



Coming to Our Senses

Thirteen science teachers met for a week in July to explore human sensing and its importance in science education. There was a mix of experienced and new teachers. Through a variety of exercises we engaged in active sensing that helped us to become more aware of the qualities that are revealed through particular senses. So, for example, we spent time exploring balance (see photo). We also carried out an exercise in which we described a variety of objects that we perceive with our hands, but with eyes closed. Many facets of texture, density, warmth, and form revealed themselves. We noticed how often we ignore these gateways into the world because we focus so strongly on what we see, and we are usually guided in our seeing by the definite concepts we have formed for objects. By practicing using our other senses, we become more open to the various qualities of things.

We realized that when we truly enter into sensing, the world opens up in its manifoldness and shows itself to be full of riddles. The world is always fresh in our sensing. Returning again and again to sense experience (that is, “coming to our senses”) is a way to practice what John Keats called “negative capability”:

... And at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...

One of the memorable events during the course was watching the sunrise from a field at Hawthorne Valley Farm. We met at the farm at 4 a.m. and walked, without flash lights, up onto the field. Jupiter and Venus shone brilliantly above the eastern horizon. Over the next hour and a half we quietly took in—our senses went out to—the coming of the day with all the associated transformations of sound, temperature, moisture, color, and feeling of space.

During the course, we discussed from a pedagogical perspective how important it is to let the students immerse themselves in sense experience. Out of these encounters, riddles arise and the need for more observation becomes clear. In this process a pathway to understanding guided by thinking opens up. It is not a pathway toward quick answers, but rather toward enriched appreciation of the world.

Here and There

- In April Henrike gave an evening talk at The Nature Institute on the location and movement of stars and planets in the springtime.
- Craig participated in a conference on “Spiritual Values in Higher Education: Contemplative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning and Research” in May at Amherst College. There were a number of presentations concerned with contemplative inquiry, and there was ample time for stimulating conversation with presenters and participants.
- In June Craig led members of the steering committee for teacher education of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America in a session on “Morphological Thinking.” This served as the preparation for the group’s weekend gathering in Harlemlville, New York.
- At the end of August Craig and Henrike went to the Ridge and Valley Charter School in Blirstown, New Jersey. The K-8 school has a focus on experiential education and learning from nature. It aims to “promote values of respect, reverence, gratitude, and care for Earth and all living beings.” Craig and Henrike conducted an all-day “Exploratory Learning and Understanding” workshop with the school’s staff and faculty. You can’t productively talk about exploratory learning without having done it. So together we carried out observations and experiments concerned with colors in nature such as the blue sky, which are not pigment-based, and spectral colors (as they appear in prisms and rainbows). After doing some work, we would reflect on the phenomenological method we

were using: observing, comparing, and relating similar phenomena to one another. We also discussed the problem of using abstract models to “explain” phenomena—explanations that often have the effect of distancing children from the world they are trying to understand.

- A Symposium on “Living Questions Research” was held September 20–23 at the Threefold Educational Center in Chestnut Ridge, New York. Craig gave an introductory talk that considered the nature of questioning in the process of inquiry. He also gave a talk on “My Pathway in Goethean Phenomenology.”

- Following the symposium, Craig and Henrike held a week-long course entitled “A Pathway to Living Knowledge.” The course focused on the nature of phenomenological inquiry. We worked with the theme of “inner and outer,” which we approached through different exercises and explorations that ranged from pure thought in geometry to detailed observation of natural phenomena. There were eleven participants who came from as far away as Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

- In October Henrike traveled to Germany and participated in a conference on “What is the Reality of Atoms: 100 Years since Bohr’s Atomic Model.” The conference, held in the German language, gave her the opportunity to hear talks and participate in workshops from scientists and science educators.

- During October and November, Henrike gave a series of workshops locally on “Goethean Explorations of Perspective and Light and Color.” The workshops are part of the Free Columbia Art Course.

- Leading up to the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association’s November annual conference in Madison, Wisconsin, Craig will participate in two different events. At the Mentor Farmer Gathering of the Association’s apprenticeship program (held at Angelic Organics Farm and Learning Center in Caledonia, Illinois) he will lead an observational workshop, “Cultivating Awareness and Observation: Practical Exercises,” and then introduce and lead a conversation on the topic, “Biodynamic Farming and the Development of the Human Being.” Following that, he will contribute to an all-day workshop on “Seeds and Breeds: Breeding for the Future of Agriculture.” Other contributors in the workshop are Walter Goldstein (Mandaamin Institute, Julie Dawson (Cornell University), Harald Hoven (Rudolf Steiner College) and Dana Burns (Healing Traditions Veterinary Services).

