

## **2018 Professional Development Program for Spiritual Care Practitioners: Education and Supervision**

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPES AND NATURE IN HEALING AND THE PROVISION OF SPIRITUAL CARE**

Therapeutic and natural landscapes are being incorporated into the physical care of patients and clients within hospitals, rehabilitation and aged care facilities. Memory, sensory, reflective and water gardens, and more generally green and natural environments, benefit the elderly and dementia patients, as well as those recovering from acquired brain and general injuries, illness and surgery.

Therapeutic landscapes enhance the provision of spiritual care and healing: inviting a greater awareness of place and belonging, offering perspective through the experience of wonder, and encouraging a sense of calm and peace amidst discomfort, pain and loss.

Encounters within the natural world draw patients to reflect upon the nature and relationship they have with the creative life force that intrinsically indwells the natural world. Spiritual care workers and health providers in general can access therapeutic and natural landscapes to aid in the provision of care.

Being involved in gardening tasks, walking or sitting within green space, or even viewing a natural landscape through a window, prompts storytelling and recollection, alongside the desire to share feelings and emotions. Such opportunities enrich quality of life and offer a wholistic approach to health, healing and wellbeing.

**Slide 1.** Welcome to our session today on Therapeutic landscapes exploring the encounters within the Natural World that aid in the provision of spiritual care.

By way of brief introduction, I am an ordained Church of Christ minister and presently I work 3 days with Baptcare as an In-Home-Care chaplain and 2 days with Whitley College where I coordinate the TransFormation training program for pastors and lay leaders of Non-English-Speaking-Background (NESB) churches.

My interests over the years have been in community development, ecology and spirituality. Several years ago I completed my doctorate with the University of Divinity investigating children in the Natural World where I researched a practical theology around encounter and wonder.

My interest in recent times has turned toward the design and implementation of Therapeutic Landscapes (TL) and in particular how they might help in the context of offering better health, spiritual and emotional outcomes.

I am married, with 3 adult children and a grandson.

**Slide 2.** In our session today I would like to cover the following topics:

- i. Where TL is heading in health care (along with a definition...)
- ii. We will touch upon a brief overview of my research with children and gardening – as there are universal themes for all who engage within the Natural World (NW).
- iii. Along with how TL might aid the provision of spiritual care
- iv. And whilst I will draw upon my background within the Judaistic-Christian tradition, I want to introduce a broader and inclusive theological understanding of TL in spiritual and pastoral care emerging from Job's encounter with God (YHWH) within the Natural World
- v. Then finally some practical suggestions on how TL might be used in spiritual care.
- vi. And of course throughout our session please interrupt to ask questions and share personal encounters and stories. I'm sure that as we cover this material you'll be stimulated to think of your own experiences.

**Slide 3.** I was recently interested to learn that a group of university students sent recorded sounds of Earth to astronauts on the International space station. Sounds included Birds, wind through trees, the buzzing of bees... along with the sound of water running along a stream.

Their motivation was around the issues of isolation and dislocation from the everyday experiences that most of take for granted of being close and familiar with our natural surroundings.

In the 250,000 or however many years it has been since we believe homo-sapiens evolved and emerged as a separate species from our hominoid cousins, it

has only been a very short time that we have separated ourselves from the outside world of everyday sounds, smells, temperature and weather variations, dangers and delights within the Natural World.

It didn't take someone long to work out that sounds of Earth could help maintain the emotional and physiological health of an astronaut floating in space tens of thousands of kilometers from the Earth...

But you don't need to be 10,000 kilometers from the Earth to miss out on the healing and nurturing benefits of participating and dwelling within natural environments. The busyness of our lives, the design of our buildings, the time spent in cars and public transport, insufficient parkland, shrinking backyards can all contribute to us spending less time Earthed, or grounded/embedded within natural surrounds.

**Slide 4.** There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that TL improve emotional and physical health and wellbeing.

For many years research in the US and Great Britain has been conducted into the physical health and recovery benefits in a broad range of patients in care.

Ulrich (1986, 29-44) along with Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) report that exposure to nearby natural landscapes, even simply a view through a window, can effectively speed the recovery of surgical patients and reduces stress, particularly if initial stress levels are high.

Ulrich, R.S. 1986. Human Responses to Vegetation and Landscapes. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 13:29-44.

Ulrich (1984) A view through a window may influence recovery from surgery, *Science*, April 27 vol 224 p420.

