reached the waters edge. This was difficult for me as everything seemed a wonder today; butterflies everywhere; small monarchs, blue, yellow, orange, like a kaleidoscope, yes? I decide to set my chair on waters edge, and wait for 'the 7th wave' the water was quite vigorous, the beach empty. I ducked into the water, covered myself with wet sand and waited cross legged on the sand as the tide was coming in. I put all my senses into the water and the waves, I could feel their pulsing, each wave coming a little closer and then nothing, then closer, then nothing, then finally, as I hear the wave about to come in and wash around me...ouch, bit by a teeny tiny crab!! Ouch! You are on my spot it said. Darn. I got up and sat in my chair. !

2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.

Many things; one, a partner is good when doing this exercise! Two, a partner is good (theme of late) The other thing I learned is that I have a sense that I have been closing my eyes to a lot of things lately and I have a great NEED to look around me and actually SEE

3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be?

See all things above!

4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how?

Not particularly this exercise, Dan, but last Sunday I actually held a funeral in my backyard sanctuary for the brother of a dear friend; we lit torches, collected shells, read a prayer and a poem it was intense and profound and my backyard became a profound oasis for releasing a dear friend.

5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you?

Yes, above

6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of

I have a greater recognition that this is an extreme part of my life, from yoga on Laura's family rooftop, to yoga on the beach, to today's loss of Hildebroome. Today is the first day I have not

seen her in 4 weeks, to the arrival of many butterflies, and an extraordinary flower that is blooming in my backyard, since the moment we did said funeral.

Leslee, Activity One, Group Two

Leslee, a 42year old mother and single parent, lives with her daughter in Mt. Pleasant, SC. Her profession is in Yoga practice and instruction, NIA dance instruction, and holistic health consultanting. She is particularly intuitive and interested in feminine spirituality.

1. A general description of how you did the activity and what your personal experience was. I did this 2 times with children. My daughter, Chelsea and I did this "exercise" in our townhouse backyard, which is mostly concrete and a small grassy area in the front. We started by doing a hunt of sorts to set the stage. I was delighted at how much is really there when you take the time to look... Slow down. Chelsea even came up with a squashed (aluminum) can claiming it as part of the earth.

2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.

Most important I realized from doing this with the girls that it wasn't an "exercise." It seemed like a continuous part of their lives. Curiosity, natural time, play, and everything natural are all part of their day and reality. What I saw as our birthright.

They didn't question what we were doing as my adult friends want to talk about the class and what was the purpose.

I also reevaluated (key is value) connected with man-made objects .. made from our bountiful earth ! Wow I am rich. I often do this when I am about to sculpt and use the material, but this

time I experienced what was around me and in fixed states of being: for example the concrete and aluminum can and my rock collection.

3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be? Flowing and a seamless sense of living was an observation of Chelsea and her friend, and I was sad to realize how much of my life I've spent out of that perception. I definitely would say that I want that for myself indeed and feel equally worthy. I just forgot.

4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how? Yes. I keep affirming and utilizing more of "All that is" and have expanded my idea of what my backyard sanctuary IS..beyond what I own.

5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you? I am a sensuous being. This seems completely innocent and our birthright. I am surprised.

6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part? This joy of my knowing presents a possibility for me to live and others as well. Shaky, but hopeful.

Henry, Activity One, Group Three

Henry is a 58-year-old male living on Folly Beach, SC. He is a musician, artist, avid solo rock climber, and has had many profound and valuable experiences with nature.

I walked in my yard this morning with my eyes closed. The crunch and softness, The birds laughing at me, my neighbors puppy, barking from in his house---Henry, I love you, give me a biscuit. The smell of salt air and decomposing leaves, the swish of the ocean. As I approached a palm, I could feel its density. just as I was about to collide, it rustled it's dead fronds from high

above. Warning me away like a cranky old man would do. Then dropped one in my path, to trip over as I turned away. I felt a twig stop me and just hold me there with six in. of the end gently pressing on my belly. I reached down to touch it and thorns pierced my fingers. The pressure on my body was loving, sensual, reassuring me, she was only giving me love. I felt love coming from everywhere!!! From the Sun, from you, from my children, my huge family on Folly Beach, from everywhere! I did it 3 times today. On the beach and listening to some friends play music with my eyes closed. It's as if all of creation was rejoicing for my decision to be happy. ---What time is it?

Kathy, Activity One, Group Three

Kathy, the only non-resident of the Lowcountry area in this study, is a 47year old female living in the Finger-Lakes Region of Upstate New York. She has completed three courses with Dr. Cohen's NSTP degree program and is an active hiker and runner. She sums up her kinship with nature in this way, "I have learned that a crucial part of who I am is captured while in nature, and while in movement."

The Activity: Many miles of running in the snow recently allowed me to slow down and sense some of the deeper crevices of the forest that I call my home. A particular pond, now frozen, invited me to kneel and receive its many voices. As I listened and closed my eyes, while kneeling on the snowy surface I heard cracks throughout the pond, felt the coolness of the wind provide me with a feathery 'hello', and heard the tattered, dry leaves still intact on a nearby oak tree. My eyes still closed, a rain of snow showered across my exposed skin, and I could sense the darkness of a cloud moving overhead. I imagine myself living in an earlier time taking in

the beauty of familiarity along with a strange sadness...a time long since passed, before the mechanical world.

The three most important things learned: Without relying on sight, I was able to absorb my surroundings and participate in the myriad with my own movements. I too was a part of this place, not just a visitor. I sensed a welcoming and gracefully accepted the pond's popping and cracking as it adjusted itself to the winter changes. I learned that I have to adjust and shift my position in life, and it often stretches me in places too. So, I felt a kinship to the pond.

I also learned that other sensations of sound, texture, breath and body are more pronounced as I tried to balance absorption with staying warm.

I also felt thoughts travel backwards to a familiar place in time where this was what I would have done, just as I do now. So, there was a sense of connectedness toward a tear through this linear world, and a deeper knowing that remained nameless.

A new perspective on self-worth? I just feel more rooted when I'm in the home of nature. Any restlessness that I usually find in my 'house' dissipates.

Relatedness to backyard sanctuary? Yes, I feel that I want to protect and nurture as much as I can by living in harmony with my surroundings, and living in accordance with what is ecologically beneficial to the larger picture...lots of stuff to work on here.

Sense of connection? Yes, already stated.

Expanded perspective? Of course. I had heard awhile back that you know you are alive when you are touched by the four rivers. The river of surprise, sadness, love, and challenge. The ecological community moves me to action and I strongly voice and advocate for better ways whenever and wherever I can. I ride my bike--when I can this time of year--not below 20 degrees--to work, to show that it can be done.

Holley, Activity One, Group Three

Holley is a 41-year-old single parent female. Her profession as a Veterinarian has led her to natural animal health practices. She owns a ten acre horse farm on Wadmalaw Island, SC, (in rural Charleston County), and has been in organized shamanic training for the past four years. I was prepared to loosely plan my nature walk exercise but then one spontaneously occurred Tuesday morning. Although it was not a blind exercise by physical standards, after the experience occurred I realized that until the moment of the experience, I had indeed been temporarily blind!!! Or rather temporarily awake is what I became. I play a game every day twice a day when taking hay into the pasture. Hide the hay from the horses, it encourages more movement. Each time I venture out into the 10 acre pasture with many trees spread out, I feel for which direction to go- clockwise, counterclockwise, straight or zig zag etc. I just follow my directional pull. Tuesday morning was sunny and I was meandering along not looking at anything except the inside of my mind lost in thought streams of no particular consequence. I was drawn to the north, an open tree circled area with all varieties of oak, magnolia, holly and dogwood trees. I had been looking down at the ground mostly on this morning. Found the right ground patch and threw out my last hay flake. And then I just stood, something felt good about that and finally my eyes were drawn up to the trees I was facing. A dozen birds were flying out of the holly tree in intermittent patterns. They flew in and out, over to the oak and back. They were medium sized birds with red brown breasts- Robins! What on earth were all those Robins doing? More Robins came and when I finally started looking around, they were everywhere swooping very businesslike dancing all about. It was a workmanlike Broadway musical.

Although I could sense no work they were doing. Maybe it was just a musical! I felt such gratitude to have experienced this dance of nature. It was an honor to witness and participate.

Spring is here.

2. From this I learned to remember to be present in nature's cues, receive the messages in nature, dance.

3. The activity reminded me that nature and I have a relationship of reciprocity of worth.

4. This activity introduced me to a bird species I had rarely noticed here before. It was like meeting a cousin whom I don't know that well and am delighted to have been reacquainted with new glasses. Although I must tell that Monday night a lone low flying duck zoomed by on a hurry to somewhere- I had never seen that before either.

5. Hmm, this question is confusing. I sensed a connection with the experience. It was so magical and surreal that evidence of my presence was absolutely an integral part of the experience. Meaning it 'felt' like nature jumped up and had a direct communion and show just for me. I felt the divine speak through those birds, the noises, the wind, the colors, the motion, the leaves, the sun, the slow motion wonder. Enough evidence for me, but doubt it would pass a double blind placebo controlled study.

6. I have a more expanded perspective now of the ecological community I serve and am served by.

As mentioned in the introduction of this activity, the Blind & Silent Sensory Nature Walk Experience was selected for the purpose of re-stimulating other inherent senses, validate these experiences through self-evidence, and to cultivate “perceptual capacity” (Sewall, 1999; p. 14). Reducing vision and human verbal instruction or conversation was intended to present a contrast

to the participant's average daily lifestyle. The Camera component of this activity was included to aid in reducing the dominance of vision yet allow vision to be a limited but integral part of the overall multisensory engagement process.

Each participant's self-evident validation is reflected, as they experienced it for themselves. For example, Lynn's answer to guide question number four (See Appendix D), "The exercise gave me a realization that there are so many living things in the yard that I never notice."

Robbie's response to guide question number four reveals the stimulation of inherent senses, other than vision and sound. "The cool, moist, young feeling of spring is present in my backyard as well as in the rest of the Lowcountry." Holley's response to guide question five demonstrates both the importance and uniqueness of self-evident multisensory perception, while indicating her cultural conditionings to specific scientific studies. "I felt the divine speak through those birds, the noises, the wind, the colors, the motion, the leaves, the sun, the slow motion wonder. Enough evidence for me, but doubt it would pass a double blind placebo controlled study."

Communion, Reciprocity, and Mutual Consent: Activity Two

The activity, Exploring Mutual Reverence: Treating the Natural World as Yourself (Appendix E), was selected and paraphrased to introduce a unique NSTP process of consciously reorienting the participant into an awareness of communion and reciprocity with nature. This mutual consent process aids in reducing cultural preconceptions, in the spiritual moment of such phenomena, by allowing the participant a frame of mind that is not dominant over nature but

both accepting and respectful of the intrinsic value in the relationship. In his book, *Awakening to Spirit: On Life, Illumination, And Being*, Lee Irwin states,

Where there is interaction, there is transformation.” This is a principle of Spirit that encourages us to seek relationships that enhance and expand our awareness,The secret lies not in the articulation, but in the living and experiencing, in the sharing and feeling of connectedness, in our direct, embodied contact with other life forms and worlds (Irwin, 1999, pp.46-47).

