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7 Liberation and Compassion in Environmental Studies

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Two circles of students sit cross-legged on the carpet in the classroom. Those in the inner circle speak, those in the outer circle listen. The conversation is intimate, intense, riveting; the topic is environmental racism. But they are not talking about toxic waste sites in Louisiana or uranium mines on Indian lands. They are grappling with their own environmental racism. The fish bowl brings the conversation close to home. A student of color has challenged the group to see the impact of white privilege on the environment; the others struggle to escape the guilt of collective history. I stay back to let them face the issues from their own perspectives. This is not a time for explanation or lecture. This learning is about the struggle itself, the struggle to be liberated from oppressive social conditioning and its consequences.

These students are undergraduates at the University of Vermont, a land grant university supported 15 percent by state funds, 85 percent by tuition. Half the students come from around Vermont, a mostly rural state; the other half migrate north to the Green Mountains from urban New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. They are drawn to the beauty of the environment, the skiing, the partying; the students are mostly white and some are very affluent. Blatant lack of racial diversity has spurred student protests and concerns about racism. Environmental studies students are often on the front lines in discussions of racism, sexism, colonialism, classism. Since I teach classes examining environmental values and ethics, I hear the students' concerns in class. For many, the topics generate a sense of being overwhelmed and powerless. I try to imagine their experience, the world viewed from an undergraduate perspective in the late 1990s. Development, strip malls, suburbia, television, divorce, drugs, and perhaps only each other to hang on to—it is not the same as the 1960s.

To teach these students I must continually try to understand the values they carry and the sources of these values. Who is "Generation X"? What do they stand for? I wonder, is this really the "Lost Genera-

tion"? The students drawn to the Environmental Program at the University of Vermont are already a cut apart from many others on campus for they share a common urgency and a desire to care for the planet they call home. Very quickly, in the introductory courses including International Environmental Studies, which I teach in rotation with other faculty members, the students come to see our program's emphasis on global systems perspectives and the role of human values in determining the direction of environmental health. Each student must mature enough to take responsibility for planning his or her own self-designed course of study through the major, built from a broad range of university and department offerings. Those who want to explore environmental values in depth come to my courses in Ecofeminism, Radical Environmentalism, and Religion and Ecology.

I think it is important to begin by describing the students I work with since they are my co-learners in the process of transformational education. Also, I can't be certain how much of my experience generalizes to students on other campuses. But perhaps some of these observations are relevant where others teach environmental studies. One of my graduate student teaching assistants pointed out that this generation holds a particularly ambivalent relationship to liberation movements of their forebears (DeBoer 1995). Some have lived with parents who chose to homestead and live off the grid or who have fought for women's rights. Some have struggled to find their own "Third Wave" forms of earlier movements. They have been taught that the feminist movement liberated women and yet women, including their own classmates, are still raped every day. At the same time their own peers, reflecting the backlash of the '90s, mock young women who stand up for women's issues. Civil rights is similar: Black history month is well established on college campuses, yet there is still inner-city violence, and racist stereotyping is rampant in the dorms. The environmental movement is likewise subject to question—if so many laws were passed and environmental awareness has steadily increased, how can the world be in such bad shape? Overall, it seems the movements have been inadequate to the overwhelming scale of current issues. The students observe the fragmentation of effort caused by differing agendas; they yearn for some more integrated and effective approach.

In the face of such apparently unsolvable problems, these young people in Vermont turn to their own inner lives. Some feel this is the only place for genuine environmental work—the realm of the spiritual or psychological. If they can't understand racism, sexism, and consumerism from within themselves, how can they ask others to change? This turn toward the subjective is further reinforced by the overwhelming deluge of information available to this generation. Environmental data from almost every corner of the world can be accessed with a few clicks on the computer screen. Nonprofits working for every possible cause are up on the Web with the latest rainforest or human rights bulletin. This generation can learn in a year what it took my generation ten to twenty years to find out about the environmental crisis. But to do this so quickly is a painful coming of age.

