



World Council for Psychotherapy

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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WCP USA Report March 2013

The following report applies to goals 8, 9, and 12 of the World Council for Psychotherapy (WCP):

- To establish international working groups on special topics.
- The exchange of training standards world-wide.
- To develop a world-wide Disaster Trauma Training Certification Program (DTTCP) to identify gatekeepers who have the local knowledge to more effectively direct local, national, and international responders and service providers to places where they are most needed.

Dr. Doherty Presents Symposium

Drs. Nemeth and Ray, organized a symposium featuring Thomas Doherty, PsyD, ecopsychologist, as a part of the annual meeting of the US Chapter of the World Council for Psychotherapy on March 22, 2013. This is in fulfillment of WCP's commitment to disaster trauma training focusing on environmental trauma. Thomas Joseph Doherty is a clinical psychologist from Portland, Oregon. In addition to his private practice, Dr. Doherty is the founder and co-director of the *Ecopsychology in Counseling Certificate Program* at the Lewis & Clark Graduate School and the founding editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Ecopsychology*. He is also President-elect of the American Psychological Association's Division 34, *The Society for Environmental, Population and Conservation Psychology* and helped author APA Climate Change Task Force Report in 2009. He draws on his training in clinical and health psychology and his background as a wilderness therapist and professional whitewater rafting guide.

In 2011, *The New York Times* has called Thomas Doherty "the most prominent American advocate of a growing discipline known as *ecopsychology*." His website is found at selfsustain.com and his blog is at personalsustainability.com. In his presentation, Dr.

Doherty emphasized that the term *ecopsychology* was coined in the 1990s when people began to explore their connection to the environment. Although Indigenous Peoples long understood this connection, most individuals in Western society had lost sight of this. Yet, this is an extremely important concept in psychotherapy. Dr. Doherty also emphasized, "It is difficult to change behavior even when life depends on it." This can certainly be seen when dealing with major environmental traumas such as hurricanes. People remain in denial that there will be a problem, want to live as close as possible to the shore line without expecting any trauma, and want to rebuild what they had before even though sustainability is usually not an option. Although the science is quite clear on these topics, rather than logic, emotionality prevails. Therefore, many topics that must be addressed are often so emotionally laden that they bring out tremendous reactions in individuals. These reactions are so severe at times as to preclude any meaningful problem-solving and/or resolution. Psychological/psychotherapeutic intervention is therefore crucial to reducing the negative valence of science and increasing individual's willingness to address these problems. Dr. Doherty noted that climate change issues, global warming issues, etc., have underlying social justice components, which people do not wish to address. Psychologists/psychotherapists are in a unique position to address issues that affect people on their level first. This will allow people to feel valued and therefore be open to new ideas and opportunities. Dr. Doherty's final comment was "Feelings are like water. If you share them, they go away. If you cover them up, they stay and build."

An interactive discussion followed. Dr. Doherty emphasized the role of the psychologist/psychotherapist in disaster training and intervention. He pointed out the different views that many people have and how a common ground needs to be achieved in order for successful intervention to occur. Dr. Doherty cited an article by Jungersen, Dailey, Uhernik, & Smith (ct.counseling.org, March 2013). This article defined disaster "as a potentially traumatic event that is experienced collectively, has an acute onset and originates from natural or human factors that overwhelm local resources" (pg. 47). It is typical for a psychologist/psychotherapist to focus on people's emotional reactions to trauma. These often include "feelings of fearfulness, anxiety, psychological and physical distress, depression, irritability, frustration or significant fear regarding one's sense of safety and security" (pg. 47).

Participants were then given two beach-sized balls filled with air, one representing the earth and the other representing a projective opportunity. As these balls were passed around, participants focused on the earth as they knew it and their perceptual experiences. Some focused on change, others focused on trauma, others on sustainability, etc.

The group was multi-disciplinary involving natural scientists, social scientists, and interventionists. For example, Dr. Robert Hamilton, a well-known ecologist, focused his comments on the process of change and how few people are prepared to respond to change. He noted that a reaction is not a response. Dr. Robert Muller, a well-known climatologist, focused on the effects of hurricanes and how many individuals do not take the hurricane warnings seriously. This was a problem, for example, in Hurricane/Superstorm Sandy. On the Gulf Coast of the United States, people are used to hurricanes and have learned to heed hurricane warnings; whereas on the New York/New Jersey Coast, the last major hurricane struck in 1938. As there was little institutional knowledge, not only were the people not prepared, but the governments and industries were not prepared. Dr. Ray spoke about the need to be more environmentally proactive to protect the next generation. Mr. Scott Nesbit, who is in charge of a major ecopsychology project in Louisiana, spoke about the difficulties of achieving consensus so that the best good could be achieved for the greatest number of people. Mr. Nesbit went on to state that, at times, industry goals may be disparate from those that are in the best interest of the people. Dr. Nemeth echoed this view when she brought up the difficulties that are currently occurring at Bayou Korne, which is where a sink hole developed as a result of salt brine production. Dr. Donald Nemeth, geologist, explained the geology of salt domes, their use for the storage of natural gas, oil, etc., and the importance of respecting their boundaries so as not to destroy their stability, which would cause sink holes to form. With the Bayou Korne situation, people are in great distress and currently in need of mental health intervention. Although this need was pointed out by the recent appearance of Erin Brockovich, now famous for her role in investigating the water contamination by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company of California, industry and government have still not yet formulated a plan for mental health intervention for the residents of Bayou Korne. This may be a future project for WCP.

The Jungersen, et. al., 2013, article focused on the aftermath of both natural and human-caused disasters. Nemeth, Hamilton, Kuriansky, 2013, expanded this to include disasters that are a hybrid of both natural events and human-caused events. Many environmental traumas are in this latter category.

All attendees received a Disaster Trauma Training certificate for 3 hours of continuing education, signed by Drs. Nemeth and Ray (see attached).

Respectfully submitted by,

Darlyne G. Nemeth, PhD, MPAP & Kelly Paulk Ray, PhD, MPAP

Co-Secretary General & US Vice President of the World Council for Psychotherapy, USA

Disaster Trauma Training Certification

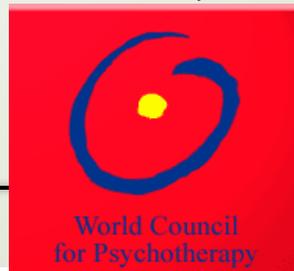
This certificate is
presented to

[Empty box for recipient name]

For participating in this 3 hour session on Ecopsychology presented by
Thomas Doherty, Psy.D., Clinical Psychologist
Editor in Chief, Ecopsychology Journal
President-Elect of Division 34, APA

Sponsored by the
WORLD COUNCIL FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY - USA Chapter
In Baton Rouge, Louisiana

March 22, 2013



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