As indicated in the activity, the process of standing still with eyes closed and being attentive to one’s breathing helps prepare the participant for transition into mutual exchange or reciprocity. Elan Shapiro similarly refers to this transition process as “balance of attention”,

Many people discover an unforced kind of meditation in this way, as a natural sense of concentration and engagement gradually emerges. Experiences with balance of attention can also provoke some combination of a “close encounter” with another species or element, a fresh opening to previously unconscious feelings or images, and a sense of more fluid and permeable boundaries through which a different quality of contact can occur (Shapiro, 1995, p.232).

The following are selections of participant responses and experiences with activity two. Previous participant introductions, in activity one, will not be duplicated in this or the third activity.

Robbie, Activity Two, Group One

1. General description of activity I decided to go to my front yard this time. Though I pass through it often, because it faces the street I had not (until now) thought of it as a sanctuary.

First, I closed my eyes and felt a natural attraction toward the ivy that spreads out on the ground below the oak tree. I opened my eyes and the first thing I felt was childlike. I asked why, and realized that the largest ivy leaf was shining at me just like the patent leather Easter shoes I wore this time of year in the late 1960's as a small child! I then walked around the small front yard and felt a natural attraction toward the large white azalea bush that is now bloomless. I went to it and used my mind to ask its permission to spend time with it. It said yes by showing me the last few fragile tendrils left after all those huge white blooms it wore last week! It then sent me a message to go visit the other two azalea plants that are still blooming. Before I left the large plant's side, I touched its somewhat tired leaves and realized it was recuperating from its recent, profuse efforts. I said thank you with my mind, touched one of its leaves and said goodbye. I walked to the two coral miniature azaleas lining the front porch. As they continue to bloom, I continue to savor their visual offerings. I looked deep into a fresh bloom and thanked it for providing my eyes with such a gift. The azaleas told me to look around, pay attention to the less showy pots filled with last summer's lemon grass, rosemary, thyme and Italian parsley. Yes, wonderful herbs that I'd all but turned my back on! The cheeky azaleas said to me, "Attention must be paid!" So I plucked, rearranged, stroked and smiled at the herbs and thoroughly enjoyed myself.

2. The most important things I learned from this experience

Who I am is a caretaker. Though lazy at times, I have the heart of a nurturer-an appreciator. I learned that attention must be paid, and that more joy is gained from caring in the long haul than for paying attention only to the new. I gained a little insight into how long-term caretakers find the energy to do the work day after day with fresh love.

3. New perspective on self-worth

Yes. Having the opportunity to give is a complete blessing. What else is there really? If this is a large part of what I am, I'm worthy.

4. Did this activity help me relate with my yard as part of the greater ecological home? How?

Yes. Particularly as I sensed the white azalea resting after its profusion of blooms. I like really feeling how all things in nature must rest and re-nourish.

5. My natural attraction to last years herbs was self-evident. Frankly, I feel like last year's herbs.

A little love and tenderness towards myself will go a long way.

6. Do I have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community?

Yes. This activity has broadened my view of nature to include "life coach" as another of its gifts.

Helen, Activity Two, Group One

Helen is a 62year old female and a Certified Master Gardner, which is her profession. She has also been involved with Rudolf Steiner schools as an administrator, and enjoys kayaking.

Part A

1. Simply, I took myself out to the center of my back yard and practiced deep breathing with my eyes closed. My first natural attraction was to the overpowering sweet, citrus scent of the Meyer's lime. Simultaneously I felt the breezes wafting this scent over to me. I became so absorbed in the moment that when I opened my eyes it was like a surprise that I was where I was - in my own back yard.

2. The "moment" had been so uplifting and I had had to go nowhere and do nothing. My awareness had shifted so quickly with the scent, was so transporting to my natural senses, that I was thrown out of my habituated way of being and offered a moment of at-oneness.
3. Yes, in the sense that it is not through doing any thing, but purely through being with that we come to know the deepest nature of the self.
4. Yes, it is my greater ecological home, but only to the extent that I bring my conscious, sensory aware self to it.
5. My chosen gesture of extending my arms to my sides with palm turned upward was met some seconds later by my dog Mocha coming out from the house and coming over and licking my ankle. That innate need to respond at a deeper level is present in me as I witnessed it today through my dog in nature.
6. Today's experience was quite moving for me. As I sat there listening and being with nature a sudden powerful presence came over me, a collective nature presence, and I felt myself acknowledging that presence. Then this certainty came over me saying,, "Know that you are witnessing what is alive and you belong to this." I don't convey this well. It was a wordless moment I'm attempting to give voice to.

Part B:

I sat in a chair on the deck for this part of the exercise. I felt still, the better part of being calm. The breezes were swirling life around me, I was breathing in sweet scents, the pores of my skins were registering the aliveness of the presence of nature around me. I ask, Who are you and wait. After some minutes I began to hear the din of traffic and sounds outside of this bubble of

nature that I had been encased by. They felt and sounded hollow, not imbued and pulsating, not filling. Then, Who am I? without the trappings?..... I am that, I am that. I am.

Christine, Activity Two, Group One

Christine is a 26year old female who has her own business and lives with her mother on rural John's Island, in the Charleston area.

1. A general description of how you did the activity and what your personal experience was.

Yan and I took our time to breathe and get settled in the yard. Individually we went off in the direction of what attracted us. First I was drawn to sounds of birds and animals in the branches above. I was amazing to me to notice the vertical energy of nature. I am mostly interacting on a horizontal level in my life and there is so much more above my head... Next, I noticed a tree that before today I hadn't even seen in the yard (it is pretty obvious too). I followed my attractions all around the yard. We both came back to the center of the yard and sat to ask our questions of nature. Silently I asked what this space was without labels or names and then I asked for an answer to "who I am without labels or names". What came to me most is that everything is connected, it is all energy and those energies flow into and through everything. We are not separate. I am just a part of this web of living and moving energy. Another answer I got was that nature is loving and nurturing.

2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.

1) We are all connected. 2) I am not separate (even if I can only get this on a shallow level). 3)

There is much more to the world than that which I realize on a daily basis.

3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be?

Sort of... I'm realizing slowly that my perception of who I am and what I am worthy of is totally based on a materialistic view of the world and of humans. I consider where most of my feeling of worthiness comes from and it is mostly from what others feel I am doing right or wrong (what I've acquired, what I DO or how much I DO, what I say, how I react to people, what I give or don't give to others...). Strip that all down and what am I?

4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how?

Yes. Just talking to this space is creating a bond. Instead of forcing my image of a pretty backyard – I am interacting a little with it to let it direct me.

5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you?

I'm not quite sure what this question is asking...

6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of?

I'm finding the connection between me and all living things deepening. There is serenity in nature – peace and nurturance.

Laura, Activity Two, Group Two

Laura is a 55year old female living with her husband and son in the Mt. Pleasant area of Charleston. She has taught Art in local public schools for most of her adult career and has been a Yoga instructor for many years.

Part A

I went to a natural area of my backyard where a palm tree grows surrounded by verbena and coleus plants. I became quiet while appreciating the colors and textures in this area before closing my eyes. I was attracted to, and became more aware of the sounds of the chirping birds. Once I completed this part, I asked whether I could share, visit, and learn. Immediately, I became

aware of a butterfly sitting on the verbena blossoms. I felt a desire to get the hose and carefully water, as if the butterfly might be thirsty, not the plant. My feelings were that I was responding intuitively to the butterfly, so I did get the hose and very carefully apply water. I felt connected to the plant and butterfly.

Part B

Without names and labels, my backyard area IS. It is texture, shapes, color, a natural exchange station (as shown by the plant and butterfly). It transcends need for words or labels. Without names or labels, "I am a simple pencil in the hands of God" Mother Teresa.

I learned from this experience that nature can be very quiet in teaching us.

My self worth perspective shifted while doing this activity because I felt that I intuited what the butterfly wanted and trusted that intuition.

My backyard sanctuary is part of my greater ecological home as it is a learning station for me, and a sanctuary to birds and butterflies.

Trusting and following my intuition gives me new perspectives toward nature and the natural world.

Leslee, Activity Two, Group Two

Part A:

(1) General Description:

Week two...I went to a wide open space to play natural attraction. This space was on two sides met by some water (the pool and a little pond behind my place that teems with frogs in the summer time.) I have been feeling for open space and sky lately (expansion). I believe that was my first attraction. The second of my attractions was feathers: soft and downy. They communicated right away to me tenderness and an eagerness to fly. When, however, I asked permission and waited, seconds later two big fluffy dogs from my hood came running over. My eyes had been closed and then open softly, so I was surprised. I hadn't had these dogs run up to me at all without Chelsea or before, I was delighted to pet and be rubbed on.

Part B:

I asked, "Who am I without labels?"....LOVE AND AFFECTION. I let this soak in. I thanked the dogs and the owner who came for them. A few minutes later, I sat on the swing and asked, "Who are you without labels??" The answer came quickly and like a blanket. "Your mother, Your father, Your Everything." This made me weep with recognition and gratitude.

I learned that in the slowing down, in the asking, we can go even deeper into our true inner nature. This is more to me about Natural time and the power of reverence!

Evident as part of me- Yes, this knowing of who I AM without labels (LOVING and Affectionate). When I was unhappy today, I stopped and affirmed, "If I drop this judging stuff about why I am unhappy, I am loving." It worked. It proves to be true.

Self-Worth: The more I realize that I am a part of something beautiful, the more self-worth I realize (and on a cellular and very real level).

Community: Again I am dazzled by the Web and the interconnectedness that I had heard about, but never experienced.

Relationship with Backyard Sanctuary and Greater Ecological Home. My Backyard is a parking lot and pool and place shared by many people and creatures. In Loving and accepting this I comprehend the value of where I am today-I can trust this.

Stephaney, Activity Two, Group Two

PART A

My back yard consists of my steps leading up/down to my home. Some patio furniture, my utility shed. It also consists of 3 large pine trees I fondly refer to as 'the 3 amigos' My first natural attraction was the wind. The wind was the first thing I noticed except for perhaps the ringing of my wind chimes. I felt the wind surrounding me; caressing me, protecting me. I felt it rustling the trees around me.

Walking around, I had difficulty not getting stuck in thoughts. The hose needs winding, the chair needs painting, so I began to rewind the hose with a connection to my surroundings, I noticed a small web that was connecting the leaves of my geranium; two butterflies chasing each other, lots of birds find my backyard a sanctuary; grackle and crow are always present and doves are everywhere, lots of conversation among them.

PART B

After asking permission to share; I sat quietly and squirrel approached. Observing me momentarily out of the corner of its eye; it began to approach within just a few feet. It buried its

nose into the pine straw while keeping a constant watch; dig dig dig, look, dig dig dig, look.

Watching it rub the dirt off its paws/hands was very connecting.