As a teacher I feel both compassion for their struggle and need for inner solace, and also frustration with their seemingly extreme individualism. At times their favoring of the subjective can feel overly self-referential, almost indulgent, ahistoric in a way. In my courses I work with the power and tension of this subjectivity, using it as a base for liberation work. I sense that at the core of their self-absorption is a yearning for wholeness, a desire to free themselves from the relentless assault of fragmenting, soul-stealing influences—television, advertising, consumerism, urban development. In order to feel they can make a useful contribution to the environment, they want to first gain some sense of internal strength and self-knowledge.

One consequence of this subjectivism is a kind of political paralysis among my students which is based on accepting everyone's experience and position as valid. In defining the particular nuances of their own perspectives, they balk at consensus and group organizing. Relativism reigns. The context for their efforts in self-definition is less than supportive. Every semester I hear how environmental studies students are marginalized or belittled by their peers as "crunchies," "enviro-geeks," "tree-huggers." They don't want to take a position for fear of losing the comfort of friends, so critical in their passage to adulthood.

In many ways today's students mirror the despair, denial, and self-absorption in the culture around them. It has been my experience as an environmental educator that exposure to facts alone is not enough to turn people toward environmental action. The facts can actually turn people away from meaningful engagement with the issues. They say the situation is too complex, too all-encompassing, too demanding, too scary, too big to tackle. If I don't address these feelings with my classes, I find myself looking out on a room of blank faces.

I have been very fortunate to be exposed to two liberatory models of education which I have adopted in teaching environmental studies classes. Together they provide a philosophical foundation and pedagogical method for working with social and internal blocks to environmental understanding. The first of these is the "despair work" developed by Joanna Macy and her colleagues at Interhelp (Macy 1983). The second model I draw on comes from the work of Gerard

Fourez (1982) in liberation ethics. Macy's work evolved to break through the psychic numbing around nuclear threats described by Robert Lifton (1968). Macy and others, motivated by their own concerns for the serious dangers of both nuclear warfare and nuclear power, pioneered a series of workshops across the United States which gave people of all walks and professions a forum for addressing their fears and denial. They developed experiential exercises, group sharing, and a collective process based in systems philosophy as the primary mode of learning. By leading people through a process of waking up to their own feelings for their world, the work releases bound energy which can then be engaged in positive effort. The aim of despair and empowerment work is to overcome patterns of avoidance and psychic numbing while generating compassion and commitment to act. Like Paulo Freire's work, despair work takes place in community and helps to build community through authentic exchange.

Macy begins by validating as natural the feelings of distress, grief, and anxiety that arise when people consider the present conditions and future prospects for the world. These various forms of emotional pain are seen as indicators of a wider interconnectedness with the web of life. Dread, rage, guilt come up—it can hurt to think about the state of the world, to listen to the endless litany of losses. It is natural to want to block out that pain. But, as Macy points out, this cuts people off from a flow of information and connection that is central to human vitality. The work invites people to contact their own authentic, experience-based responses to the deteriorating condition of the environment. In the group learning framework they are able to share the causes of repressing such awareness—fear of the pain itself, fear of being morbid, fear of appearing too emotional, fear of feeling powerless—and then go on to experience the supportive power of acting in community (Macy 1983, 6–12).

The philosophy of Macy's model directly challenges most Western higher education, which assumes that emotions interfere with objective learning. Subjectivity has traditionally been an anathema to the university classroom except perhaps in creative writing or art courses. For our students at the University of Vermont, emotional response to the environment is often what has brought them to the Environmental Program; it is obvious from the stories they tell us. They speak frequently of their devotion to specific places or their sadness at losing childhood woods to new housing. Macy's work has given me a way to start with this emotional response and build on it. By validating student feelings, I invite them to bring their whole lives and personal motivation to their environmental stories.

At the core of Macy's work is an emphasis on learning in community. Perhaps the most debilitating aspect of painful feelings for the environment is the resulting isolation. Cut off from genuine contact with each other, people fall further into despair. Through exploring these arenas together and releasing blocked feelings, participants in the work find new surges of energy for tackling difficult issues. They also develop compassion for each other and their own struggles in the complex web of causes and conditions. Many of Macy's exercises are designed to foster compassion as a heart-opening antidote to pain for the world.[1] This too is hardly a common element in the traditional Western curriculum which emphasizes competition and self-will as the road to mastery. Even among many Environmental Studies programs, objective science and legalistic policy courses carry far greater weight than philosophy or values-based humanities approaches (Strauss 1996).

