

Keynote Address - NZAC Professional Development Symposium, 2 July, 2021



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Tuatahi, he mihi nui tenei ki te mana whenua o Poneke
Tuarua, ki nga kaiarahi o te kaupapa nei
Tuatoru, ki a tatou katoa kua huihui mai nei
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa
Ko Kaumira te Maunga
Ko Pareora te Awa
Ko Airihi te iwi
Ko Des Casey ahau

I want to talk about the meaning the deterioration taking place in the natural world might have for our work. My disquiet about the assault on Nature has been around since the 80s and 90s, and with it a wrestling within me about the work/nature connection.

When I first started thinking about this it seemed very clear what other work occupations needed to do. If I was a farmer I would have synthetic nitrates, fossil fuels, and streams in my sights. If in the fishing industry bottom line trawling, nets, sea birds and dolphins. Business, politics, trades and corporates - seemed clear what needed to be done in those spaces. But I was a counsellor – counselling didn't seem to fit. Counselling wasn't having a detrimental effect on the environment, on climate, on other species. Was I exempt? Afraid not. We are all in this together – we are in a time when the human relationship with Nature, how we perceive and act towards the natural world, has never been under such intense and scary scrutiny. Every one of us, in our working lives, must fit in here somewhere, somehow.

What has taken us into this dangerous situation? Something which is clear is that first peoples, indigenous peoples, aboriginal Australians, Pasifika people and Aotearoa's tangata whenua have not been the push behind the precarious situation humanity and nature are in. But outside those who have had this intimate connection with nature, humanity has been putting its stamp on nature for a very long time, especially since the industrial revolution. But now, seemingly quite suddenly, the state of the natural world has caught up with us. What is the context for this crisis? A few words about this – as I see it. Following the Second World War there was a wave of relief, excitement. Times were still very tough for many people but freedoms, optimism in business, employment, economic growth were under way. But in the 60s and 70s there was a slow-down. Alongside this, political and economic powers became threatened by social forces, social protests, the freedom-loving voice of a new kind of youth, the growth of unions, a questioning of private enterprise and those negative aspects of it that we know so well. An outcome in the West, particularly the US and Europe, was a

determination to ensure economic growth and control. Of course, it spread much further. Neo-liberal capitalism was not born then, but in the 80s and 90s it broke into a gallop. Its manifestations, with emphasis on the private sector at the expense of the public sector, deepened and strengthened. Maximisation of profit; a deification of growth with GDP being the measure of society's health; the intense expansion of extractive industries; fossil fuels, sea-bottom trawling and forest destruction; the myriad production of nature-destroying chemicals and processes; continued insistence that enlarging the apple meant bigger bites for everyone; and a direct attack on fauna and flora, their habitats and ecosystems far in excess of what had been seen on the planet for millennia. These forces were on runaway. Marianne Walters, family therapist, wrote of the 80s and 90s as a time of "glorification of the individual, of me, mine, the self, and the celebration of being good to oneself" pointing out the resultant increased social alienation and decreased social responsibility when "taking care of your own needs became the hallmark of personal power and of the truly well-adjusted individual, where the pull, both economically and conceptually was now the ideology of the self". Not much room there for Nature, its occupants, eco-systems and processes. A couple of decades later and we are waking up to the impact. (And of course not only in the West. Non-democratic and autocratic powers participated in similar or perhaps even worse environmental attack.)

Kaitiakitanga – the commitment to caring for people, the land, fresh water, sea and air, and all that dwells there. As counsellors we focus on this commitment with people each day of our working lives. Today's world challenges us to do likewise with nature, to connect with the natural world as we connect with our own species. And, I think, to do this not only after or as an aside to our work, but *in* our work.

The natural world, and humanity's relationship with it, are both in serious trouble. Two exponential curves are on the march. One is the growth of awareness and concern surrounding threats to planetary life and its eco-systems, the other is the ongoing assault on nature and its processes by the dominant species. Although that expansion of awareness, concern and activity grows by the day, it is the second curve that remains in ascendancy. A turn-around is urgently needed, and we seem not to have a lot of time.

I am not going into all the ways in which Nature is desperately trying to get its message across. We learn more and more about this every day. My emphasis is on the meaning environmental developments might have on our work and how we might respond. There are three areas I believe are worth considering. Firstly, an addition to the way we counsel; not to interfere with the present ways in which we do our work, but to consider how we might include Nature and its processes in what we do. That is, include an ecological context to our work just as gender and culture (Tiriti o Waitangi) contexts were eventually included. Not a word spoken about either of these when I did my first training in 1971! Secondly, become part of a widespread and rapid increase in consciousness among ourselves and our Association, a strong coming together in the context of our relationship with the natural world and the imperative that together we urgently address it. Thirdly, in that awareness and with our Association publicly voice our position and both challenge and support political, business and economic institutions to address the damaging ways society is structured and managed.