Observing without names and labels is a process for me; like a child observer. One who does not know that a wasp is called a wasp and that it can sting. It is simply a flying object, no labels on the flower vs. the poison oak. Separating my brain from just looking, to labeling is more of an aesthetic sense for me. As there are no good, nor bad emotions, can I seek to see a dead palm branch and see it for what it is rather than the work that it will become once it hits the ground? Or that place of defining weeds from flowers, or defining the never ending pine cones as art as opposed to something I have to keep from stepping on or tripping over. Shifting out of my state of 'life can be too much' was my task today and also my lesson. Letting go, allowing myself to surrender to the present moment instead of creating a 'should' around it. Perhaps this is the most important thing learned; to take time out to be in my back yard without needing to fix it or improve it or make it MORE. This is a real issue for me today, a sense of lack that is generally not evident in my life, while at the same time being in an emotional place that I could BE with the squirrel and the birds and the webs and the wind without having to create a story around it. There are many lessons here. The process of asking permission to speak is a huge reverence for me; and another part of today's learning process for natural state of the time.

Debi, Activity Two, Group Three

Debi is 51 years old female and lives in the Mt. Pleasant area of Charleston. She has been very involved in alternative healing for many years and loves nature.

Today I ventured out into my backyard once again with the intention of mutual reverence. Again a beautiful day, I sat in my same spot as before and covered myself with a blanket. I closed my

eyes and thanked nature for all the love and sharing that continues to be with me and work through me,

Then asking for permission to join with my sanctuary, and beyond, with all sentient beings, for the highest good of all. My attention went to the lot next door where almost all the trees were cut down, I once again expressed my sympathy and sorrow for their loss. I began to connect further with the energy of the trees in the lot that had been physically cut down. It was needed for their purpose and mine. Then I started to connect to all the trees and plants that had been cut down in my yard, before my house was built. Then I tuned into where I was sitting, as I felt the energy {after asking to} I felt sort of a short octopus like being. I tuned into one limb and followed it as it went up and around soon like being on a roller coaster ride I went up and around for a good while then down to the ground for a good while traveling further distance among the earth worms and the rich soil until we began to root into the ground feeding and expanding into many directions, embraces many other trees and plants. There were not limitations. With the ability to root to the earth and draw on energy from other plants and insects. Then to be able to reach high into the trees and touch the clouds, the sun and moon. There seemed to be no limitations. I liked that a lot no limitations. My connection with this experience was the on going process of being in my body while also connected to my spirit without being stuck in my mind or my pain and suffering. I loved the thought as we crawled along the ground being able to root myself and continue on, yet where I had rooted I had a whole new life to journey while the rest of me continued on my adventure. Never being stuck just continuously rooting, eating, and continuously moving, never a dull moment, sounds like my life, although not enough movement. Together with nature I will bring in more movement, I am grateful for that. I will never look at a grapevine the same, It will always be a roller coaster ride, a never ending journey, a wealth of

excitement, venture and an abundance of resources for survival. No wonder they are so abundant and strong. This was fun and has opened up a whole new relationship within me and nature. It was a great preparation for week 3.

Rosemary, Activity Two, Group Three

Rosemary is a 57 years old female. She lives in the historic Ashley River district of Charleston and has been involved with horse riding for much of her life. Rosemary is also a professional potter.

My first natural attraction was the sun. It was really dominating the space even with my eyes closed-its brightness filling my consciousness. When I first walked into the back yard, I carried with me my feelings of it not being beautiful enough. But then when I closed my eyes all I could be aware of was the bright sunlight, as if it was blacking out all of the barren, leafless trees and brown dead leaves on the ground. I tried to become aware of something, anything else in the yard, but I could not get away from the total ness of the sun on me. It was exhilarating-so much light dispersing my somewhat dark thinking. When I opened my eyes and looked again at the trees, I felt their deeply rootedness nurturing the earth as their roots when down and nourishing the earth as their branches reached upward. As they let me in on their treeness I had a profound new sense of their total commitment to taking care of the earth and us as they stood so firmly rooted and reaching at the same time. In those moments, I learned more about trees than I have ever known. I leaned to feel taken care of by them, also. This made me feel more a part of the whole of the world. I leaned to look more deeply. I learned to feel in a more expanded sense of all; it was such deep feeling of support from nature.

Holley, Activity Two, Group Three

I had been dragging my feet about the exercise this week, couldn't decide which direction I would head out. I reread the description while checking emails then promptly forgot about it and went outside to ride and feed horses. Soon to discover a certain tree had an exercise for me. I have a particular relationship with a horse that has been a personal life challenge for 5 years. It was nearing dusk and we had been engaged in a communication struggle for nearly 30 minutes riding in the arena. My mind was blank, I had not one clue about what to do to solve this situation on a good note. Tension had not escalated but was present and not an impass in sight. I closed my eyes as a well of emotion started to surface and silently asked 'what do I do'. My eyes opened and immediately vision locks on an oak tree I had not often noticed so much as an individual being. The tree looked clear, as if it was the only tree around instead of the dozens present. I quickly closed my eyes and breathed in 4 times as we stood. Then, looking at the tree in its ever aware presence I asked, 'who am I', 'who are you'. Time passes an eternity it feels, no human answer, just the tree being there ever hyper aware, saying I am this tree, see me be a tree, see me with a structure that's not a structure, see me, I am. And so I continued on the ride, the only thought in my mind and heart and peripheral understanding was the imprint of the live oak tree. I see and feel myself riding yet am not focusing on anything but the imprint of the tree on my being. Things start to unwind. My mind is still and the tension leaves my body. The horse and I are both swinging and moving through time and space. All is well. I have connection.

2. I learned to let go and nature showed me the way to re flow in a trauma moment.

3. I have everything I need, trust my self worth.

4. The activity pulled me closer again back into my loving extended family of nurture and support.
5. I am the tree, this was self evident. I am in all.
6. I am now over and over and over again reminded and reminded of the greater home.

Communion and reciprocity was central to the NSTP in activity two. The ongoing development and deepening of the nature-connected belonging and community process with household, through direct sensory natural attraction, was necessary for the participant to thoroughly determine the contribution of this study. Each of the participants listed in both activities one and two, indicate a clearer understanding and more direct experience with self-evidence, self-worth, and an expanded sense of greater ecological community/home or household, in activity two. A comparison of responses to guide question five in activity one and two, indicates a deeper understanding and awareness, through the enrollment program process. For example, here is a comparison of responses to question five, in activities one and two. Holley's response to guide question five, activity one and two:

"Hmm, this question is confusing. I sensed a connection with the experience" and in activity two, her response to this same question is, "I am the tree, this was self-evident. I am in all."

Robbie's response to question five, activity one and two: "Because I was attracted to the "V" trees, I see that I love my attitude of standing with my arms up and open to the sky." Robbie's response to this same question in activity two, "My natural attraction to last years herbs was self-evident. Frankly, I feel like last year's herbs. A little love and tenderness towards myself will go a long way."

Leslee's responses to question five, activity one and two: "I am a sensuous being. This seems completely innocent and our birthright. I am surprised." Activity two: "Evident as part of me- Yes, this knowing of who I AM without labels (LOVING and Affectionate). When I was unhappy today, I stopped and affirmed, " If I drop this judging stuff about why I am unhappy, I am loving." It worked. It proves to be true."

Discovering Your Natural Born Self: Activity Three

And by staying nature-conscious we can bring a more natural awareness to the tasks we must carry out and the problems we must solve. This basically means we're giving nature a spiritual home inside ourselves, where she rightfully has a place anyway and secretly resides even if we don't consciously acknowledge her presence (Cook, 2001, p.19).

The last activity in this study, Discovering Your Natural Born Self (Appendix F), was intended as an aid to bridging the conscious gap of cultural abstractions, such as the conventional observer/observed way of approaching nature study, with one's inherent ecological identity. Thomashow expresses the work of ecological identity as, "a framework for ecological citizenship" (Thomashow, p.171), and that establishing an ecological identity is important "as both a conceptual foundation of formal education and the experiential curriculum of everyday life" (Thomashow, p.171). The "nature-conscious" (Cook, 2001, p.19) awareness is an important link in this study's program process. This activity allows the participants to perceptually and cognitively experience themselves in full participation with nature. Such ecological identity is therefore necessary in re-establishing a sense of belonging and community with one's household.

Helen, Activity Three, Group One

I chose my backyard screen porch at light of dusk. I chose dusk in an effort to "see more" through seeing less (I sometimes find my field of vision limiting). I also chose, dusk as it is a most spiritually enlivening time - a space between the worlds time.

I close my eyes and am first aware of the feel of the darkness descending and blanketing the earth. This blanket of warmth is more than the warmth of my own body in response to a temperature in the atmosphere. There is about it an intangible presence, maybe an energetic presence to it that feels encompassing, holding, protecting. I like the presence of the dark because I feel touched and comforted by its buoying presence. It has substance but is without form. I am drawn to it, as I feel attracted to its warmth. I feel held in its presence. I know I like it because it is alive, vibrant.

I like myself because I am an embracing and accepting person. I like myself because I am... (could it really be true that I am) a warm person! Like the presence I am so drawn to in nature when I am in my warm person self I am able to share and be a presence for others that is a comfort. (I've just had to re-read this a few times because I'm feeling uncomfortable about saying this about myself. Old think - could this possibly be who I really am, etc).

This particular activity definitely gave me a new place from which to view my Self-Worth. I can "allow" myself to be this warm person because I have experienced this warm being at the heart of nature. I see better how I am a direct reflection of the greater radiance that nature is.

I learned two things primarily. One is that I can allow myself to enter into this reflective in nature kinship that these exercises bring to me. The other has to do with wanting to ask myself to remember the duality in nature and all of life. Just a little warning that alongside the development of my warmth with nature kinship I need also to increase my capacity to be

discerning - to remember that warmth in nature can be a fatal attraction too (it can burn). And so it is that with my own nature I can better learn to both trust my innate warmth and that it will attract and to development finer tools of discernment of who and when to trust.

I find an increase in perspective in knowing that the earth etheric holds and sustains us and feel drawn to further inquire of nature for guidance as to how I fit into its greater ecological home.

Leslee, Activity Three, Group Two

So I went out and sat on a little swing on my front lawn. My first attraction was a red dragonfly, the swinging motion of the swing, and little flies on the lawn--simultaneously. I decided not to choose one thing but focus on all three asking the question..."May we commune?" In this natural area I liked the dragonfly and the flies because of their shiny wings and the mysterious ability to fly.

Then shifting to myself, I became aware of the scent of a tea olive (don't even know from where) I didn't "see" one. That was itI like myself because of my sweetness and ability to sense sweetness. Surprising to me. But OK

2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important: I learned more trust that nature is communicating with me and that I can be delighted and surprised as much as I open myself to be. I LIKE THAT.

3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be? Yes! I found that I had immediate stories and judgements about being "sweet" or sensing sweetness in life. In other words I was able to see what is keeping me from experiencing delight and sweetness and separating me from both myself and nature. My stories: which range from how

others viewed sweetness and what might happen if I reveal this quality -seems vulnerable...Like a hive.

4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how? Yes. The swing and it's location and all that came to me in a small spot helped me trust myself and again expand on the wealth beyond what I "own."