Pedagogically, Macy's model is based in experiential learning. The workshops are guided by a facilitator rather than taught by a teacher. The facilitator's role is to maintain a safe setting for depth of authentic contact and help participants acknowledge their own feelings as signals of interconnectedness. The facilitator also helps structure the turning from despair to empowerment through sensitivity to timing and group process. In a classroom setting this process is stretched out over the semester, drawing on specific assignments and class projects to address the elements of the work. I have led this work in both weekend and 10- to 12-day adult sessions for the Institute for Deep Ecology; adapting it to the undergraduate classroom presents new challenges—the constraints of instructional periods, the self-conscious shyness of college students, the high status and power of the professor. In this chapter I share some of the methods I've developed for implementing Macy's work for awakening and transformation.

I encountered the work of Gerard Fourez, the source of the second model, in a course on Christian social ethics for my seminary degree. Shaped by his training as a physicist and Catholic priest, Fourez's ideas evolved through contact with liberation theology and Marxism. In teaching ethics to science students, he developed analytical tools for evaluating issues in the context of social conditioning, particularly patterns of oppression and domination. Fourez believes "the task of ethics must begin with analyzing the established power relationships, laying bare a given society's inner institutional relationships and decoding its legitimating myths" (1982, viii).

The first step in this process is evaluating dominant social norms and values and identifying the agents that promulgate these values. For my students this was most dramatic in looking at consumerism. They

know all too well the social pressures to buy more things; they are more assaulted by media advertising harassment than any generation before them. The next step is to see how these social values make up an ideology that serves those in power and whose rhetoric skillfully hides dominating relationships. When such values have been deeply internalized, they contribute to the formation of "conscience." Fourez suggests that the moral reasoning capacity of one's conscience is more strongly influenced by dominant ideologies and less by absolute moral codes. Social ethics tend to mirror the social structure. Free trade, private property rights, and economic gain are all justified as ethical by those who profit from them. Thus in Fourez's model, questions of environmental ethics necessarily raise issues of relationships of domination.

Fourez's method for investigating these patterns of internalized norms and power relationships is what he calls "conscientization"—waking up the conditioned conscience to see the ideological forces at work. In this process the student recognizes the possibility for deeper moral choice. The work is closely related to Paolo Friere's methods, but is more ethical rather than behavioral in nature. Fourez suggests that people act out of a relational ethic built on actual experience and the stories of others far more than they act according to normative absolutes. People are "called" to respond to others and make meaning out of their lives based on these calls. From this relational point of view, Fourez (1982) considers "the intersubjective world . . . as a field in which [human] beings make calls upon each other and communicate the meaning of their actions" (70). To take an ethical position is to stand in solidarity with those who have called you.

Like Macy's work, this liberatory method offers both philosophical foundation and pedagogical method for environmental studies courses. By examining the production of values and ideologies, students can be freed from the constraints of current environmentally destructive rhetoric and consider other alternatives. In deconstructing their own conditioning, they become liberated from the dominating relationships that restrict their expression of power and ecological self-interest. The pedagogical method of naming these values and relationships and questioning moral absolutes leads to more authentic recognition of calling relationships.

One more piece of Fourez's work is useful for environmental analysis. He points out that most of our ethical principles evolved to handle situations of individual one-to-one human social relations. They do not necessarily address structural situations that maintain overall patterns of oppression. For environmental studies students, structural ethics are

critical, for it is all too clear that most environmental destruction is directly tied to the interests of big corporations, national governments, and even major religious and academic organizations. Individual choices to recycle or reduce consumption have only small impact if the system-wide incentives favor production of more virgin materials. Fourez's model provides both a way to liberate students from dominating relationships that perpetuate environmental deterioration and a method for distinguishing social change from individual guilt. This analytical tool combined with Macy's experiential exercises can generate both awakening and empowerment, freeing students to act responsibly in a relational world.