Nature is making its position very clear. Our time, *this* moment in human history, is cross-roads time. How do we work together in these three areas? How do we ensure we stay positive – and united - in being part of movement that *is* growing out there. Pessimism and fear are robbers and killers of energy, belief, and spirit – we don't go there. Remember as COVID kicked in, so too a global cry – “It will take 5, 10 years before a vaccine will be available”. We had one in 12 months! We could do similar in our relationship with the natural world. Optimism is a better friend, as long as it doesn't exclude what is required. Maybe the ideal is hope, and a willingness to join in the activity. I like to think of this time, our time, as being invited to be a part of history, an invite straight from Nature itself.

That first exponential curve is encouraging. Even the last five years, three years, the awareness, the concern *and* the changes being made have been enormous. However, the increased awareness and changes taking place are not enough, and not fast enough. If in the 80s and 90s we were in the place we are in now, imagine how better we might be feeling about now – so much further down the track. But we were asleep back then, leaving us one decade, maybe two, to catch up on those three or four that we lost.

Many know there is a problem. What is significant is the inability to build a movement that becomes ascendant, and secondly the inability to spark sufficient numbers to actively interrupt the destructive path we are on. Growing awareness, a consciousness that becomes predominant, and the call for change in how we relate to Nature are vital aspects of what is needed. How do we do this? And how do we bring our work, our profession, to this point?

I want to talk for a bit about work, occupations, in general – a macro look at our occupational world. A fundamental change in thinking and response, a new consciousness about how we do work, a movement of people within their specific spheres of work that raises awareness within their association or organisation striving to attain that goal of a sustainable society, a planet that continues to support life. The emphasis is *quickly*. Time is not on our side. This awareness and call for change must cease being an attachment to our occupations of work, or outside our work, which is where environmental matters presently lie. People head off to do their work and perhaps later, outside their work, some might give environment their attention. Education, health, a trade, a profession, any occupation, any place of work, must no longer be its only priority. Because that's where we're at now – it's urgent that we change this. Environmental well-being must sit equally alongside that place of work in status and in operation. This is different to what we do now, and may not be an easy switch. But we are in a precarious situation. How we think about work and the manner in which we do work needs to include the new reality. The goal, and urgently, is that nothing is done, no work occupation is pursued unattached from an intrinsic connection with nature's need and health. I don't see another choice.

There is something indigenous in the way we need to think. That innate linking, being part of, never separate from but connected to Nature and *its* operations, *its* processes, *its* needs. It doesn't mean leaving the modern world; it doesn't necessarily mean not doing what we already

do (though in some occupations it will include a lot of that). It means connection with and realisation of our being *part* of, a member of, the natural world. I have to tramp back through the bogs of Ireland, across into Europe over the Normandy plains going back centuries, to find all my roots. We are blessed in this country having people much closer to what it means to be part of nature – Aotearoa’s tangata whenua. Despite the distance, though, I recognise the connection and beauty of it; feel it, as I take in a mountain scene, the sweep of a coastline; thank the thrush or grey warbler for its song; peer into a bird’s nest; admire the brilliance of a foreign species of another land; or go beyond the melting Grandad part of me looking into my two pre-school grand-daughters’ smiles to see the perfection that is all about me. All part of Nature, creation, life however we understand it. Ours to protect.

Nature standing arm-in-arm with the occupation itself. Environment as part of the identity of a particular sphere of work. To farm, to teach, to construct is to have an inseparable relationship of identity between work and Nature, and this relationship is claimed as such. This is no different from what any of us did back there in our indigenous relationship with the world about us. Nature is never an add-on.

In summary what does this mean? The participants and the leadership in each field of work will close the gap between Nature and their working world. Also, they will publicly make known their concern regarding the state of the natural environment, this centred round the burgeoning evidence now littering scientific and ecological fields. Participants in each occupation fronted by their leaders will make their belief and position publicly clear; that locally and globally humanity and all of life are in difficulty, that our modus operandi must quickly change, that their occupation, be it a trade, profession or service, is committed to that change and will be calling on government, all political parties, big business and economists to push ahead with radical and rapid change. There are people in every occupation aware and concerned, many active in working for change. But these are as individuals, groups within work environments, as members of an occupational organisation or identity. But not together, not a groundswell within and through the occupation itself that impacts on the wider community, and in turn challenges political and commercial leadership. They will state the need for every field of work to do the same. Theirs will be a call for all to unite and address this turning point for life on the planet.