5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you? Movement and mystery.

6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of? Yes I think all answers above support that my perspective is expanding and that it is an endless Ocean.

Stephaney, Activity Three, Group Two

I love my 3 amigos in my backyard sanctuary. 3 Strong trees with abundant pine needles and pine cones. The first natural attraction I sense as I step into my sanctuary is a pine cone barely missing the top of my head and falling on the ground near my feet. I don't even need to look up as I know squirrel is up there, very busy. I look up anyway and sure enough, there is squirrel, busily gnawing away at a pine cone. This was new to me, before my move to the treehouse, I was unaware that squirrels can munch a pinecone down to that similar of a corn cob, and all that is left for it is the cob . There are dozens of these strewn all over my yard.

I also like the smell that seems to permeate my yard, and the entire island for that matter. It is, at times, as if living in a perfume bottle. I frequently smell things I can not see. Two days ago there was a strong smell of gardenia, but they are no longer blooming so it is something else.

This morning on my walk to the beach I smelled a new smell, very sweet, it was a large bush with tiny white flowers that looked like bells. When I went to touch one, I almost placed my hand there a very tiny, beautifully weaved spider web.

I like myself because of the accessibility to this backyard and this sanctuary. As the pine needles fall, mixed amongst the 'pinecones' I am realizing too that I am adding new layers to my own life.

I had a gathering here in my backyard last night. Maybe it was for a variety of reasons, my birthday, an excuse to hold a fiasco, a gathering of friends, a reason to celebrate my backyard sanctuary. I like myself for many reasons, this sanctuary brings it to focus and I remember to be grateful for the abundance and give thanks.

1. The first portion of my activity was to walk to the beach; that is when I discovered the bell-flowers and spider web. The second portion was to sit quietly in one of the chairs in my yard.
2. The most important things. To relax and enjoy my yard even when weeds need pulled, and things need tidying. This is still a big one for me. To just enjoy my sanctuary in its current state.
- The next most important thing, to live in gratitude for all that I have and all that surrounds me.
3. The self-worth portion is connected to #2, all of this is strengthening my self worth.
4. Currently I sit out with laptop on lap. This is novel for me, to be able to combine nature with technology. To integrate it, instead of separate it. This gives me a great home that I am a part of. A momentary office outside!

Debi, Activity Three, Group Three

As I went out into my backyard my first attraction was three blooming irises and some other bulbs grabbed my attention as, if they were all wanting to be seen. One bulb that was sprouting out I thought had died but was starting another new life. It reminded me of the new

lives I start every year, every day and every moment just like nature. I like myself like I admire the way the bulbs always relive a new life again and again.

The unbelievable perfection of each flower and the vibrant colors just absolutely draws me into the pure unconditional love of nature. To be one with this beauty, to stare at a daffadil, to smell the fragrance of rosemary, I love that I can be present for each gift that they are offering me.

They are like children. I felt that they were so happy to be so beautiful for me to enjoy. While in the presence of such beauty nothing else exists. I feel so happy about life with these natural attractions in their full glory. These exercises are so powerful and really have helped me to learn a whole new way of being and I am so grateful.

Holley, Activity Three, Group Three

I headed out into my sanctuary in the dark. This was the time available and I turn on again as the sun is setting, I am a night owl as much as a day bird, I love them both but the nighttime is very much my time and less of the worlds time of the rat race. As I headed out I would soon discover (once again) how loud my mind is in the daytime. Tromping along, I thought I was meandering, I was walking through a dozen strange alternating warm and cold air pockets until I sensed the place to stop. I just knew the place to stop, the scenery and feel clicked like a latch and said here. The world became quiet and I realized how loud I had been tromping around carrying my human world (what a lot of work!). As I stood, the world became more quiet. I began to hear things I had not noticed. The crickets were singing everywhere. The leaves were rustling. I began to sense the world in a 360 degree fashion without moving a thing. From the northwest I heard a wind coming through the trees. It moved slowly down the wooded treeline towards me with a musical quality as if running a finger down a piano keyboard. As it

left the woods and came toward where I was standing the most incredible feeling came over me. I knew exactly where that breeze was at every moment as it approached. I sensed that something in front of the breeze was coming before it, I could feel in my whole being as if I was in that other energy at the same time as being where I was standing. It felt like people or spirits or beings were rushing towards me pulling the breeze behind them. Then I felt the breeze on my body and sensed these beings were all around me and spread out peripherally. The atmospheric pressure changed as they advanced, and it felt heavy. I felt a flash of panic as it swirled in - but then I remembered who I was and who they were and I was no longer afraid. I finally passed the test! The gratitude and tears welled up at the same time as I felt my own love power surge and in that moment when I was in unity with all I enjoyed the full expression of who I am within the divine. Then, poof, it was gone and I walked back to the house holding in my heart the sparkling beauty that is always trying to talk to us when we can hear.

2. I remembered who I was simply through nature, nothing else fancy dancy to boost kick elevate or show me through a quicker or amped-up door. Incredible.

For the rest of the questions, I think the experience is explanation enough. Yes, yes and Yes!

Kathy, Activity Three, Group Three

The natural areas this week that I explored were the snow covered hills, and trails, and the beautiful night sky.

I like and am attracted to fresh falling snow for the sense of cleansing and renewal it emotes.

I like myself for continually renewing myself with experiences that allow me to expand who I am.

I like and am attracted to the quiet of the forest filled with snow as the sounds become accented, and each shuffle resonates throughout my being.

I like myself when I am quiet and allow nature to channel through me. I like that I can sense this underworld via a multisensory route.

I like and am attracted to the night sky as it glows with wisdom, understanding, and timelessness.

I like myself as I peer inward and see my wisdom and trust in the community of souls, like the community of stars.

What I learned: Just spending time in nature can be so powerful, comforting, and loving. I really thank nature and universal love for allowing me to run and play in such graceful surroundings. I hardly ever see anyone in the forest, but I feel so unbelievably at home and welcomed. These are the great teachings of these exercises.

In conclusion, Helen's response to activity three, "This particular activity definitely gave me a new place from which to view my Self-Worth. I can "allow" myself to be this warm person because I have experienced this warm being at the heart of nature indicates her enriched ecological identity and self-worth.

Leslee's response to guide question three seemed to reveal a deeper awareness of her cultural conditionings toward nature, "In other words I was able to see what is keeping me from experiencing delight and sweetness and separating me from both myself and nature."

Holley's experience seems to represent yet another sensory dimension that integrates with consciousness and nature-connected communion, "I knew exactly where that breeze was at every moment as it approached. I sensed that something in front of the breeze was coming

before it, I could feel in my whole being as if I was in that other energy at the same time as being where I was standing.”

Before (Pre-course) and After (Post-course) Survey Questions

Amanda, Group One

Before

1. (a)Location. I can see the magnolia tree where I lived previously for 18 years. It is in Charleston.

(b)The structure. It feels solid and is made of brick. Little maintenance, as opposed to wood.

(c)The size. Small, yet gracious. Rooms lead comfortably from one to the next.

2. The house is about almost opposite the Inter –Coastal Waterway entrance off the Ashely River headed South. Opposite this entrance on the Eastern shore facing up river the house sits near a large magnolia with ½ its trunk rotted out. Just beyond the boughs looking south is my home.

3. Yes, my home is a retreat space currently and could accommodate others for a weekend.

4. My home is where I can conduct work for an income and I currently use it for workshops that other people bring to it.

5. My home is a kaleidoscope of my concept of home. It varies in usage, purpose, and agreement between myself and others according to my mission statement.

My home is about a (7.5) as the inside comfort level in furnishings needs improving. The garden is a (5). It is ok as is, but could use some imagination. The entire house and garden are about a (5) according to larger dreams for it on a remodeling scale of 5-7 years or so....

After

1. Since I have completed the NSTP Orientation the activities we pursued remind me often of my connection to all things in Nature especially as I sit outside enjoying my little courtyard. However even from inside as I watch out the window I benefit from the fruits of our pursuits during the Course. I love the mutuality upon asking consent from a natural attraction that puts me on the same level as the natural world...it is humbling in the most reverent respect to all that I see and love in Nature. And I love the message that ensues causing me to appreciate some overlooked aspect of myself, or situation. The process opens me up to a larger picture of which I am an integral part and I feel comforted, strengthened and leaping with faith towards the order and harmony to which I belong.

2. Yes. (10).....no doubt. It is a gift to be able to fall back on a proven process and know that it works. If ever I feel lonely, or depressed, elated or just neutral I can glean information from nature by processing a natural attraction and gain valuable insight. By doing so I immediately enhance the sensation of being a part of a larger whole. This expands my consciousness beyond human form affirming peace, wholeness and blending.

3. Absolutely, and less expensive! (10)

I don't need to go any further than my own back yard to be in communication with the natural world. In fact I need to be at home first experiencing well-being before I'd go somewhere else to buy it.

4. I say an (8). Currently my income pays for a lot of holistic body work I am practicing and I use my home as a facility in which to share, expand and learn greater awareness towards harmony and balance in the body, mind and spirit. The only real gripe I have about the actual

setting of my home is that it isn't in a big field surrounded by trees, a running brook, and great view.

5. (5) I am not totally satisfied with my home no matter what. However, now that I can sit on the front stoop and understand my natural attractions when I do so makes for sitting there or in the back much more satisfying.

Christine, Group One

Before

1. a. Its the perfect size

b. The bamboo floors Yan and I put in

c. The kitchen

2. (This is just from within my neighborhood) Turn left at the third Palmetto Tree - turn left again between the two flowering trees (i'm not sure what they are) - turn right at the drift wood and shrub garden – my house is the one with the large oak tree and two pink flowering bushes in front. (I don't think anyone could ever follow that...oh well)

3. Yes, my home could be my retreat space if I had enough resources to finish the outside and some of the inside.

4. When I'm tired and just want to crash after work...my home is a little haven to rest my body and mind.

5. My number would have to be 7.5 because there are so many things I love about my home and there are also many things that are unfinished inside and outside. My backyard would be a 2 because it is a great size and has potential but I don't even want to spend more than a few minutes out there at this point.

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? A GREAT BIG YES!

How? I am enjoying parts of my backyard that I hated or didn't even notice before. I find great peace in my morning watering and "talk" (with my newly planted veggie and flower garden). It is not about imposing my will over the yard so that it will get me praise from the neighbors, its about knowing that this is a place that I can feel the true belonging and connectivity that is our natural world.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? (9). Comments? I have been amazed to feel the peace within my own being that I reach by putting my hands in the cool, black soil or touching the supple and tender leaves on green seedlings. Whatever the interaction, I am feeling more and more connection to the web of infinite wisdom that is carried through my natural surroundings, when engaging its physical form!

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? (7).

Comments? I still feel like seeing new places and traveling is a part of my nature that I have to indulge often. I took a great part of my adult years thus far in travel and have a hard time staying put. I do know that I can escape the concrete, metal jungle and retreat to my backyard anytime I want to "come up for air". It's a great feeling.

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? (7).