APPLYING THE MODELS

How then to use these models as a basis for liberatory environmental education? What experiential learning activities could I design to engage students in this empowerment process? In my elective courses as well as the large-group introductory lecture class, I have tried several experiments with these objectives in mind. I oriented the three elective courses around values analysis and environmental action, using student assignments to structure the inquiry. In Ecofeminism we look at parallel patterns of domination between women and nature, reviewing literature in ecofeminist philosophy, activism, and spirituality.[2] In Radical Environmentalism we start with Fourez's work and then examine five radical environmental movements and philosophies for their liberatory agendas: animal rights, deep ecology, social ecology, ecofeminism, and environmental racism.[3] This work evolved to break through the psychic numbing described by Robert Lifton around nuclear and other environmental threats. In Religion and Ecology, we review major world religious traditions for both traditional and revisionist green perspectives.[4] In International Environmental Studies, the second semester of our introductory majors course, we take a close look at North/South political and economic relations as they drive global environmental degradation.

In the Ecofeminism course, students undertake two projects beyond their open-book, take-home exams. The first is an ongoing journal of subjective responses to class discussion. This assignment not only allows students to release some of their despair, it allows me to validate their feelings by serving as a witness through their writing. This sort of response was not uncommon at some point or another in many students' journals:

Sometimes I feel that the problems are too large and too deeply rooted to be changed and I feel frustrated, angry, and helpless. . . . It is tempting to give up by saying that nothing will ever change, the problems are too embedded, and my effort won't make a difference. (DeBoer, 3)

Because many of the students were reluctant to voice their strongest feelings in class, the journal provided an outlet and a place to integrate the principles they were learning with their personal lives. Sometimes I asked the students to read to each other from their journals as a way to move the despair into connection and out of isolation.

The second assignment is a group activism project designed by the group to address a relevant topic of common concern. The project is an opportunity to apply ecofeminist principles to real ecological and social problems and a deliberate exposure to the joys and frustrations of political activism with a community of peers. As I wrote on the assignment sheet, "this project is your chance to change the world in some small and immediate way, . . . to take action and change the way we think or act about women, oppressed peoples, and the environment." To come up with topics, we brainstormed a blackboard list of many possibilities and gave everyone first three votes, then one, until the less interesting choices were eliminated. Though I provided some outside assistance, the groups were more or less on their own to find methods that best addressed their topics. By working in groups of four to six, the students together overcame their individual uncertainty and reluctance to engage an issue. Though some groups suffered from weak group process or poor "chemistry," most focused on their goals and made significant contributions.

One group developed a campus awareness program with tabling, leaflets, and campus lectures on breast cancer and the environment. Another group investigated the toxic chemicals in tampons (dioxin, rayon, chlorine bleach) and mounted warning stickers in all the women's restrooms. This fall a group took on Halloween and the negative stereotyping of witches; they built a shrine to those who'd been burned in earlier witch hunts and leafletted by it outside the library. On Halloween night they designed a pagan ritual for the class and supportive friends to honor the time of year as part of the seasonal cycle. Another group became outraged at sweatshop labor conditions for women and the direct connection for women consumers in the United States. Realizing that many of their clothes were most likely produced by sweatshop labor, they undertook the necessary research to prepare educational literature and petitions of support. Perhaps the most evocative action was a slide show on parallel dominations of women

and animals. The students found very disturbing ad images and photos of women that portrayed them as animals, sex objects, and hunted game. Their moving and insightful script left many in the audience alert and upset in a newly "conscientized" way.

In this class the liberatory work came first through studying ecofeminist theory about the logic of domination. While they wrestled with subjective implications privately, in class they put together the reinforcing dualisms of man/woman, human/nature, reason/emotion, spirit/matter, etc. (Griffin 1975; Plumwood 1993). Seeing through the values and norms produced by the dominant patriarchal society gave them new insights into some of their previously unquestioned behaviors. This mental liberation opened the way for experiential learning through the activism project, in which they responded to a call and actively took a position of solidarity. One student wrote in her course evaluation, "the activism project was great—both a great learning experience and a great way to make friends in the class." By working together in groups, the students built community and support for each other as they took their work out into the wider campus arena.