Turning now to our own work zone. Many in our related fields of work write and talk of the psychology/ecology relationship. Roszak suggests we have locked ourselves away in an “existential vacuum” and, in the light of the damaged state of natural environments, believes that a “psychological theory that cannot address itself to irrationality of such a scale is surely deeply flawed”. He suggests that an “ecological unconscious” lies at the core of the modern psyche, and that the role of psychology is to draw from it in restoring humans to harmony with the environment. Ralph Metzner wrote of “The ecologically disastrous split – the pathological alienation – between human consciousness and the rest of the biosphere”. James Hillman: “One could accuse therapeutic psychology’s exaggeration of the personal interior, and aggrandizing of its importance, of being a systematic denial of the world out there”. And Sarah Conn: “Perhaps the currently high incidence of depression is in part a signal of our bleeding at

the roots, being cut off from the natural world, no longer as able to cry at its pain or to thrill at its beauty". I think of the recent movie "James and Isey" – the simplicity and honouring of tangata whenua connection with nature, locating their being as inherently a part of Nature, never above it, always alongside.

Some use strong metaphors to describe the situation, aspects we might consider and reflect whether they might throw some light on our work/Nature connection. For some: we humans are in an autistic state, unable to get out of our confinement, nor can we let the outer world flow into our own beings. We cannot hear the voices or speak in response. Some suggest our relationship with Nature is akin to sexism. Arranging the world along male lines, pushing women into a backwater of societal non-recognition, has a parallel when the voices of other species and the earth's natural processes are silenced. Superior complex, collective amnesia and disassociation are terms used to describe our relationship with nature. Arrested development or developmental stoppage, addiction, abuse and narcissism are also mentioned.

Back now to those three areas I mentioned at the start as to what we might do. First, our counselling practice itself. Some ideas, things you may already be doing, things we might talk more about among ourselves.

- Introduce nature into your room – plants, posters, magazines, objects. How we advertise ourselves, our profiles, interests, introduction cards. When in a particular place, a park, a marae, a church, a sports club, I know where I am, know something about the place, recognise signs of what the place represents. Once I was asked "was I a greenie" as he looked around my room. It opened up some areas and connections that were helpful in his situation. For some time working as a family therapist I named my practice Sustainable Systems which gave entry to wider perspectives and inquiry.
- Taking opportunities to story a person's experience of nature can be helpful round anxiety and depression. Story the feelings, thinking, what is appreciated. Explore how Nature affects the disposition. How might it create a new story about themselves and their situation? Inquire about possible nature-based activities that might facilitate a change of disposition. How can the change be maintained? What does Nature tell us about what is going on within us? What does it teach?
- Asking people where they feel most themselves, most at home in the world? Often that takes a person into a natural environment. Inquire about what is different; what sustains; what nurtures; what impact does this have on feelings, thoughts, self-esteem. How include this in the ordinary running of their day? What is their contribution back to Nature, what are they able to give back to Nature, indicating there is a relationship here. How might Nature see "you" contributing to "its" benefit as it does to "you"?
- When working with relationships, families, there might be an appropriate time to say something like: "I notice in my work the unsustainable ways in which we sometimes have our relationships. It's a bit like what is happening out there in the environment and the trouble we get ourselves into when we connect with it." Use language and metaphors which link with Nature and also address the person's situation – balance; what sustains and what doesn't; flooding relationships; hurricanes in the family; invading forces; what connects and what disconnects. Many words apply to both what

the person brings to therapy and what applies in the natural world – words such as nurtures, trashes, heals, deprives, abuses, enlivens. What Nature needs, we need. The harm we do to one another is like the harm we do to Nature. Climates can be too hot or too cold in both environments. Both can be endangered, both threatened by extinction. People resonate with these ideas. What we do in our relationships and families we do to the environment, and vice versa.

- Destructive patterns in relationships can be like the patterns we thrust on the natural world. In both there is separation, a lack of understanding of the other and an unwillingness to take into account the story and the experience of the other. Nature intertwines, balances, ensures longevity - these can be mirrored back into human interactions. I think we have to be brave in all this and not allow ourselves to get caught in self-messages of “I shouldn’t be talking about environmental things here”. No, I am working with the relational self *and* the ecological self. We are introducing ways of bringing Nature, the ecological, into the room. We do this with gender and culture; we do it with ecology, Nature. We don’t take away from what brings a person to see us. A couple tells us how difficult and despairing their relationship is, and go on to explain all the ways they are unhappy. After empathising with them, acknowledging how awful it sounds for them our response is not going to be along the lines of: “I can see how bad things are for you, but it’s not as bad as climate change!” No, we are doing something quite different.
- Use of language. Step one – respect the language and the words people use. It might then be possible to expand the meaning and application of the words. For example, words like progress, change, value, growth, security, the future – these all apply in the natural world. This is different from colonising language – taking meaning away and supplanting it with another, as corporates and sometimes business advertising does with the word “sustainable”.

