

Trumpeter (1994)

ISSN: 0832-6193

Integrated Technology: The Process of Counseling with Nature

Michael J. Cohen
World Peace University

About the Author: *Michael J. Cohen* is a Professor of integrated Ecology at the World Peace University and founder and former director of the National Audubon Society Expedition Institute. He is the author of several books, the most recent of which is *Connecting with Nature: Creating Moments that Let Earth Teach*. The article printed here appeared in longer form in *The Humanistic Psychologist* 21, 3, 1993. For a reprint of the larger article from which this is taken, contact the author at Box 4112, Roche Harbor, WA 98250. (206) 378-6313

Whenever our nature-estranged thinking aggravates our inherent multitude of natural senses and feelings, it creates the stress that underlies most of our personal, social and environmental problems. This stress further estranges us from experiencing nature's wise, self-balancing unconditional love within and about us. A new integrated ecology training program uniquely addresses this great challenge to the educational and psychological community. Ecopsychologically counseling students in natural areas over a thirty year period has produced 97 unique nature- connecting activities that renew over 49 inherent sensory fulfillments. Dramatically, the activities induce critical thinking while in natural areas. They let our natural inborn feelings of love and understanding express and validate themselves. This process catalyzes responsible relationships by filling the sensory voids which fuel our apathy, dysfunction, and dependencies. It gives natural areas added value as rejuvenators of our biological and spiritual integrity.

Overview

All people are feelingfully connected. We enjoy the same migrating birds and whales, the same air and water. We love our beautiful landscapes, humanness and spectacular home, our living planet, Earth. It is our sensitivities to and from the natural world that connect, sustain and rejuvenate us. Culturing them has been shown to create wise responsible people(s).

Although a delicate wildflower delights us and our pets or house plants give us pleasure, society seldom teaches us that we neither learn or earn the ability to enjoy our rewarding natural feelings. We inherit this gift. At birth we, and most other living things, biologically inherit at least 53 different natural sensory attractions. They are nature's way of building relationships, of non-verbally sensing, knowing and enjoying life. They include pervasive natural sensitivities like taste, sound, community, nurturing, place, compassion, reason, trust, music, hunger, empathy, language and belonging. Each natural sense feelingfully conveys and integrates our vital natural connections.

Today, thirty years of all-season outdoor education, counseling and research in over 260 national parks, forests and sub-cultures offers the public a new science and learning process called *Integrated Ecology*. It uses personal sensory contact with natural areas, in backyards, parks or back country, to unleash our natural ability to relate and survive

responsibly. Integrated Ecology teaches us to critically think about making sense of our natural lives. Rationally, it sustains our good feelings by sentiently connecting our inner nature to its wise, balanced natural origins and integrity, the nature of a person, natural place or thing. The World Peace University, a non-governmental organization of the United Nations, trains counselors, educators and students to use Integrated Ecology's self-guiding, home study methods and materials in schools, counseling and environmental education. Dramatically, the applied ecopsychology program intensifies the sensory communication and support that pervades self, society and nature.

Building Responsible Relationships

Integrated Ecology recognizes that biologically and feelingfully, we and the natural world are "Us", for we are as connected to each other as is our leg to our body. Us is our own and every other person's true inner nature bound to *Us*, the natural world, Creation's unadulterated nature. Learning to tangibly connect with Us connects us to our origins. It enables us to feelingfully measure information, sensations and behaviors by their natural attractiveness and long term effects. We learn to amalgamate with our deeper natural attractions, sensations and ideals, to more responsibly organize our daily lives.

Us within and about us has immense wisdom but no spoken or written language. Because Us organizes, preserves and regenerates itself without producing garbage i.e. without leaving out anything or anybody, Us is unconditional love in action. When undisturbed, Us globally approaches an ever-changing, self-regulating perfection, an optimum of life and diversity without waste, war, or pollution; without excessive crime, insanity, stress, unhappiness and violence. When we learn to let Us express itself within or about us, Us heals scarred landscapes as well as our personal bruises, emotional wounds and destructive relationships. Every species and individual biologically inherits this wise non-verbal blueprint. Individuals and societies that culture it function harmoniously.