In the Radical Environmentalism course I assigned a similar activism project, but preceded it with an exercise in exposing values and ideologies related to common everyday products. For this "Life Cycle Analysis" I asked students to investigate a specific product and all the various implications of its use—energy costs, groundwater pollution, shipping distances, volume consumed in Burlington, labor policies in the production place, associated environmental hazards, and alternative, less environmentally destructive options. My students were naturally drawn toward items they held some stake in using: last year the groups investigated coffee, beer, soy milk, tampons, and paper. This year they are investigating products used in quantity at UVM, as part of the new Environmental Council's efforts to "green up" the campus. These groups are looking at locally produced food purchased by campus food operations, the degree of pesticide use, water waste in the dorms, paper procurement policies, and campus investments.[5]

This assignment requires "action research"—going beyond the library to the people responsible for a company's policies and choices. Students inevitably hit some brick walls and begin to see why it serves a producer to keep certain information out of sight. Their frustration points them toward Fourez's power relations analysis; they begin to see the ideological values promoted by producers to ensure consumers will buy their product. Students also begin to glimpse the scale of environmental impact generated from Northern patterns of overconsumption. The soy milk group, for example, found out that EdenSoy milk was pro-

duced in Hong Kong from organic soy beans shipped across the Pacific from the United States; the milk was then sent back across the Pacific to California for packaging and distribution.

In dealing with campus products, this year's class will inevitably be faced with structural issues that require structural solutions. The paper group already knows that the best environmental interests of the central purchasing department are undercut when virgin paper prices drop below recycled paper costs. Although the state of Vermont has mandated that all internal correspondence and reports be printed on recycled paper (a structural solution), no such mandate has been issued from the university administration. The campus investments group wants to know what environmental misdeeds the university might be supporting through its stockholdings in Monsanto and Mitsubishi. Enforcement of a socially responsible investing policy would also require structural change based on structural or social ethics. The university might want to consider whether its investments are consistent with its emphasis on environmental education programs, energy efficiency, and campus stewardship through recycling.

The activism projects for Radical Environmentalism are purposely grounded in the liberation agenda of one of the movements we study. We spend time in class brainstorming about campus ecology issues that would be of concern to deep ecologists (pesticide use, natural areas management), to ecofeminists (proportion of women professors in the sciences, inclusion of ecofeminist perspectives in environmental and natural resources courses), to social ecologists (bioregional planning on campus), to animal rights activists (treatment of experimental lab animals), to environmental justice advocates (custodial staff exposure to chemical hazards). I ask the students to identify who their action strategy for social change will affect and how it will produce conscientization. By applying Fourez's model in their own student-motivated projects, they try out the liberatory praxis for themselves. By presenting the results of their efforts in class, they come to articulate the values and process linked to the conscientization.

In the Religion and Ecology course it seemed clear that many environmental studies students needed to reflect on their religious and spiritual upbringing or the lack of it. Many came to the course convinced that Christianity was the root of all environmental evil. Very few had been exposed to any concepts of stewardship or respect for nature through traditional religious practices. Readings and class discussions offered the opportunity to delve into some of these arenas, but I thought they might leave the students still distant from their own personal anguish about the topic. Thus, based on Macy's despair principles, I assigned a first self-assessment paper which would allow students to encounter their own denial and frustration with the absence of connection between religion and the environment. They were asked to explore ways in which their attitudes toward religion and nature were shaped by experience, institutions, and influential people in their lives. I also wanted them to identify specific religious or spiritual "messages" from their culture and personal history that they carry with them in their orientation toward the environment. The autobiographical nature of the paper allowed for full expression of their subjective experience; for many this was deeply satisfying and illuminating. It was striking how many students felt their spirituality was unique to them, an internal knowing based almost entirely in individual experience.