Kaplan, R., and S. Kaplan. 1989. *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

**Slide 5.** Studies in Japan on folk engaged in the practice of *Shinrin-yoku*, or forest walking, reported changes of improved immune system response, lowered stress indicators, reduced depression, and for those living with diabetes - lower glucose levels.

Morita, E., S. Fukuda, J. Nagano, et al. 2007. Psychological Effects of Forest Environments on Healthy Adults: *Shinrin-Yoku* (Forest-Air Bathing, Walking) As a Possible Method of Stress Reduction. *Public Health* 121, 1:54-63.

Ohira, H., S. Takagi, K. Masui, M. Oishi, and A. Obata. 1999. Effects of *Shinrin-Yoku* (Forest-Air Bathing and Walking) on Mental and Physical Health. *Bulletin of Tokai Women's University* 19:217-232.

**Slide 6.** Researchers from University of Melbourne and the University of Tasmania just this last week in the Conversation wrote about (read from PowerPoint...)

**Slide 7.** The Science is in: gardening is good for you...

**Slide 8.** Certainly we know from our own experiences that being in safe, light and airy, leafy spaces, where we might gain a sense of being held and nurtured can lift our spirits, offering a 'feel-good-experience' that can calm... Can help get us through the afternoon, or even a difficult life encounter or situation.

**Slide 9.** The growing body of science around the benefits of natural landscapes and environments suggests that gardens, and open areas can be specifically designed to promote and the desired benefits and outcomes. Researchers suggest the universal image we are all attracted to is an open field with trees.... It offers a sense of security, we can see if there is danger. We can see food...

A definition of a therapeutic or salugenic landscape is found within the title. Any landscape, either found within nature or designed and built by people to replicate a natural setting that offers healing, restorative... properties is a therapeutic landscape. (Greek *soteria* = deliverance... )

**Slide 10.** One of the most wonderful TL, which I have visited here in Melbourne, and I'm sure many of you are familiar with, is the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation centre here at Austin Health. Stephen Wells a brain injury nurse developed the garden about 12 years ago after completing a horticultural course at Burnley. You may have seen Stephen on several episodes of Gardening Australia earlier in the year as one of their guest presenters. Over years of fund raising and applying for grants they have created a wonderful garden which has grown from small beginnings to an amazing oasis within the dated buildings of the Acquired Brain Injury rehab centre. One day a week Stephen takes patients out into the garden to pot up soil. He has scene amazing progress in patients and research is being conducted to gain empirical data for further funding and development.

**Slide 11.** Elsewhere in aged care facilities and centers, which I am sure many of you are familiar with, there are Memory and Sensory Gardens, along with Reflective and Water Landscapes, and more generally green and natural environments, that can greatly benefit those living with dementia, and others recovering from general injuries, illness and surgery.

*Royal Childrens, Womens, others...*

*There are some missed opportunities Box Hill...*

**Slide 12.** So where do TL fit within the provision of spiritual care? Most of us would agree that the spiritual care we offer patients, clients and parishioners is offered with an wholistic perspective in mind.

We are each of us concerned for the whole person, for the physical, emotional, and spiritual worlds of those within our care. Each aspect of the whole person can't be separated.

The Royal Talbot rehab center therefore incorporates what they term 'an inner sanctuary'. A quiet space that offers solitude and the opportunity for reflection and highlights the great potential to use Therapeutic landscapes within the provision of spiritual care.

Many of the patients in rehab are young men recovering from road trauma injuries. The sanctuary provides a semi private space that helps folk to reflect upon the nature of their injuries, their grief around loss of cognitive and physical mobility, time to consider their road to recovery, the people they love and the many other questions and emotions that anyone of us might explore and experience facing pain, loss and grief.  
A place for solitude and peace....

**Slide 13.** Many of the interviews I conducted were of non-religious community groups, and for me approaching with a background in pastoral Christian ministry and theology I was keen to note several key themes that emerged that paralleled significant biblical and theological themes within the Christian tradition.

And this is why I would strongly argue that churches and faith based communities should consider actively promoting the engagement of children in such activities.

**Slide 14.** Many schools in lower socio economic schools are regularly vandalised with graffiti, broken windows and in extreme cases even set alight. Two teachers told me that most often children from these schools experience no sense of loss or anger when these events occur.