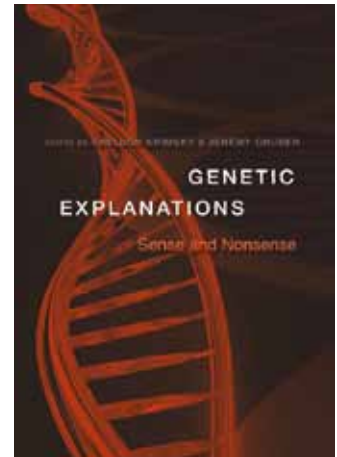
- On November 11 Jonathan Talbott and Seamus Maynard—a regionally well-known violin and guitar duo—gave a

benefit concert for The Nature Institute at Hawthorne Valley School, near the Institute.

For news about upcoming events, you can always check our website!

A Long Time Coming!

In the last couple of issues of *In Context*, we’ve mentioned the forthcoming book from Harvard University Press, with a chapter by Steve entitled, “The Myth of the Machine-Organism: From Genetic Mechanisms to Living Beings.” The book is still not released, but at least we now have the cover image shown here and also a firm availability date: January 14, 2013.



Steve finds himself in illustrious company between the covers of this book, which is entitled *Genetic Explanations: Sense and Nonsense*. That company includes, preeminently, Harvard biologist, Richard Lewontin, who wrote the foreword, and Lewontin’s Harvard emerita colleague, Ruth Hubbard, who pioneered criticism of the modern gene concept with her bestselling book, *Exploding the Gene Myth* (1993). Hubbard’s chapter in the current book is on “The Mismeasure of the Gene.”

The book has three sections: New Understanding of Genetic Science (where Steve’s paper is chapter 5); Medical Genetics; and Genetics in Human Behavior and Culture. Intriguing chapter titles in the Medical Genetics section include “Some Problems with Genetic Horoscopes,” “Cancer Genes: The Vestigial Remains of a Fallen Theory,” and “The Fruitless Search for Genes in Psychiatry and Psychology.” You’ll find the complete list of sixteen chapters and authors at the Harvard University Press website: <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674064461>.

Incidentally, you will find the essential contents of Steve’s book chapter, expanded into three long articles, on the Nature Institute website: <http://natureinstitute.org/txt/st/org>. The articles corresponding to the Harvard book chapter are “Getting Over the Code Delusion,” “The Unbearable Wholeness of Beings,” and “From Physical Causes to Organisms of Meaning.”

See the main article in the Notes and Reviews section of this *In Context* for more about the project of which these articles are a part.

The World of Color and Light

Seventeen participants from across the U.S. and the U.K. gathered for our public summer course to study the light-filled and colorful world. We engaged in nature observation, experiments and painting, as well as in conversation about Goethe's method of research.

One participant, Amie Slate, described the course in the following way:

“Experiencing the unfolding color phenomena was exciting and fascinating. To begin our experiencing of color and light, the first thing we did was go into an absolutely dark room. We sat together in the dark, in silence for five or ten minutes. Can you imagine? Here we are in a color course and the first thing we do is go sit together in the dark in silence. Since we don't experience color and light (in the usual sense) in darkness, perhaps you can get an idea of what we were experiencing — our own eyes and our own thinking. From this very first exercise and throughout the course, we experienced how to develop our capacity for sensing and thinking, and indeed, for entering into the phenomena with ourselves. Our capacity for sensing was made a wholesome and necessary part of understanding the world. That is in itself quite phenomenal!

“After each exercise, there was some kind of review (also with a kind of growing order in it). The day was well organized with different types of activities that all related to each other in a living way. Each exercise built on the previous ones. It was so lovely how no theory was used to frame the experiences. They were really free to unfold, unconstrained by prior ideas and expectations.

“We had several more experiences in the dark room, seeing how light enters that space and begins to shape and reveal form and color. We were given a fascinating experience of inside/outside — it was, you could say, just like being inside the eye itself. We progressed through experiences of color in a large number of categories in a way that allowed them to feel well-ordered. Every afternoon we did painting of color wheels. Though I have done color wheels in the additive world with my computer graphics, I had never done it with the subtractive colors (paint). It was enlightening to do this very structured color blending and see the magical but ordered and lawful appearance of the colors.

“The way Craig, Henrike and Nathaniel worked with this newly-met group of twenty people was very exciting for me. I suppose in Waldorf or Goethean environments, it is not so unusual. But in my field, with my education and upbringing, it is not typical at all. I watched them make space for the sensing and thinking of each person to be made visible. And even more importantly, they managed to hold the space and us skillfully enough that our separate contributions added up to something more, something that was, in the end, not reachable in any other way. For me, this was a very inspiring experience and I hope to do more of it.”



