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Networking Patterned on the Environment

Networking Patterned on the Environment

By Fred O'Brien, Honorary Vice President (Ireland) of IFEH

Some years back the National Association of Adult Education of Ireland held a workshop at the Lakeside Hotel, Killaloe. Some 45 people from different backgrounds, principally in the fields of adult education and environmental science, came together and outlined and discussed their approaches to developing a course in adult education on "Caring for the Environment".

At the Killaloe workshop before very long it became apparent that the great variety of perspectives and attitudes present could result in much disagreement. The variety of viewpoints and the depth of feeling on issues discussed had the potential to create a significant barrier to communication and cooperation. In addition to the differences of opinion on what has been termed "soft science" there was a variety of scientific disciplines present with different concerns, approaches and priorities.

At an early stage it appeared to me that the differences in approach presented insurmountable obstacles. But I was wrong. On the afternoon of the second day we were taken on a guided tour of North Clare, and visited the area known as the Burren, a unique environment where Arctic and Mediterranean plants and other life forms thrive. As we walked the road and the land of the area the backgrounds of the different participants came into play in interpreting the environment that we were observing. Agriculturalists, botanists, geologists, ecologists, those familiar with the local history and culture and others completed a picture of what we were looking at.

Finally I found myself with a small group looking down on a patchwork of ground about the size of a tabletop. It contained perhaps a hundred or more types of plants with all variety of beautiful flowers, and, within these, a mix of living creatures, including insects, spiders and worms.

Having experienced this patch of the environment in terms of its great diversity and overall unity, in which interconnections, interrelationships and interdependencies revealed the importance of each element and the significance of the overall pattern, I was struck by the fact that a group of people could form a network, the model of which was the environment itself. Each member of this diverse group had an important contribution to make and our networking was of a pattern of nature.

The environment itself is a unifying force and the environmental health global stewardship challenge is an opportunity to establish a form of networking locally and internationally to the significant benefit of the world community. Human beings are distinguished by a special and complementary capacity for service, which, when properly exercised, can renew the quality of the environment and promote the well being of all peoples. It is necessary

to break down the barriers between the social partners influencing environmental health, and to promote a science of the heart where the complementary capacity for service in each individual is recognized, appreciated and encouraged.

The foregoing was a personal story that the author experienced and contributed in part to the 'Healing Cycle' and 'Pattern in Nature' flowcharts set out below.