**Slide 15.** However when the garden or environment project the children had been involved in was vandalised the children were extremely upset and angry with the perpetrators. Many had the opportunity of reflecting upon the feelings associated with this and also were able to gain a sense of empathy of what it might be like to be a victim of crime.

**Slide 16.** The teachers described to me the children displayed a sense of ownership and belonging. A sense of this is their space to which they belong and have meaning and significance within a world that has a great deal of instability and often turmoil.

Theologically I explored the significance that place and belonging in the land has in the story of the children of Israel. Walter Brueggemann and his work with the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament as we call it suggests that land in the context of place and belonging is a central 'if not the central theme of biblical faith'. Meaning and purpose grow out of an historical experience of place, so that a sense of place is a central element of how one makes meaning in life.

Many suggest this is the issue for indigenous peoples who have been displaced from their land by colonists and invaders.

**Slide 17.** All interviewees told stories of how children's behaviour improved while they were outside. Recent research suggests that children make more healthy food choices. One child apparently said they loved peas straight from the pod, even more than lollies from a jar.

**Slide 18.** Children learn practical skills, learn how to work together, negotiate who will perform tasks, get extra sunlight, and physical activity, which Marie Montessori suggested 'connects the spirit with the world. And that a lack of 'physical activity can lead to physical depression and poor spiritual health'. She said this over 90 years ago.... And ongoing research and our own experiences suggests this is very true...

**Slide 19.** Teachers related to me that Children who have been bullies or difficult to handle in the class room learnt to be more gentle and calm when they spent time caring for animals.

**Slide 20.** And many others overcame fears associated with animals and bugs, discovering companionship. Friendship and a mutual dependency. The knowledge that we need each other that we can't separate ourselves from the world...

Troubled children working with horses was a significant example of this, because of the size of a horse and its nature, the need to learn to communicate and work with the animal in a mode of cooperation.

**Slide 21.** The outdoor world stimulates the senses and children fully engage with the sounds, smells, texture and tastes that surrounds them. Many child development physiologists suggest this is vital for healthy brain development in children. There is growing research to suggest that exposure to bacteria, fungus and other microbes, along with a high fibre low sugar diet, leads to greater microbial diversity within the digestive system which leads to better physical and mental health. What this space as there is a lot of research in this area especially in regard to autism... And other mental and physical health issues.

*When I reflect upon the words of Jesus in John 10:10.... that "I have come that they may have life and live it to the full...." This is what I think of.*

**Slide 22.** The outdoor world stimulates the senses and children fully engage with the sounds, smells, texture and tastes that surrounds them. Many child development physiologists suggest this is vital for healthy brain development in children. There is growing research to suggest that exposure to bacteria, fungus and other microbes, along with a high fibre low sugar diet, leads to greater microbial diversity within the digestive system which leads to better physical and mental health. What this space as there is a lot of research in this area especially in regard to autism... And other mental and physical health issues.

**Slide 23.** Children learn the principles of Sabbath care for the land, rest and the celebration of life in the sharing of tasks, playing outdoors and eating together.

**Slide 24.** Many engage in art activities, and this is a mosaic that one of the children from my church did when asked to think of a word from the bible and what it means to them. Here he did a plant with water and sunlight.

**Slide 25.** Most of the children in gardening programs follow permaculture and/or organic gardening practices which promote respect and care for the land in the context of mutuality and equality.

**Slide 26.** They learn about crop rotations, mulching and composting, recycling weeds by giving them to chickens and earth worms.....

**Slide 27.**

**Slide 28.** The awareness of the rhythms of the NW, the flows and cycles, along with the ability to listen to what the Earth is saying about its health and well-being are important principles taught to most of the children in these programs and is a vital aspect of the future of this planet, given that our society, might share with, rather than steal from, future generations and other inhabitants of the Earth. (Kin)

**Slide 29.** One of the most encouraging themes was that most programs once had boring, plain, underutilized grass, pavement or concrete areas that they transformed into an area where they had created gardens rich in diversity, colour and full of life. Co-creators...

**Slide 30.**

**Slide 31.** Areas which offer hospitality to a greater number of beings, people, plants, animals, bugs, worms, birds and other wildlife.