Supporting The Nature Institute: Planned Giving

The work of The Nature Institute is supported by many individuals and organizations, and has been since its founding. These supporters are, in a very real sense, co-creators and participants in the Institute's mission. The tasks before all of us now include planning for the future, not just the coming year, or five years, but longer...perhaps even well beyond the lifetimes of those of us reading this issue of *In Context*.

The Institute has benefited enormously from the generosity and thoughtfulness of many individuals. For example, Seyhan Ege bequeathed a sum of money to The Nature Institute that, upon her passing, assisted us in going forward with a much needed expansion of the Institute's facilities.

Did you know there are ways to support The Nature Institute that will not affect your current income or your family's financial security? You can arrange a gift that costs you nothing during your lifetime, a gift that leaves your cash flow and current financial planning unchanged.

Recently, two long-time supporters informed us of their decision to identify The Nature Institute as a beneficiary in their wills. One friend of the Institute commented on how easy it was to name the Institute as a secondary beneficiary in a retirement annuity, in the event his wife (the primary beneficiary) predeceased him.

We want to share some of the ways you can consider supporting the Institute right now, and well into the future, even if that gift is not realized for 10, 20, or more years.

BEQUESTS

When you decide to leave assets in your will to support the work of The Nature Institute, you are making a bequest. You may decide to leave a specific amount or a portion of your estate to The Nature Institute. We are able to provide your attorney with the appropriate language to include in your will.

RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS AND LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES

Identifying beneficiaries for retirement accounts or life insurance policies can be very easy to do and usually does not require an attorney.

For some people today, retirement accounts are significant assets. These might include IRAs, 403b plans, annuities, or pensions. Moreover, some people have life insurance policies that they have purchased or received through affiliation with an organization such as a professional society or labor union.

Such financial arrangements typically allow the individual to designate a primary and secondary beneficiary as the recipient upon your passing. (A secondary beneficiary would receive the funds only if the primary beneficiary has already passed on.) Naming The Nature Institute as the primary or secondary beneficiary on your retirement accounts can help you to make a significant future contribution, while maintaining your current financial status.

Similarly, you can name the Institute as a primary or secondary beneficiary of a life insurance policy, and/or you also can transfer ownership of the policy to The Nature Institute during your lifetime.

STOCKS, BONDS, AND MUTUAL FUNDS

Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and many other securities are easily donated, and can often provide the donor with tax savings. When you donate appreciated securities to The Nature Institute, you will usually receive the benefit of a fair-market-value income tax deduction, and your gift will be exempt from capital gains tax.

Please check with a financial advisor before deciding on the best way to make a gift of this type and call us for information that will make giving easy for you. In order to realize potential tax benefits, you may donate securities directly to the Institute, rather than selling them yourself, giving the Institute the proceeds.

PERSONAL PROPERTY AND TANGIBLE GIFTS

Supporters may be able to donate rare books, artwork, equipment or other items of value and secure an income tax deduction. It is also possible to make a substantial gift to The Nature Institute through a transfer of residential or commercial real estate. You can even receive a tax deduction by donating a residence while retaining the right to live there for life.

These gifts can be a wonderful opportunity for both you and The Nature Institute. Provided the Institute uses the item as part of its exempt purpose, a donation of tangible personal property can usually be deducted at its full market value, and may be exempt from capital gains taxes.

GIFTS OF CASH

Cash is obviously the simplest and most common way to support The Nature Institute's annual work or its long-term needs. You may make a one-time contribution or a pledge over two, three, or more years. Your gift will be tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. If you would like to pay your gift over a number of years, please let us know if you would appreciate reminders for your future gifts.

We realize that many of our most ardent and dedicated supporters do not have the financial and material resources to support the Institute as they might prefer. We always welcome the enthusiasm and positive energy of such individuals; they are contributing in a vital, living manner that should never be underestimated!



Removing the previous entryway to our building on August 13



Excavation for the new wing



Building the walls of the lower level; the walls are made of 14-inch thick insulated blocks that consist of concrete-bonded recycled waste wood fibers. Once the blocks are stacked, the core is filled with concrete.



The walls for the upper story go up. The walls are framed with a double row of 2x4 studs, so that they are 9 inches thick and form no thermal bridge. They will be insulated with cellulose.

The Building Expansion *What Can Happen in 7 Weeks*



By the end of September the outer shell was nearly finished and we could experience the building in its final size and proportion. It's a beautiful structure and we aim to be using it by February.