The second part of the assignment addressed Fourez's work in another form. Often religious messages are closely associated with the development of "conscience" and moral values. It can be difficult to distinguish between religious rhetoric that supports an institutional view and true moral response to a situation. Most Judeo-Christian traditions emphasize an absolute set of moral guidelines as expressed in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. In Fourez's model it is important to identify the sources of influential values and understand how they represent a dominant group's position. This leads to questioning the absolute nature of normative moral commands. This, in turn, can generate the possibility for a more relational ethic based on taking personal responsibility for one's own actions. In order for students to find a constructive green path, they had to be able to see their religious training for what it was—and then go on to make it meaningful in a new way. The most striking comments were from those raised Catholic who had been actively taught to hate their bodies and anything that remotely suggested sensuality (and by association, paganism). The students could see that such anti-body positions not only contradicted their own personal experience in nature (skiing, swimming, hiking, etc.) but suggested by inference that the Earth as body was also to be repulsed (Spretnak 1991).

Following Macy's empowerment model, I knew that it was important for students to keep moving with their insights, that it would not work to leave them struggling and bitter about their religious inheritance. I should acknowledge here that a small proportion of the group did in fact have very strong religious upbringings that encouraged love and respect for the natural world and people. But this gift, too, needed to be put in the perspective of the majority's experience. Thus the second paper I assigned offered a chance to try some new religious practices from various world traditions which could foster a greener

ecospirituality. Students were asked to choose five different religious practices and undertake one each week over a period of five weeks. Some were able to do this with more discipline and rigor than others, but in general, the results were tangible and profound. Some of the practices were:

vegetarianism	Jainism (ahimsa or nonharming)
sun salutation yoga	Hinduism
walking meditation	Buddhism
meal prayers	Christianity, others
eco-kosher eating	Judaism
relations with a special animal	Native American
daily visit to a sacred place	Native American
five daily prayers for life	Islam

Though students confessed their unfamiliarity with the traditions they "tried on," they could plainly see the difference the practices made in their awareness and relationship to the natural world. The discipline itself was the point of empowerment, held by the students, nudged along by the teacher. By releasing some of the disparaging energy in the first paper, students could move forward to find more authentic engagement with the environment. As one student summed up in her course evaluation, "I came to class with a negative view of organized religion being brought up in what I feel was a repressive Catholic tradition, but now I see the inspiration and values that religion can provide."

Though the papers did provide safety and privacy for students in their exploration, they did not accomplish the community-building aspect of Joanna Macy's work. To include this critical piece, I assigned three group projects. The first was to design a short opening for each day's class based on the principles and practices of the religion we were studying that week. Groups of three to five students shared readings, poems, songs, drumming, tai chi, yoga, and guided meditations to set an inspirational tone for the class. Though these required relatively little preparation, they opened a window for a less teacher-dominated form of interaction. The second project was to investigate ecospiritual activism in response to particular environmental issues. I wanted students to realize there were religiously based organizations engaged in addressing population concerns, forest issues, biotechnology, sustainable development, etc. Working in groups they uncovered inspirational efforts by the National Religious Partnership for Life, the EcoJustice Committees of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, the "redwood rabbis" leading Tu B' Shevat seders in the Headwaters ancient

forest grove, among others. This exposed them to the wider green religious community, a community of like-minded people they could choose to join in their efforts.

The third group project was perhaps the riskiest. I didn't really know what would happen when I suggested it. I wanted students to actually try to build community by communicating with others some of their knowledge and experience in the realm of religion and ecology. For Earth Week, they were to design a "service" to "engage a wider circle of participants from beyond the class in questions in the domain of religion and ecology." One group did plan an entire Sunday service for a Unitarian-Universalist congregation where one student's father was the minister. Three others spent the afternoon as "eco-evangelists" at the student Earth Day fair, wearing animal costumes and handing out earth prayers. Two groups worked with children to raise environmental values in a class setting, another organized a cleanup of a nearby natural area, including poems and silent walking meditation as part of the experience. One hearty group waited until the full moon after Earth Day and held a midnight walk at a wooded lakeside park. There in the drizzle they shared poems from various religious traditions and gave themselves to the power of the night.

The last class, International Environmental Studies, was certainly the most difficult challenge in applying the principles of Macy's and Fourez's work. This was due primarily to the class size (200 students) and the class format (lecture). Some degree of intimacy, however, was afforded in the required discussion sections led by undergraduate teaching assistants. Traditionally the TAs had managed their groups somewhat independently, following general guidelines set at weekly meetings with the professor. When I was asked to fill in for someone on sabbatical, I seized the opportunity to orient the course around the upcoming 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. I myself was fascinated by how the event galvanized nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government to develop positions through both Agenda 21 and the Earth Charter. I thought we could hold a Model Earth Summit on our own campus, using discussion groups to represent various regions of the world (nineteen altogether). I really had no idea what I was getting into, but I was sure this would generate community in the class and compassion for the real world conversation taking place.