Disintegrating Us

As a twig is bent, so grows the tree. We are biologically conceived of the love, wisdom and integrity of Us, as sentient nature-connected organisms. Because we predicate our survival on the conquest of nature, our society educates and pays us to assault Us. Our authorities teach us to spend, on average, over 95% of our lives indoors, excessively separated from nature. Collectively, we spend less than 1 day per person per lifetime in tune with natural areas. We live over 99% of our adult lives knowing the non-languaged natural world through abstract words, facts and pictures about it, not through enjoyable sensory connections with it. We learn to estrange ourselves from Us within and about us, from natural love, support and beauty. Being born and raised bewildered (wilderness-severed) assaults our thinking and our inner nature, the totally loving little child within us. Losing feelingful support from our multitude of natural attraction fulfilments stresses us. Bewildered, we helplessly seek help from equally nature-estranged helpers.

In America alone, stress resulting from our excessive nature disconnection causes 44 million of us to suffer from the apathy that leads to acute mental disorders, drug abuse and low self-esteem. Our stressed immune systems invite diseases that further stress us. Stress dissolves 50% of our marriages and erodes the love in many others. It fuels the irrationality of alcoholism, greed, cigarette smoking and violence. The cost: 500,000 deaths per year and \$250 billion spent from the health care system. Over 70% of our medical problems are stress related. We are not islands. As we remain estranged from Us, our negative social and environmental indicators rise. In the last decade we spent over 100 billion dollars in the war on drugs alone, yet because nature-estranged education, psychologies and therapies don't address our estrangement, more people are addicted now than a decade ago.

The Process

Our biggest problem is the nature-estrangement of our thinking. It seldom recognizes that most stress results from the painful tearing of our inherent sensory bonds with Us, it seldom values re-connecting with nature. Not surprisingly, Integrated Ecology nature-connecting activities dispel stress and apathy because they feelingfully rejoin people to their natural origins. Each activity lets our critical thinking create a nature-sensitive moment. During that special moment, our assaulted natural senses rejuvenate, strengthen and gain fulfilment from Us. We automatically think more sensibly. Additional sensory activities reinforce this process, Ensuing ideas, feelings and understandings motivate natural sharing, community and interpersonal support. We feel better and gain new confidence. We revive, we begin to relate more responsibly. For this reason Integrated Ecology finds a home in the fields of counseling, education, science teaching, spirituality, recovery, peace and natural history. Native elders call it "Indigenous Peoples' science" and "Awakening the Great Spirit within." The hands-on activities work because fully connecting with a wild rose offers 12 times more multi-sensory aliveness, wisdom and rewards than does just seeing its photograph or reading about it.

Environmental Integrity

Integrated Ecology lets counseling and education make a desperately needed contribution to environmental awareness and responsibility. It releases our excessive dependence on destructive artifacts and re-bonds us to the joys of natural wisdoms and areas. Too often, our limited indoor thinking teaches us to only trust environmentally limited ideas. For example, when we learn to mostly know a natural area as economically valuable raw materials or square feet of real estate, we tend to sense it as an expendable, exploitable, economic object, a commodity or resource to develop or improve for progress. This differs from equally sensing a natural area as a personal fulfilment; friend; profound mother; natural wisdom and community; unconditional love; our other body; spirit and healing in action or un-edited higher power. The values we assign to natural areas have vastly different long term effects on them. Tangible sensory contact with Us motivates and gives credence to protecting the natural world.

To believe that we can find lasting peace and sanity while continuously injured by our estrangement from the natural environment defines madness. Through sensory nature connecting seminars, workshops, courses and home study training programs, Integrated Ecology enables the perfection and powers of Us to help reflect and correct our estrangement and its discontents. It encourages our reasoning and language abilities to seek and validate attractive connections with the natural world. We discover responsible stories and sensations that move us. We begin to walk our talk, to live in our ideals and the peace of Us.

Copyright retained by author(s)