Comments? I love coming home after working in other people's houses. It feels great to wake up and go see my plant friends in the backyard each morning before I go to work. I would love to set up my porch so that in the spring, fall and winter I can do work out there.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation?

(8)

Further Comments: There are still many things that need to be finished before this home feels "just the way I need it". Although, I am so happy to be here and to have trees and plants surrounding me in my little cottage.

Testimonial:

During this experience I've deepened my connection with not only my own backyard, but my boyfriend, my neighbors and best of all, myself. I am learning things that I "didn't even know I didn't know"! My relationship with my backyard has gone from loathsome and dread to absolute joy. Now I take time each morning to water and commune with my plants friends, which is like starting my day with the knowledge and peace of the wisest teachers. Reaching my hands into the cool, dark soil is like plugging in to recharge my batteries through the largest and purest energy source. There is so much wisdom in the natural world and my gratitude goes to Dan for giving me an opportunity to learn to open my mind and heart to this infinite source.

Helen, Group One

Before

1. Three features I especially like and enjoy about my home are the light (all but one room has windows on two sides), the openness of the common areas to the backyard deck through double doors in the dining room, and the cayenne pepper red walls of the dining room.
2. Let it be early evening as you embark on your kayak in the waters at Shem Creeks' open mouth to the bay in Mt Pleasant. Slowly paddle past the pelicans and at the wooden docks entering the narrow channel of the creek traveling in a northeasterly direction. Enjoy the birds along the bank and in the wetland grasses. After approximately a mile you'll come to an opening grass area where a 200 year old live oak is situated on the bank with a deep bow to its branches. Land your kayak and start walking due East across the road toward a row of crepe myrtles to the left. You will come to a gnome on a wooden fence. Hop over the fence and voila! your in my back yard!
3. Absolutely. I discovered the meaning of sanctuary many years ago in my own back yard.
4. A good bit as my business is housed in the carport (plant material is there) and my office is inside. I'll often come home to load up on plant material during the day and so I feel my home actually directly contributes to my business as it is provides the physical environ for it all.
5. I'll give my home at (7-8). It would (will) be higher once I have established more of a relationship with the back yard.

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How?

The activities offered us in the NSTP Orientation that I experienced both alone and in group have greatly helped me to be in relationship WITH nature as never before. Now, when I walk out into

the sanctuary and haven of my backyard, I know that I can come home to nature and to myself by stopping and stilling myself I can become soon aware of my natural attraction and follow that to its source. Before when I entered my backyard I tended to see first what was deficient about it (what I hadn't done, what it hadn't become). Now, I know that in a higher sense it is all there, it is complete. Not perhaps manifestly complete, but intrinsically complete. And that I am complete in it. I know now through Natural Systems that I can commune with that by appreciating and harmonizing with what already is.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation?

Yes, so very much, and I give that an (8-9). The Natural Systems Orientation has been a great aid to my finding my way back to my sense of belong to nature, and of it being my true home. That sense of belonging has brought me, brings me, such moments of peace.

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Comments?

I see them both as quite different than the other. Were I to attend a distant weekend workshop it would be more for an intellectual stimulation, not necessarily to be in contact with nature. I have begun to form an intimate relationship to the life in my backyard and that is exciting and fills me with wonder and curiosity. Even now, with the heat and the bugs biting I still want to go out first thing in the morning to discover what is - to touch the lantana I nursed back from the dead, to see if the Meyer's limes have grown in size, to amaze over the Alocasias I have just planted. My backyard sanctuary offers the possibility everyday of a (10); the weekend workshop couldn't come close to that.

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Comments?

Not currently a great deal. Although I am a gardener by trade, I struggle with right balance and proportion between making a living wage and what is left for my own sanctuary once I return home at days end. I love gardening, I love helping things grow, encouraging the beauty of the natural world to flourish, to be in harmony with its natural inclinations. Yet I am often spent, too spent, to enjoy and appreciate my own gardens. They need and deserve my attention (I need and deserve my attention) yet the balance is not yet there. This however, is shifting, is changing. I am again hopeful that I will find the way, through Natural Systems, to a right relationship, wherein harmony and balance reside. So, for the moment, a (6).

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP orientation?

Further comments:

This is a whole new way of relating, a new relationship with and to nature and myself. There is so much that wants and asks to be discovered and I am new on the journey. I see this as a divining rod; used rightly it will lead you to the sure source of the living stream in your own backyard! I feel I have been given the greatest gift one can be given. I could not be more satisfied with what I have experienced thus far. A resounding (10)!

Testimonial:

Dan is and truly has been a spirit guide for me, and for our group. He has tended, lovingly encouraged and cultivated each of us as we found our way in and to our re-awakening senses. His fervent reverence for nature and his passion for all things natural is both infectious and kindling. Dan possesses a deep and great insight into nature and shares that with joy

and humility. It has been my pleasure and honor to have been a part of our group and to have shared this experience with him and you all. Thank you Dan.

Lynn, Group One

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home. Open spaces, lots of wood, nontoxic building materials, and most of all it is set in the woods.

2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

Follow the ocean coast West from Charleston. When it starts to have more trees than not, go in 3 miles from the coast. Look for a tall Magnolia tree (lol). My home is behind it.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Yes, maybe more.

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Not much. Its pretty disjointed. Two different worlds. I am beginning to look for retirement.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home. (10)

none	some	complete
1	5	10

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home

in a more ecological way of belonging? Yes.

How? I am noticing the diversity. I feel giddy, joy-filled when I notice a new plant or insect. I also look at the land around my house differently. I am attracted to what nature sends up through the ground and feel little inclination to have ornamental trees and stuff from Lowes. My connection to the land around me is more respectful.>When I hear birds, I don't just hear birds; I am hearing different birds...awareness of diversity.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? It was a 10. Now it is an enhanced (10).

Comments? The exercise that we did together opened up a world of connection, ability, and dimension for me. During this exercise I connected so deeply to the sense of smell, space, sound, air, up and down and 360 degrees. My sense of smell and hearing is much better. Really, I can hear things that Tim cannot and just when I thought old age was taking my sense of smell, it has sharpened! I had a dream experience of eating what a carnivorous animal might eat. Also, the connection that was shared with the group was very deep and stilling and enriching to self worth.

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? (10)

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? (10)

The forest was found and inhabited with care and respect and has thus been a loop of healing.>

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation? (10 plus).

Testimonial:

The connection with Dan and others has been Spirit led. The fruits are the testimony. Because of two experiences directly related to these exercises, my attitude toward nature and people is and continues to become one of asking permission to enter, to offer, to exchange. And from the other experience I am entering the exploration of entering fully into the interior and bodily space of another animal, human. Yesterday I looked at a man coming out of a door and instantly his situation and concern was "known". I verified this with my mother (it is her neighbor). What can we sense in others when we are open to the experience? This course also re-framed what I would like to see happening in education. It has helped me identify the consequences of misplaced self worth. Thank you Dan.

Robbie, Group One

Before

1. What I like about my home: It's slightly dilapidated earthiness, the east-facing window in my bedroom through which I can experience the fresh morning sun, my back porch.
2. Directions from where? Hmm. Get a map. Find the Cooper River. Boat northeast across the river. Drag yourself up the bank, avoiding the cutting edges of oyster beds. Walk north east about 1 1/2 miles until you come to a wide creek. Swim or boat across the creek. Continue walking, keeping a view of the water to your right. Draw a visual line about 1/4 mile in from the later and about 1/2 mile up from the creek. Where they intersect is about where you'll find me. Holler and I'll come running.
3. I don't pay for distant weekend retreats because I can't afford them and because I don't think they can tell me too much of anything that my blessed home and yard can't offer me. Feeling

connected to place and being rested is much more important to me than potentially meeting wonderful people who live in distant places and then having to leave them.

4. The biggest balancing factor between my work and home is that I don't work too far from my home, and that my work schedules allows more time at home than many conventional jobs do. Also, at work I am surrounded by 3200 people everyday who also live in the Lowcountry and either relate to (or have the ability to relate to) the same eco-place as I do.

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home and outdoor natural areas in a more ecological way of belonging? How? Yes. I appreciate my modest backyard as a place of magic. I think of it as a haven for wildlife and a cloister for me.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? (9)

Comments? These activities, particularly the activity where we ask permission to interact with something in the natural world, helps me feel like I have family members and friends all around me in the form of tree leaves, blades of grass, acorns...

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and outdoor natural areas could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Comments? (10). I feel much more grounded and connected when I stay home and interact with the natural world, be it hanging laundry outside in the sun, watering the plants, stacking wood, pulling weeds...

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Comments? (5). My income allows me to have a home. I actually like the separation between my work for money and my home life. My home spaces don't remind me of my work, and I rarely bring work home. However, I do wish that public education was much more connected with our ecological reality.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation?

none	some	complete.
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1	5	10
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(9). I need more hours in a day and more days in the week to enjoy all the blessings my home has to offer.

Laura, Group Two

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home.

A. I like the bright light in my home. The large windows allow the outside light to "be" inside.

B. I like being near water and being able to watch the marsh as it changes with the rise and fall of the tides.

C. I like being able to see sunrises and sunsets from most windows.

2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

A. My home is located near the marsh, in Mount Pleasant, facing Sullivan's Island. The waterway is quite close to the house. The harbor of Charleston can be seen south of the house.

Sullivan's island is east of the house. In front of the house are two live oak trees. Next to the

house are two crepe myrtle trees. The house itself is about halfway of the island known as Sullivan's Island, except on the Mount Pleasant side.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?

No. It does not happen because on weekends I am too busy working chores! In an ideal world, my home could provide this, but I have not done the work to make it happen.

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?

Balance could be better. I spend a lot of time at work. This is a hard question to answer because I am not in balance about this, although I love my work, and my home.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home. (7-8).

none	some	complete.
1	5	10

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging?

How? I have an increased awareness and appreciation for nature and its gifts. I have a greater desire to conserve and protect my natural surroundings.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation?

This course has helped me see the harmony within nature, and appreciate its beauty. (9)

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?

I never would have thought so, but yes, my backyard has been a source of learning. (10)

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?

I feel that my work, although fulfilling, keeps me from being in my home as much as I would like. I do not feel completely in balance with this. My income is not the issue. It is more of a time thing.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the

NSTP Orientation?	none	some	complete.
	1	5	10

(8 or 9). I have had some wonderful learning experiences with this work.

Leslee, Group Two

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home.

I love the neighborhood, I liked the price, I like the living room which I just decorated with one of my friends and all the color.

2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

After crossing over the Cooper River, out of the Peninsula...head east towards the Ocean, follow the tree line on the right. You will pass a creek. After the creek go into the forest on the right and follow its main passageway (where the trees are cleared in a path down until you get to an intersecting passageway (meaning trees cleared in a path) near the marsh. You will know because you have gone through a very dark place where the trees overhang more than usual AND it is beginning to clear at that intersection especially on your left as you look out. Also it is not all the way down to the marsh. Turn left follow along the pathway as it is parallel to the

marsh until you see a small forest of trees and brush which has not been cleared like the others. Turn right when you see the Big Oak Tree on your right. Go down until you get to the ditch or small creek mostly covered and lined with trees making a border. My house is attached to the other houses but is marked by a *tiny* Mimosa tree with a border made of stones and shells.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Almost

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Not much

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home. (4)

none	some	complete.
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1	5	10
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After

1. Now that you have completed this *NSTP* Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How?

Yes. The small patch of living things I call my backyard brings me peace as I see how I can easily connect there. What is more, I now relate to my backyard as everywhere and this is phenomenal and expansive.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this *NSTP* Orientation? (9)

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? (7)

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and

your home? My work for income is coming into harmony with the harmony I am now starting to feel at home. This has been the work for me to get to the starting point of harmony and home.