The course itself had a reputation for being "Gloom and Doom 101," a seemingly endless list of global problems, none of which was getting any better. It was hard to add humor to the lectures when the topics were so serious and all-encompassing—deforestation, desertification, fisheries decline, global warming, human rights, structural ad-

justment. The lectures generated a certain amount of despair and discouragement, especially as students began to develop a systems perspective and could see how many of the deteriorating influences worked synergistically in a negative way. I introduced some of Macy's exercises to the TAs who brought them to their small groups. This barely made a dent in the tsunami of emotional helplessness, so I turned to the empowerment aspects of the work, enjoining the students to help plan the Model Earth Summit.

Each regional discussion group sent a representative to the Earth Summit council which met several times in April before the two-day event following Earth Day. Together with my head teaching assistant (TA) and a research intern, the group figured out student keynote speakers, chairpeople, logistics, music, publicity, and food donations. We designed the agenda to allow each group to present its concerns and then for caucus groups to propose changes to the draft Earth Charter. I encouraged groups to be creative in finding ways to communicate their concerns and to organize to work together where helpful. We held a short dress rehearsal in the lecture hall, where students practiced using the mike to address the entire group formally. This alone was quite empowering for the formerly passive audience to my lectures.

On the day of the event, the television cameras and reporters turned out to cover the colorful scene. Central America's table was covered with tropical houseplants and brightly woven cloths; the Middle East delegation was dressed in veils and long robes. Southeast Asia had free curry and rice to give away; Oceania offered pineapples and papaya. The indigenous groups' delegation followed the lead of their TA, who shaved his head into a Mohawk for the occasion and wore a loincloth. Following the group presentations, we began to address the agenda. Then things got interesting, and I just watched from the back. The four African delegations banded together and insisted on deleting free trade from the Earth Charter, since it only drained their resources and kept them from sustainable independence. The women's caucus staged a sit-in after networking with all the groups to sign their statement recognizing the particular impacts of environmental deterioration on women and children. And the indigenous representatives completely blocked the proceedings, demanding they be given a voice and a vote at the Summit. The student chairs handled each event, doing their best to hear the needs of the delegates on the floor despite the consistent efforts of the United States (acted out by the teaching assistants in suits and ties) to block everything.

The Summit was exhausting in its endless logistics but extremely rewarding in its pedagogical effectiveness. The two-day combination

theater event and international meeting was more than a role play. Based on in-depth preparation in the discussion sections, the entire class became one learning community, sharing its frustrations and creativity as part of the international conversation. We were the first such model Earth Summit to take place in the United States. Two of the TAs subsequently found grant support to travel to Brazil and attend the actual summit, where they organized with other students to represent the youth voice. One student wrote, "I think this was a terrific project for the class to do together. The entire class came together as one unit with a common goal. You don't see classes of this size do this. I learned *a lot* and I think that it was a great project."

I thought this experience had been a one-of-a-kind event, clearly linked to the Earth Summit timing. But four years later I was again asked to teach the course, and again, I felt it essential to do something that would bring the entire group together in a meaningful way. This time we organized around Human Rights and the Environment.[6] As we discussed the various biological and geophysical aspects of global environmental decline, we considered the impacts on specific groups of people in various regions and of various economic classes. The discussion sections researched human rights issues in their own regions, looking for environmental links where documented. Once more we organized a representative council to design the culminating event. This time it was a one-day Human Rights Tribunal, a set of testimonies from the regions of the world, designed to bring attention to human and environmental suffering.