**Slide 32.** In 2007 at the height of the drought lake Eppalock that supplied drinking water to Bendigo in central Victoria was down to around 2% capacity. All the local waterways and lakes had all but dried up. The kitchen garden group at Eaglehawk PS in Bendigo, north of Melbourne had a pond which stored water from the sink they used to wash hands and vegetables. The pond had a bike with a pump and the children would pump up the water to an overhead tank that was shaped to look like a large watering can. The children were very aware of how precious water is. One day in the garden one of the children looked up to see a heron atop their shed looking at the pond to see if there were any fish or frogs to be eaten. All the children stopped what they were doing to look at this stunning bird that most had never had the opportunity of seeing before. The children had offered hospitality to this water bird who would have been struggling through the drought.

**Slide 33.** But not only do they offer hospitality to the birds and diversity of plants and bugs, they also offer hospitality to each other in the sharing of meals.

**Slide 34.** Many programs have cooking activities where the produce that the children grow is harvested and cooked and shared with friends and teachers in the school.

**Slide 35.** In offering hospitality children experience the other as having value and intrinsic worth. If we hold an inclusive view of the incarnation of the

cosmic Christ who is intimately and integratively a part of the created world, The theologian Jürgen Moltmann suggests that in offering welcome to Earth-others we welcome Christ into our midst as we break bread together in the communion of creatures, and become aware of the reality that we live in profound communion with all other creatures. In this we connect with God...

**Slide 36.** Hope for a different future was evident for the children of Western Port south east of Melbourne, who were involved in a mangrove rehabilitation project. Over the years mangroves have been cleared around the port leaving exposed mud banks which have led to increased turbidity and consequently sedimentation of mud onto the leaves of sea grass. The dying seagrass and removal of spawning areas in the mangroves has resulted in depletion of fish and biodiversity in what is considered one of the most significant water ways in the southern hemisphere with migratory birds and incredibly diverse fish and sea plant and animal life.

**Slide 37.** The children have seen first hand how replanting the mangroves is saving the water way as sea grass returns and fish stocks increase. They have learnt about the importance of the mangroves in the ecology of their area. They too have significantly grown in a sense of place and belonging and are working together toward a better future. Offering hope amidst the narrative of climate change, global warming and environmental degradation which some suggest causes children anxiety and fear of the future. Being a part of the solution helps children engage and feel a sense of meaning and purpose.

**Slide 38.** By far the most significant theme that all of the interviewees referred to was a sense of awe, wonder, amazement, excitement and joy that children experience when they are in the natural world, either gardening, caring for animals or simply playing in natural surroundings.

**Slide 39.** Children show surprise, joy and delight being with chickens. This picture is from our church. We have been operating at Box Hill a community art gallery from the front of our church and one Christmas exhibition we installed a stable with chickens who laid eggs in the manger. Which conveyed for many a powerful image of God's incarnational presence within the physical created world.

**Slide 40.**

**Slide 41.** Discovering berries that are hidden under leaves that glow with the light upon them, that can be eaten straight from the bush.

Spending time sitting.... Watching the bees.

**Slide 42.** The simplest thing of digging up potatoes 'is like discovering treasure to the children' along with earthworms and strange bugs.

**Slide 43.** Within the Christian tradition it is possible to hold an inclusive Incarnational theology of God's physical presence within the natural world.

The experience of wonder, a growing sense of place and belonging, reduced stress and anxiety, enhanced creativity and imagination, along with welcome and hospitality. I suspect that the same is for each of us, no matter what our age, or the level of our emotional wellbeing.

Over 20 years offering pastoral and spiritual care I have observed great benefits to people who discover sensory engagement and connections within the natural world in gardens, forests and beaches, and other outdoor settings.

As folks engage and participate within and making connections within such places you might expect to observe some of the following benefits...

**Slide 44.**

- i. A greater awareness or experience of place and belonging, particularly for people dislocated or isolated in a recovery ward or an aged care facility away from their familiar space of home and family surrounds.
- ii. Gain perspective through the experience of wonder, along with the sensory experience of being immersed with the natural life cycle of plants growing, fruiting and dying. Many can feel and engage with the seasons and more ably find metaphors for their personal story and experience.
- iii. Find encouragement and a sense of calm and peace amidst discomfort, pain and loss. Inside a facility can feel a bit like being locked up... However outside there is potential for a greater feeling of freedom.  
Multi-sensory h

Encounters within the natural world also invite the opportunity to reflect upon the nature and relationship one may have with the creative life force that intrinsically indwells the natural world. The pastoral care worker embracing an inclusive Incarnational theology of God's presence within the natural world can help awaken this experience of encounter and wonder.