(See the next question for more. (5)

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the *NSTP*

Orientation? (10) I believe my commitment to NSTP and some breath work brought the most powerful change in this area. All of my childhood no adult was home, and I abandoned the idea, which I think is crucial in developing security for later years. The NSTP was a whole and new approach, which has helped me realize that my *awareness is my home*. The connection to my home was a cinch from there and very satisfying.

Stephaney, Group Two

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home.

That it is so near the beach, that I can awake in the morning and quickly be near the water; that It has 3 amazing pine trees and loads of pinecones and birds. That it is so high up that it is near the treetops, that it is within close proximity to all the restaurants, green heron grocer, and the post office. That it has enough space for me and that I am gathering little treasures around me. I also like that there are so many birds, and that there is a landing for me to put my fountain and my plants. I love all the old wood and the bead-board walls. I love that it is an extension, a creation of myself.

2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

This island is a very singular one. Edgar Alan Poe (from Goldbug island)

Oh, I like this question; If you hit the water you've gone too far! When you arrive on the main street of the island, which is right past the unmarked cemetery, you will see a large clump of trees with a brown wood fence. Turn right, there, go past the empty lot that has a split rail fence with several boats parked on this lot. Walk one more block, there will be a gazebo on your right; turn left here. I am the first long driveway with 3 very large pine trees.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?

Yes, yes I do. I do believe both are necessary; yet the I must now have a place to come home to. I look for my backyard to be the place I come home to after that week-end workshop retreat. I want my home and yard to be a retreat of their own.

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?

That both my work and my home subscribe to life as art. That they must create for me a way to utilize my passions, my home must be an oasis for me to create my workshops and to be able to sip tea, listen to birds and wind chimes. It must be neat and uncluttered or it takes away from my earning potential. Right now my yard seems to serve as a place for me to paint furniture, I seem to hang upstairs in my screened in porch to avoid the mosses and the ground level noise.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home.....I would rate this a (7). I really do not have much of an outside space; I am satisfied with the way the inside of my home is coming together, but it is a constant source of interest and change.

none	some	complete.
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1	5	10
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After

1. Now that you have completed this *NSTP* Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How?

Yes, yes, yes. I now have a relationship with the 3 trees that surround my tiny yard. The pine needles, which were in the springtime a host to fleas, are now a comforting bed of needles. I have the luxury of sea and pine and know it. I have taken the time to arrange my sanctuary so that it is more welcoming with ferns and chimes, and a fountain and an arrangement of stones and collections from the sea. I now appreciate both the sound and silence in my backyard.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this *NSTP* Orientation?

Yes, as evident from my earlier reply, I thought my backyard was inadequate before, now it feels more like a retreat. I have been aware of the nature around me, I am more connected, yet I still feel there is work to do with connecting, even a greater sense of peace and harmony (7).

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Absolutely, this has been the intent, it will continue to evolve, but a sanctuary has been created (8).

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income and your home?

Oh the potential of 10; right now in this moment, I am away from my home, traveling much, I KNOW, however that I have that home, that sanctuary to return to (10) but the shape and attention it needs right now makes me rate it a (7) in two weeks it will again be a 10! I feel joyous to have the opportunity to have harmony and balance in my work and in my home, and to have the potential to work out of my home, and take little breaks on my porch and in my yard

and my new collection of *pinecones*.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the *NSTP* Orientation?

Varying, immense satisfaction with the work itself, I have grown doing this work. I do have to say that time and travel has been an issue for me and I look forward to doing more work in Charleston and near Charleston, and I want to say that even though I have been immensely busy during this segment, that this course has been a priority for me to make time to do this, to fulfill this work and to 'stop' regardless of what I am currently doing to take time out to be with nature, to set the alarm, to get up from the table, to shut off the computer, and just go to the beach or to sit at the foot of my stairs. My degree of satisfaction has been high.

Testimonial

I have always had a deep kinship and connection to nature. Yet this backyard sanctuaries course, along with gentle encouragement and guidance from Dan, has deepened that kinship. Even when I was certain, I was connecting to nature, I *realized* that I was not taking time out to savor that connection. This course guided me to do just that.

Debi, Group Three

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home. Ok. 1. I like that it's paid for. It's cozy, small, and fits my needs. It's well made and doesn't require a lot of upkeep. I like that it's very blue. It feels very safe here for me, and my animals.
2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

My home is about a half mile from the ocean and the sun sets out my front door. There is an old graveyard across the front yard with big beautiful live oaks. My driveway is on the ocean side of the house, it's a grass-dirt driveway with some root systems coming up. My house is nestled into lots of tall pine trees. The yard is fenced in with arbors at the gates and in the spring and fall there are lots of butterflies spilling out of the yard. My home is surrounded by lakes. Only one can be seen from my house.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?

Oh yes, most definitely, just doing yard work is a retreat. Although since they cut all the trees down and move in a house I don't have the same backyard. And the traffic out front now is very load.

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?
Since I work out of my home they are one together in harmony and balance, except for the outside privacy problems.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home. (9)

none	some	complete.
1	5	10

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How? Most definitely. I felt a new reconnection with my home, I feel like I have started a new beginning, a rebirth. I have a new found respect and appreciation for the gifts that are constantly being offered to me by each tree and plant and bugs, squirrels and birds, the wind, clouds, stars and moon, and more! I am so

grateful for the help that I greatly needed to reconnect with all that is GOD all around me. The exercises were each very powerful and progressive as the journey was. It helped me to grow within all of my relationships. I have gained a wealth of friendships, and a real sense of love and protection and continued communication and guidance, all within my own sacred space, which I had lost. This 7week program has brought the rhythm of life back into me, thank you Dan.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? (10+)

Comments? It's something you just have to do and experience, there are no words to express the power of these exercises.

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Comments? Yes, and I am working to support that feeling by spending more time nurturing my home and back yard and I get back now ten-fold, thank you for that gift.

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Comments? The more I connect at home, the more alive I feel and that life force expresses itself in my work and to others and back to my home; one big happy, lively circle of life.

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation? (10).

none	some	complete.
1	5	10

Henry, Group Three

Henry did not respond to the Before or After Survey questions, even after several requests by the facilitator.

Holley, Group Three

Before

1. My home is in vibrant rural setting with no visible neighbor and I am with my horses. =3
2. After you cross Church creek in the barrier islands, this is Wadmalaw. Travel 2.5 miles through an oak tree canopied straight path (its been there a while and now paved) until a fork is reached just past a pine thicket (likely planted more recently than the path established). 1000 yards beyond the fork on the left is a path through a forest of every variety of Lowcountry tree with a lot of scrubby young trees right now, the ground is high here. travel around 1 mile (1/2 mile you will cross a marshy creek) and then go right to switchback into the corner of high ground between the marshes that nearly converge from 2 fingers of Bohicket creek. The ground is slightly rolling now in the horse pasture with many varieties of trees, magnolia, oaks, cedar, holly, dogwood etc.
3. This home I am blessed to live in now is a retreat for sure. The flip side being it is also a lot of work. However I might add that everywhere I have ever lived has been my retreat. The apartments in town, in Vegas suburbia, anywhere; my home has always been with me and the little nests I build are my well-being spaces.
4. My home provides me with opportunities to connect with a pace of nature, which lends balance and grounding to my work for income as well as to transmit the feelings of this pace to

others I connect with at work.

5. Degree of fulfillment of my home = (10 minus the bug factor = 9).

After

1. The course did help to experience my environment here in a more ecological way of being. I feel more connected with and responsive to nature's requests, gifts and messages. The layers of my interaction here are deeper, the details greater. Mostly when I imagine the expanse of the whole environment surrounding me out here I feel more of a sense of family and interdependence and trust.

2. Scale of (8) for belonging and peace. The 2 points left are one for the bugs and my attitude of the work my body uses to upkeep and fight the elements at times, the other point is for the many things I still do not know about my nature and look forward to forever discovering.

3. (10) for my environment as a getaway. I am blessed with a getaway everyday and wish I could work here.

4. Scale of (5). I am blessed that my work with animals is connected to nature and that nature here makes me better at my job and helped me find that relative peace. The 5 is for the years of much work for me to attain this number of peace with my job, it is a rough job full of pain and turmoil and emotions and human recoil, the 5 is for the balance I found with rolling all that stuff off and seeing some beings receive help with gratitude, it helps me remember my gratitude. The other half of that 5 is because my true longing is to not speak to many humans and never leave the property for others needs. Funny that my very longstanding (15 years) selfish wants that do not involve service in the current capacity may be what is keeping me in this reality, what you run from always finds you.

5. Satisfaction of (9 with my home. minus one for the bugs mostly for the horses sake).

Thank you Dan for this course. It has been tremendously worth the extra effort required and was really not very effortful anyway to force changing of time schedules to do it. If I didn't talk so much it would have been even quicker.....These simple exercises I can return to over and over and always receive benefit. Church for someone who does not attend a church building of any kind.

Kathy, Group Three

Before

1. List and briefly describe three things you like about your home.

I like my private space especially in the room with the fireplace. This is where I go for my sacred time every morning. I enjoy the height and feeling of openness in my living room. This is where everyone gathers, and it is surrounded by tall windows, that allow warmth and color from the sunlight. I enjoy my kitchen because of the skylight, which brings natural light to my creative cooking.

2. Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.

From where? North Carolina? As the bird flies follow the Blueridge Mountains, onward through the Shenandoah valleys, northward through the Cumberland valleys. Enter the Appalachian chain as the valley soil turns from red to clay, and becomes rocky. Follow the chain northward until it parallels the Susquehanna River. Follow the river northward until it intersects with westward flowing Chemung River. The river flows gently toward a plain, and gradually climbs to a flatter valley. Turn northward following the valley between the two twin-like hillsides until you reach a large lake. Phew! Flying is exhausting.

3. Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?

No. My actual home was a kind of compromise so that my kids could walk to school, and I could have easier access to get to work. Even though it is a small town (only 2 main streets), it is the center of activities. The school bus garage is directly across the street, as well as the motor racing library. It is noisy for me, but the access it gives me to the hanging valleys and trails (less than ¼ mile from my home) is okay for now. I think a distant workshop allows a perspective of other natural areas, and may allow for exploration, sharing, and a deeper respect for our landscape.

4. What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?

Really great question! I have a constant struggle with this. My ideal life would be living/working outdoors, probably teaching education in nature, and therapy in nature. I am working with social service referred families who don't appreciate their own lives, let alone the breathing plant that they are blowing smoke on. The other issue is that the beauty of the area is not supported in jobs. So, I have to either drive far to make more money, or drive less and struggle more. What a paradox!