Regional tables held maps, petitions, handouts, individual stories, and of course, the ever-popular regional food. Again we invited the television stations to cover the event, both to raise the issues and to show that students could do something creative and compassionate in response to global issues. The testimonies were moving and well prepared. The Central American section read actual statements from prisoners; the West African section told the story of Ken Saro-Wiwa, recently executed for his environmental work in Nigeria. The Middle Eastern group demonstrated the gulf between white American perspectives and Islamic citizens. Perhaps the most touching moment was a tribute to all those who had suffered from nuclear testing in the Pacific Islands; the students passed out lit candles to the entire group as a symbol of hope in the darkness. One student expressed these feelings: "The Human Rights Tribunal was definitely the culmination of the whole semester. Not only did it unite our class and empower us to speak out, it left me with a feeling of hope that we *can* make change and we will, after a semester of incredibly depressing material."

Both large group events were driven by my desire to engage students at the feeling level and to empower them to speak out and give voice to their concerns. The shyness and timidity of first- and second-year students would have been almost impossible to overcome in a smaller-scale event. By generating such a complex and highly choreographed event, with students organizing and TAs helping, many were swept along in the process of the larger learning community. The sharing of testimonies in a public forum reduced the despair of such stories held in isolation. The horrors were laid bare for all to see; the links between environmental degradation and human suffering were unmistakable. In this forum at least, environmental concern was not mocked or marginalized. The students could take their own feelings seriously and be motivated to raise awareness and compassion in others for the unfolding environmental tragedies. They had the support of those who had been through the empowerment process with them. Now, I hoped, this compassion would serve as a foundation for future engagement with environmental issues, whether local or global.

CLOSING

I am nervous each time I begin another one of these explorations into conscientization. What will come up this time? Will I have the courage to let the students struggle into their own insights? Will I have the strength to engage my own conditioned thinking as part of our process together? Will I be able to face my own ongoing environmental despair as I invite the students to be authentic with theirs?

The conversation accelerates in the student circle on environmental racism. They are not likely to come to any satisfactory conclusions in this round. The subjects are too rich, too controversial, and too far-reaching to penetrate in a single session. Like the experimental assignments and group projects, the fishbowl offers a taste of another way of working. Like the Earth Summit and Human Rights Tribunal, the group discussion provides a forum for sharing feelings and concerns. My courses are popular among students; they seem to want the chance to engage both subjectively and in community. The material is challenging and often unresolvable; the realms for awakening seem infinite.

I am well aware that these experiments in environmental education go against the grain of current academic culture steeped as it is in scientific "objectivity" and individual competition. Academic values such as these may not be the most helpful in generating environmental change. They may, in fact, be a big part of the problem. I believe the most effective response to the global environmental crisis is first a moral response. Emotional connection in a supportive community can strengthen the callings that arise naturally in environmental studies courses. Raising awareness through dialogue can mitigate the unfortunate loneliness of many student journeys toward environmental conscientization.

Though outcomes of this kind of work may not be easily measurable, I am convinced by my students' experience that this work is essential for long-term environmental change. With this exposure to despair, empowerment, liberation, and compassion I hope my students will carry the seeds of empowerment to others and help turn this world toward sustainable, healthy, and responsible relations with all beings.

Notes

1 These include the following: guided meditations on the web of life and overcoming obstacles; a truth-telling mandala for expressing grief, rage, and fear; the Council of All Beings; and various shorter exercises in pairs and small groups. For the Council of All Beings see John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, and Arne Naess, *Thinking like a mountain: Towards a council of all beings*. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988).

2. Textbooks have included: Diamond and Orenstein (1990); Griffin (1978); Merchant (1980); Mies and Shiva (1993); Plumwood (1993).

3. Textbooks have included: Bullard (1993); Fourez (1982); List (1993); Merchant (1994); Singer (1990); Taylor (1995); and Zimmerman et al. (1993).

4. Textbooks have included: Gottlieb (1996); Hallman (1994); Reynolds and Tanner (1995); and Tucker and Grim (1993).

5. For a guide to campus eco-audits see April Smith, *Campus ecology*. (Los Angeles: Living Planet Press, 1993). For sample life cycle stories of everyday items, see John Ryan and Alan Thein Durning, *Stuff: The secret lives of everyday things*. (Seattle: Northwest Environment Watch, 1997).

6. For sample case studies, see Barbara Rose Johnston, ed., *Who pays the price? The sociocultural context of environmental crisis*. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994).

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