**Slide 45.** The story of Job in the ancient wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible provides a theological understanding of encounter with God in the natural landscape. Job's encounter reminds him of his place within the cosmos, and contemporary experiences, the everyday, have the potential to benefit those within our care.

The story of Job has a key place in the field of theodicy and spiritual care helping to provide an explanation, along with the capacity to endure the experience that is common to us all of grief, pain and loss.

The Book of Job is a significant ancient creation text found in the Wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Whilst probably not being of Hebrew origin it has found its way into the Christian canon of scripture. Being of ancient origin the text brings a perspective beyond the Judaistic-Christian tradition from which we read in its modern context to be far more inclusive of other religions and traditions.

The poetry of Job is highly developed and reflects a depth and richness of the universal and timeless experience of human loss and suffering. Therefore rightly earning an important place in the tool kit of the pastoral and spiritual carer. In recent times expanding fields of ecological, feminist and spiritual theologies have focused a great deal of attention upon the text.

Essentially Job overwhelmed by troubles encounters God (YHWH) through an experience in the natural world. Stripped of his wealth, his family and his health Job demands an audience with God. The legal setting of a court has Job demanding YHWH give him an audience in court where he can plead his case of innocence. YHWH remains quiet for 37 of the 42 chapters, until chapter 38.

For those of you familiar with the story you may recall the setting from which YHWH responds? (WIAT FOR AN ANSWER...)

Given the context we might expect YHWH responds from the temple or the court setting...

**Slide 46.** But rather we discover YHWH responds from out of the whirlwind. It is from within the wild and raging storm, the wild and chaotic natural setting that Job encounters God.

Here Job encounters the wild and raging natural beauty and sacredness of God's creation. The power, and great mystery behind the creation... The horizon's of Job's world, a world filled with difficulty and anguish might now be extended to see further beyond as he forms a relationship with "other". Job's first spontaneous outburst, at the conclusion of the Divine speeches, is of unreserved admiration:

**Slide 47.** "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). It is by forming a closer more intimate relationship with YHWH, through his encounter within the natural world, that Job is able to exclaim in the end; "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you..." (Job 42:5). Job has changed, and his whole perspective and outlook towards the world and towards YHWH is 'reoriented in a way that no mere reasoning, but only encounter with other, can effect'. (Mary Grey in Sacred Longings).

**Slide 48.** Job's encounter within the natural world with YHWH changes him. He becomes more fully aware, more fully alive, more fully human. Living through the grief, confusion and questions, having encountered God in the wild chaotic beauty of the natural world, he lives to enjoy and value more meaningful relationships with those around him.

Significantly the names of Job's sons are not mentioned (Job 42:14), however the names of his daughters are, along with mention they share with their brothers in their father's inheritance. Professor Norman Habel from Flinders University says "Naming daughters who share the inheritance accords to them dignity, respect

and equality with their brothers, and demonstrates Job's continued policy of justice and equality in his life which goes beyond normal practice" (Habel).

Job's wealth is greater, his daughters more beautiful and his days long, arguably because his new relationships are richer, more meaningful and of greater value and significance to him.

Job's response to this enlivening encounter is one of awe and wonder. His world-view is completely turned upon its head. It is as if he has come from a place of inwardly focusing upon his plight of pain, loss and suffering and then turning outwardly responds to YHWH and the world.

**Slide 49.** How might therapeutic landscapes be used by spiritual care providers?

You may have suggestions and experiences to share with the group?  
In my experience a key is to utilize green and natural spaces by inviting participation within the landscape.

**Slide 50.** Walking or sitting within a garden, or more simply ensuring a client or patient can view a green landscape through a window in their room invites the opportunity to share stories, express feelings and emotions associated with the client's experience.

Being in the garden, the created world, to talk about life and experiences is very much being in the presence of God

**Slide 51.** As wholistic care providers we have a responsibility to offer the best support, encouragement and help we can. I would encourage you to consider how your organization, and more particularly the space you work in might be more green and inviting...

In concluding, my experience has shown that engaging parishioners and pastoral clients within the natural world invites a greater awareness of place and belonging,

Offering perspective through the experience of wonder, and

Which can encourage a sense of calm and peace amidst discomfort, pain and loss.

Encounters within the natural world also invite the opportunity to reflect upon the nature and relationship one may have with the creative life force that intrinsically indwells the natural world.

**Slide 52.** Being in the garden, the created world, to talk about life and experiences is very much in the presence of God.

And returning once again to the Book of Job...