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home.

none	some	complete.
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1	5	10
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I would give this a (6). I never stay anywhere too long!

After

1. Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How? I think any activity that helps us feel deeply moved, and expand awareness regarding our collaboration with nature is

beneficial. Sometimes the tough part is to know what to do with your expanded awareness.

Sometimes it seems like an uphill challenge to try to cope with our degradation of our land.

Being patient, keeping the faith, and trying to model the way isn't always easy.

2. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? I think it's a paradox of feeling a kind of serenity, affiliation, and knowing almost cellular, and at the same time never wanting to leave that center. For me, it's taking the harmony back into the external world that is the true practice. (9) Comments?

3. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Comments? Well, what's been kind of strange for me is that you have been able to meet face to face, and create an encounter together. So, I'm wondering as one member who couldn't be there what it was like for your sense of unity and commitment, compared to only writing exchanges. I really value both the individual work, and would love to embrace other folks simultaneously. It would be great to hear your thoughts.

4. On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Comments?

I really sense the destiny for many of us is to live in the world, and to be of the world at the same time. Being overly grounded within the material can certainly distract one from expanding upon nature's spacious networks, and on the other hand to live within only the nature-connected world is to do a disservice on one's calling. To me, as stated it is about bringing purpose, value, and integrity out of the forest and into the messiness and chaos of the worlds we live in. It's almost like saying the only way I can find peace is to retreat to a monastery, whereas, what is really

tough is to bring the monastery into the world. I have hopefully just created a way to do both by micro-roasting coffee beans from around the world. This way I can teach ecological sustainability and LIVE. My coffee is called “The Philosopher’s Stone” wherein I am resurrecting the alchemists from medieval times in man’s search for the truth in nature, thus the “stone”

5. Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation?

none	some	complete.
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1	5	10
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I am a person who has always been in love with many elements of nature. I enjoy the nstp philosophy, but being honest I feel it can be a limited approach, because of such a high emphasis on the ‘stories” we inherited. Stories, to me, are critical interwoven fabrics of our language and can be controlling and limiting, but also metaphoric, symbolic and mystical. I think the key is in understanding the nature of stories, and greater emphasis on the attachment of the ego to the story. I think there could be greater emphasis on the many theories that exist on separation from nature, and each theory should be explored.

Rosemary, Group Three

Before

1. My home is small which gives me a sense of connectedness yet my yard is very large and expansive feeling; the boundaries in the back yard are so thick with trees and shrubs that I can’t even see my neighbors. The kitchen is large with a big table so it’s where cooking and eating

and gathering happen together. The floors are hardwood, which keep me feeling like I am in the woods.

2. Follow up the Ashley River from its inception at the Atlantic Ocean. At the wide water and the wide bend in the river, begin to look left for the creek that crosses to the Stone River. Follow that creek to the avenue of oaks. Go right on the land a portion of a mile. Begin to play a musical instrument and listen for my dog singing.

3. Since my space is “in process” I spend time working on it. This, of course, is good for my well being, but it is still labor. To enjoy each accomplishment is wonderful, but it does not afford me much rest, as I am always seeing the more I want to do.

4. My home is a welcome retreat from my work for income. The two so far have been separate experiences. Since I have almost completed my pottery studio in my back yard, I look forward to the transition this year will hold for me in working more and more at home. I see, though, the need to have places of fulfillment outside of the home/work space.

5. I am on (#6) with my satisfaction with my home. I do want to make some furniture and color changes in the living room. A sofa and new curtains, maybe paint. The two dogs keep cleaning a constant activity, so I am looking forward to spring time when they will be outside more. I am planning to change the dog fencing so I can walk to my studio without having to go through a gate. I want to plant more flowers etc around the studio, to transition it from a construction site to a beautiful place.

After

1. The exercises I completed gave me a deeper sense of nature, by stopping to look, see and feel and an inner refreshment & peace. So often I am doing: taking a walk with the dogs (not much

time for reflecting there), working in the yard (dig, haul, water, mulch) all too much movement, action. I have the experience now of my backyard being a place to rejuvenate, not just labor.

2. I struggle to settle. I still want to complete the other portions of the course. I can see that by completing the course work, I will benefit from this process of being and not doing. The two exercises I did melted my heart. I've got some issues to address here personally regarding settling in to feel. I did feel an increased sense of belonging, peace and harmony after the two exercises. Maybe you could consider, for the tough cases, a weekend in the woods, where we would have carved out for us this time to stop and be. (3)

3. As a daily place of rest, I think the backyard sanctuary can be beneficial (6). To lay my eyes on a new geography is so completely refreshing. I believe that such change is essential.

4. I don't know how to scale this question. I feel competent at my job but it is stressful at times. My need for control is part of what creates the stress. When I come home I feel protected, safe, at ease, an overall increase in well being.

5. I feel deeply that I need to empty myself out so that I can stop and feel what you are making available for us to feel and experience with this course.

DISCUSSION

Can indoor, abstract thinking and behaviors be reconditioned in the outdoor, natural areas of one's dwelling, to register awareness of our greater ecological belonging and community? This study provided participants with a brief background of information about the NSTP, explained what they would be doing, and offered my guidance as facilitator of the study. After completing prerequisite background readings, the program process utilized three direct nature-connected activities. The first activity was selected especially to reorient and restimulate direct natural sensory connection with the outdoor natural areas of ones home or dwelling, while encouraging partnership participation in the activity. As the findings indicate, several of the participants chose to do this Blind and Silent Sensory Nature Walk as a solo activity, although there was a brief demonstration of the activity at each group's orientation gathering and introduction to the study, for each group. As an indication of participant freedom and creativity in experiencing the activity in their own way, Holley chose to share this activity with her horse, and Leslee did the activity twice with children. Amanda and Robbie chose to use their experiences at the orientation gathering.

As the program process continued with the second activity, Exploring Mutual Reverence: Treating the Natural World as Yourself, participants were introduced to a key NSTP element of communion and reciprocity through gaining consent with a natural area and attraction. Any initial confusion with guide questions, such as Holley with question five in activity one, seemed to have been settled through my assistance as facilitator. Cognitive awareness of what the participant finds in common (what is mutually shared) with their direct natural sensory connection, can reestablish a seamless awareness through participation, and an inherent reverence can emerge through such relationship identity with ones' greater ecological household.

Helen's experience with activity two demonstrates a relationship identity and belonging with the greater ecological household,

"Today's experience was quite moving for me. As I sat there listening and being with nature a sudden powerful presence came over me, a collective nature presence, and I felt myself acknowledging that presence. Then this certainty came over me saying,, "Know that you are witnessing what is alive and you belong to this." I don't convey this well. It was a wordless moment I'm attempting to give voice to."

Of the participants who completed activity three, comments such as Kathy, "I feel so unbelievably at home and welcomed", and Debi, "These exercises are so powerful and really have helped me to learn a whole new way of being", also indicate an evolved understanding with the activity program process. Participants do not present any further indication of confusion with the guide questions, following activity two and three.

The Before (Pre-course) and After (Post-course) Survey questions were intended to summarize the contribution that this study has made to improving awareness of relationship with ones' greater ecological household, as well as an expanded sense of belonging and community. One side note may be important to mention. For unknown reasons, one Group Two participant (Stephaney, p. 90) did not respond to the Before (Pre-course) Survey question number two, as written. Instead, she included man made features in giving directions to her home.

Although there was a numerical component for question five in the Before survey, and for questions two through five in the After survey, the additional comments to these questions were of primary importance, in accordance with the phenomenological qualities of the studies' methodology. Therefore, no attempt was made in quantifying these numbers into a table, due to respect for the participants' particularistic and descriptive (Merriam, 1998; pp.27-30), quality in

written expression of their experience. All aspects of the participants' experience with and response to the activity, as is, were of primary importance in this qualitative study. The program process, participant activity responses, and Before and After Surveys indicate that the study made a significant contribution to their experiencing a more conscious awareness of household and a greater sense of belonging and community, through the NSTP activity program. Sight and hearing senses were the bridges to opening other inherent senses, in the outdoor natural areas of their homes. The natural areas of one's home, or temporary dwelling can restimulate our deep need for belonging to the greater natural ecology of place or household, expand our sense of self beyond ego, and contribute to our inherent need for ecological belonging and community, without having to travel to a distant retreat. In addition, this program process reveals our own unique intrinsic value to the whole of nature.

CONCLUSION

Each time we learn how to join together and mend our ties with our own little place called home, we link our souls with the soils that sustain us, and nurture the network that is healing the Earth (Shapiro, 1995, p.239).

This case study has offered a unique direct natural sensory-connected program process, using elements and activities of the NSTP, to 14 willing participants in the Charleston County, South Carolina area, with one participant living in Upstate New York. The study addressed two central questions;

What are some of the cultural operatives, which can contribute to the development of a psychologically or spiritually nature-separated self? Can indoor, abstract thinking and behaviors be reconditioned in the outdoor, natural areas of one's dwelling, to register awareness of our relationship with the greater ecological belonging and community, through our senses of sight and hearing?

Central to the design and theoretical framework of this study was to allow the participants to determine the contribution that a direct nature-connected activity process makes in helping applicants register their natural senses of belonging and community in relationship with their natural senses of sight and hearing. The intrinsic value of each participant was honored above all else. Therefore, as facilitator, extensive rhetorical interpretation of each of the participant experiences was not used. Each participant's experience was to "stand alone" as the primary determinate of contribution. In addition, the simplistic design of this study was and is intended to be used by anyone, rather they be home-owner, renter, or traveler, and including parent-

guardian-child relationships. Some possible recommendations to further studies of this nature are as follows.

- Before and After Survey questions could be improved, as this was a first-time learning experience for the facilitator.
- A wider range of demographics and geographic location could be integrated into the study.
- Greater applicant participation could be encouraged and emphasized in giving a number to the Before and After Survey scale.

Based on the experiences and findings of participants in this study, participants demonstrate that they need not travel to a distant weekend workshop in order to rediscover their natural sense of ecological belonging and community, and household. Sight and hearing sensory connection, using the NSTP, in the natural areas of one's home or temporary dwelling can restimulate our inherent need for reintegrating household, and ecological belonging and community back into our lifestyles. This direct natural sensory integrated ecology reveals our own unique intrinsic value to the whole of nature, for an expanded sense of self-worth, peace and well-being, as a participatory citizen of the greater global community.

APPENDIX A

BACKYARD SANCTUARY PROJECT:

INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT LETTER

Dear Project Participants,

I would like to ask each of you for your permission to explore Nature-Connected learning and practice to help you and me understand how we can live peacefully with all things. If you consent, this letter gives an explanation of what we will be doing and a bit of why.

The graduate work that I am doing is in the field of Applied Ecopsychology and Integrated Ecology. The Natural Systems Thinking Process, developed by Dr. Michael J. Cohen is the focus of this ‘application’.