Secondly, become part of a widespread and rapid increase in consciousness among ourselves and in our Association.

- Central here is simply getting together on these matters. Working with others, especially colleagues, as to how we include these Nature and environmental perspectives in discussion, at staff meetings, at our area meetings.
- Counselling holds strongly to therapeutic conditions such as empathy, acceptance and congruence. How might we include and honour these in relationship with other species, their habitats and processes? How can we help one another be inclusive, seeing ourselves and the people we meet as being part of an ecological milieu, not as outside of the natural world but as part of it? How do we manifest this in our work?
- Remind ourselves and each other that the natural world is a prime educator and healer. This is not a new idea. It has been the university for indigenous people for millennia. A word on training. These themes, the ecological, need to be included in trainings: Earth’s narrative; our place in this narrative; damage being done; what needs to change; connection made with any new learning being taken. People emerge from universities with important knowledge and skills for an increasingly sophisticated and advanced

world. A down-side of the learning is a prevailing lack of inclusion of the natural world in their education regarding nature's vulnerabilities, its needs and the careless relationship we have with it. David Orr in his book, "Earth In Mind", is very direct about this: "If one listens carefully, it may even be possible to hear the Creation groan every year when another batch of degree-holding, but ecologically illiterate "Homo sapiens" are launched into the biosphere". Sounds tough perhaps but he does highlight the separation within education between learning, training, career and the natural world.

- With our Association we might look at introducing an ecological context into diplomas, degrees and other trainings. Are we equipped to supervise counsellors who want to make moves in connecting work with Nature? What training is needed? What is available?
- Arrange workshops, interest groups, monthly meetings; link with associated organisations – anything that will raise our own and others' consciousness of connection between ourselves, our work and Nature.
- Something we might look at more closely – the relational self, the ecological self. I can only touch on it here. For much of its history psychology and therapy have located the "me" in a defined and individualised context. We were conditioned to seeing ourselves as bounded and separate from the outside world, so all pain is individualised as individual, personal pain. Now the self and individuality are more likely to be deconstructed, giving emphasis to the relational self. The "I" is always in relation to some other ... We need to go further, include the ecological self. We broaden the relational self through identification with *all* beings, *all* life, including Earth as entities with narratives of their own and in which we are involved. A lot here, I think, that we can work with together.
- I want to acknowledge our Exec. As you possibly know it has moved to set up a working group - CCCE (Counselling, Climate Change and the Environment) - to consider our relationship with the natural world, its issues and what this might mean for us. Also, what support, back the other way, the Association might want from its members as it takes a lead? Perhaps linking with other organisations in similar fields such as the Psychotherapy Assoc. and the Psychological Society – they have been moving in these areas.

Thirdly, how do we go about taking this added understanding of our identity out into the community? How do we support our Association in doing this? How do we go public? And how do we address the political, business and economic worlds which are at the centre of change, the future?

- We may find ourselves resisting this one! Briefly, how do we communicate these things to the community, and where we stand? These things need to be made known? The move has to be as individuals *and* as an Association. Otherwise we miss the point that over and above the vast range of issues in society, which rightly continue to claim our attention and effort, there is an issue that is planetary – humanity's relationship with other life forms and what sustains them. We need to position ourselves clearly on this, make it a part of who we are, and make public claim to it.

- Imagine the impact of say even six work occupations – say teaching, construction, farming, nursing, civil engineering and accountancy (and we might include ourselves with or without inclusion of mental health generally), along with their representative organisations (this is essential) taking this unequivocal stand. A statement of recognition to the community, to society, that the environment struggles big time, that it needs urgent attention, that they/we will be endeavouring to join with other work environments and the community to initiate change. Alongside this a call on politicians, business and economic structures to urgently respond.
- Being stuck is experienced in the present. I remember a supervisor’s advice to me long time past: if someone is stuck, collapse time – go back or feed forward. A final thought here, feeding forward: “If in two or three decades it looks as if we have moved too slowly, the tipping points have passed and the future looks dire, looking back what might we wish we had done differently, been a part of? And how might we have changed the way we worked?” Or perhaps, more positively: “If in two, three decades we *have* reconnected with Nature, the needed changes have been made and a new pathway has been set. The future looks good. As we look back what do you think we would have been doing back then that has brought us to this good place? And what were the changes we made in our work?”

Thank you. Carry the news, spread the aroha, and embrace Nature as you go.
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.