Throughout the 17 years that I have offered Ecologically Minded Living programs (known as Natureskills) to reconnect people to their primal (first) home, I have collectively and empirically sensed a deep need in people to feel and consciously practice Belonging to this Earth, on their local or Ecoregional level. I also sense a deep need for relearning their own natural language of Belonging in an emotionally undisturbed and private natural area. The Greek word for household is “Ecos”, which includes our greater ecological community, and the area I am referring to is one’s outdoor backyard or natural area. Here, we can relearn how to apply this natural wisdom to our daily lives for the purpose of living in balanced harmony with our primal home—this Earth.

In our urban setting, we can often lose a sense of connection with nature, without the support of other people to engage with the natural world around us. We often get swept away in an abstract way of thinking and relating with each other. My hope is to offer people, a relearning process that they can use to develop a deeper sense of self-worth, peace, and compassion through eco-

community belonging. The purpose is to create a supportive Ecoregional Community Network that reawakens a meaningful Ecological self-worth from a sense of belonging and community with nature in and around you.

What I am asking is very simple, but can cause some anxiety in some people. The practice of understanding our kinship with nature is often disturbing to some because of the dominance of our abstract practices of living. I will send each of you the first of a 3- week natural attraction program process, to begin the process of nature-connected learning and practice. These are sensory activities that are safe, from your own natural attractions, and engage you with nature. There are two pre-requisite website links to readings and activities that I would like for each of you to do, which I will give at the end of this introduction. We will need to create a Group Mailing List in order to post our natural attraction experiences to each week's activity. You can do this by going into your Address Book in your E-mail program.

The mailing list will be sent to the group after each group is formed. Below are links and pre-requisite activities that will give you an overview of the Natural Systems Thinking Process before beginning.

First go to www.ecopsych.com homepage and then plug each link into the Google Search Box

there---1. <http://www.ecopsych.com/insight53senses.html>. 2.

<http://www.ecopsych.com/trailattract.html>

Read and respond (with a couple of paragraphs) to each link. These will give you an overview of information. Post this to the Group, and once I receive these from each of you, I will send the first 3-week phase of activities. Each activity will be explained and a list of guide questions to answer in the post of your experience/activity, as well as a pre-course survey.

Once we all have posted our introductory responses, we can agree on a location (Backyard Natural Area of our choice) to do a Friction-Fire Belonging Ceremony. Next, we will begin a schedule of the activities. At the end of the 3-week phase, I will have a post-course survey question list for each of you to answer and post. I want to thank all of you for your interest and participation, if you agree, and I offer my complete honesty, love and help with this process.

Sincerely,

Dan Shelton

APPENDIX B

Backyard Sanctuary Project

Pre-course Survey Questions

- (1) List and briefly describe three things you like about your home.
- (2) Give directions to your home using the natural landscape and no human created markings.
- (3) Do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat?
- (4) What harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home?
- (5) Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home.

none	some	complete.
1	5	10

APPENDIX C

Backyard Sanctuary Project

Post-course Survey Questions

Now that you have completed this NSTP Orientation, have the activities helped you to experience your home in a more ecological way of belonging? How?

(1) On a scale of 1-10, do you feel a greater sense of belonging, peace, and harmony with all nature in and around you, as a result of this NSTP Orientation? Comments?

(2) On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that your home and backyard sanctuary could offer just as much to your well-being as a distant weekend workshop retreat? Comments?

(3) On a scale of 1-10, what harmony and balance do you feel between your work for income, and your home? Comments?

(4) Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I have with my home after taking the NSTP Orientation?

none	some	complete.
1	5	10

Further Comments:

APPENDIX D

Activity One

Blindfold & Silent Sensory Nature Walk Experience

NOTE: This activity is paraphrased from (Cohen, 1997), to fit this study.

Through sensory activities, we can begin to think and act in ways to exist in harmony and peace with all of nature. The following fun activity is one way for friends and families to readily reconnect with nature.

Do this activity in your backyard or natural area. All that's required is a bandana or cloth to cover your eyes and an openness to wonder. Because we typically rely on our eyes for a large percent of our impressions, covering the eyes and doing this activity in silence will allow us to practice using our other 53 senses (recall list of 53 senses from <http://www.ecopsych.com/insight53senses.html>).

Allow one person to be the guide and another person to be gently led, blindfolded, around the natural environment. The guide leads the explorer to a flower, a rock, tree or any safe part of nature. Do not use poison-ivy for example, or a wasp nest.

The guide asks the explorer to reach out to the object and touch it, smell it, gently feel its motion, its position, and to make note of the sense of direction or position and any other details. Then the guide silently instructs the explorer to lift their blindfold, keeping their eyes closed, and positions them by kneeling down close and focusing their head on the item being explored. The guide gives one tap on their shoulder to briefly open their eyes and "take a picture." The guide taps their shoulder again in a few seconds to close their eyes. The guide continues to lead the explorer in a similar sequence to experience more of their senses in the natural area. After fifteen or twenty minutes, switch roles and allow the guide to become the explorer.

This experience will be refreshing and reawaken participants to nature's own language within and around you, which we can use to broaden our reverence for all things. An added benefit of NSTP and this activity helps us to build a greater appreciation and trust between the people that share it as we learn to discern and perceive the "unseen" natural grandeur and well-being that is within each of us.

Please answer, as best you can, these guide questions for each activity:

1. A general description of how you did the activity and what your personal experience was.
2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.
3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be?
4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how?
5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you?
6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of?

References: Cohen, Michael J. (1997). Reconnecting With Nature Ecopress.

APPENDIX E

Activity Two

Exploring Mutual Reverence: Treating the Natural World as Yourself

NOTE: This activity is paraphrased, by permission, from (Cohen, 2003), to fit this study.

Part A:

Walk out into the natural sanctuary of your backyard, stand still with your eyes closed and breathe deeply, in and out, four times. Relax, and then with your eyes still closed, sense your first natural attraction? Once you are aware of this attraction, open your eyes. How do you feel in this moment of discovery? If you feel different now than when you first walked out into this natural area, what is it that brings your awareness to this difference? Can you recognize that there is a relationship bonding with nature in and around you, and that you are a mutual part of this relationship? Now, walk around this backyard sanctuary and discover another natural attraction---the sky, a leaf, a crawling insect (try not to get stuck with thoughts in your “new-brain,” just be still and follow your natural senses), and ask this attraction, in silence or any other sensory way, for permission to share and learn. Remember, you have established a natural sensory bond with nature and nature does not understand our human created language. Nature senses you in multidimensional ways as well. This will most likely seem odd to you at first, but please try gaining consent to visit and share in this experience. Establishing mutual respect for nature will reveal a deeper respect for yourself and thus a deeper sense of self-worth because you are treating nature as you want to be treated---with respect. Today, how often do we ask to speak to another person? We usually just start speaking without considering reverence for their natural state at the time.

Once you have asked permission to share, visit, and learn, wait at least 10 seconds (looking at a watch isn't important here, only give a short time of stillness) for a response. Remember, nature does not speak our human created language, so what could be a favorable response from nature? Your next natural attraction, as long as it is pleasing and attractive, will be your 'permission'. Natural attractions are 'webstrings' of intelligent sensory information in and around you. For example, one of the 53 natural senses is thirst. Your natural sensory body signals you when you need water. This is a healthy balanced relationship with water and your body. When you have had enough water, your thirst will subside until you need more. In our abstract cultural thinking, we seldom consciously register that this is the natural intelligence we were born with. When we allow our thinking and reasoning to dominate and become linear, we begin to feel that we don't need the rest of the natural world around us. This has caused many problems in our cultural world—particularly the abstraction and estrangement from Nature.

When we practice mutual respect with nature in and around us, we become balanced, reverent, healthy, and reeducated to a greater sense of belonging and self-worth.

Part B: Now, settle, still, and transition yourself into this natural area of your backyard sanctuary and for 10 or 15 minutes, ask this area: "Who are you without your names and labels?" You can ask this in silence, or any feeling way that is best for you. Wait for some kind of response to register in your stream of consciousness. Then ask: "Who am I without my names and labels?" Wait for a response.

Please answer, as best you can, these guide questions for each activity:

1. A general description of how you did the activity and what your personal experience was.
2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.

3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be?
4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how?
5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you?
6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of?

References: Cohen, Michael J. (2003) The Web of Life Imperative: Regenerative ecopsychology techniques that help people think in balance with natural systems. Victoria Canada.

APPENDIX F

Activity Three

Discovering Your Natural Born Self

NOTE: This activity is paraphrased, by permission, from (Cohen, 1997), to fit this study.

The following is quoted from Dr. Michael J. Cohen's book: Reconnecting with Nature; Finding wellness through restoring your bond with the Earth (Cohen, 1997).

“Biologists and chemist demonstrate that the natural world constantly flows around and through us. They show that every 5-7 years, every molecule in our body is continually replaced, particle by particle, by new molecules attracted in from the environment and vice-versa. The natural environment becomes our body and we become it a dozen or more times during our lifetime. We and nature are each other.”

“This means that since we are part of the natural system, nature must communicate with us in some way. We learn to ignore that communication, so it seems invisible to us. We rarely identify or validate how nature communicates with us, yet it does so continuously.”

Part 1: Walk out into your backyard or natural area and sense your first natural attraction. As in the previous activity, gain this area's consent to share and learn. Write down what you like about this natural area and why. For example: “ The plant, animal, sunlight, or wind I like in this natural area is _____. I like it because/why_____.”

Part 2: Now, place the phrase “ I like myself because” in front of the “because/why” statement above.

Read this part 2 statement to yourself in this same area---in the mutually present moment of this natural attraction area. What do you sense? Can you find a mutual connection with nature in yourself from part one and part two? The natural attractions you share with nature are a mutual

part of you, and all nature. You were born with these senses/attractions for your regenerative harmony with nature. You did not have to be taught this, but you may need to re-educate your dominant new-brain linear thinking to balance your awareness and practice of balanced and mutually reverent harmony with nature. Our natural attractions with nature mutually sustain the harmonious balance we need for sustenance of life. However, we often practice false disconnected cultural stories that bring about many of our disharmonies and illnesses. Our natural senses are alive, need nourishment, and are attractions of wholesome balance and well being for all things in nature---even rocks. Can you see how these natural attractions are what hold nature together? The following is also quoted from Dr. Cohen's Reconnecting with Nature.

"Nature is a Nameless, nonverbal process."

"Natural senses and nature are intelligent."

"Natural senses in people are attractions to parts of nature."

"Natural senses are forms of love that we feel."

"By connecting with nature through consensual sensory contact with natural areas, we learn how to habitually think like nature works. We gravitate to what attracts us in a given moment."

Thus, the Natural Systems Thinking Process –NSTP.

Please answer, as best you can, these guide questions for each activity:

1. A general description of how you did the activity and what your personal experience was.
2. The three most important things learned from the experience. If only one thing was learned, this is just as important.
3. Did the activity give you a new perspective on Self-Worth and what that might be?
4. Has this activity helped you relate with your backyard nature sanctuary as part of your greater ecological home, and how?

5. Can you sense a connection with your natural attraction experience that is a self-evident part of you?
6. Do you have an expanded perspective of a greater ecological community/home that you are a part of?

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