

Eco-literate Coaching



By Lizzi Larbalestier

Last time we explored nature disconnect and the issue attention cycle. This second article navigates eco-literacy and explores the value of nature.

What is eco-literacy?

To be eco-literate involves emotion and understanding; it is concerned both with how we feel and what we think in relation to the natural world and our place within it.

To explore the **affective domain**, we might ask ourselves, "How do I feel about nature?" This is something I have explored before in a previous *Rapport* article ... but really reflect for a moment. When you dial into the sensations in your body and your true nature, remembering you are

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part of this diverse and fragile world, with all its beauty and a depth of time, what sensations arise? When you contemplate the fate of our planet, how do you really feel deep down? When you experience the awe of the shift in seasonal colours, or the beauty of birdsong, for example, which emotions emerge?

To consider the **cognitive domain** we might question: "Do I know enough?" What is your stance in relation to climate

change, for instance – do you feel informed? How can you become more conscious of your carbon footprint? Are you really aware of the role of the oceans, for example, in regulating our planet? How discerning are you when it comes to the purchases you make? Are you being greenwashed? For instance, a lot of recycling schemes give a false sense of security, and many alternatives to single-use plastics have their own environmental issues. Are you consistent? Do you perhaps advocate low impact cleaning



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products to avoid polluting the water, whilst in contrast love a 'good old firework show' that massively pollutes the air? Where in your lifestyle is there dissonance in relation to your planet advocacy and what can you do to address this?

Nature is interconnected and so are we. By gaining awareness of the intricate connections between living systems we can gain insights that shift our approach from competitive to collaborative and from isolated to connected. Nature has so many lessons about interdependency that we can bring to the coaching forum. In order to create significant positive change, eco-literacy is something that resides within a collective rather than individual domain. True eco-literacy is a shared awareness that requires us to socially cooperate to support the health of the planet. If we fail to value nature, taking into account the ripple effect of our actions, we risk losing everything. Think about your social networks. How eco-literate are the individuals within your friendship groups, or your work colleagues? Are the choices they make eco-conscious? How much do you question choices you believe to be 'environmentally friendly'? What can you do to inspire others to develop a fascination with the natural world?

Benefits of eco-literacy

As we build a relationship with nature, we get curious about it and want to learn more about how life itself is sustained. As we recognise how life is sustained, so our relationship with nature unfolds to an extent whereby we acknowledge a lack

of separateness between us and our environment. (Check back to a previous article in *Rapport* issue 67 where I talked about eco-centrism.)

A by-product of developing eco-literacy is a tendency to question much more deeply rather than taking things at face value. In addition, eco-literacy teaches us to pre-empt unintended consequences. Acknowledging these will always exist helps us to mitigate the risk of short-term decision making and instead take a long-term view.

For many years we have considered nature as a kind of 'service provider' offering us natural capital such as food, water, habitat, clean air etc. As a result, we have seen nature as the giver of resources for us to use up – fossil fuels being a great example. This very linear approach to co-existing on this planet is at odds with the natural world. Nature

does not create waste and primarily works in cycles – a great template for a healthy life. As we know, using nature as a seemingly limitless resource has created long-term challenges and unintended consequences. Short-term decisions made from a place of efficiency are not necessarily wise. When we begin to think more in terms of ***cycles*** and ***dynamic equilibrium***, the way we make sense of the world shifts. As individuals, we ask very different questions before taking action, and as coaches, our awareness of cause and effect becomes less an A to B type discussion and much more like ***fractals***, since each of our actions has a multitude of potential reactions.

Eco-literacy promotes an awareness of ***deep time***; a reminder that beyond temporary illusions of wealth, in reality we own nothing. This realisation can be freeing for many and for others it provides ▶



gravity to the value of living a purposeful life beyond material wealth. Ordinarily, we have awareness of our parents and grandparents perhaps, maybe our children and grandchildren. Our relevant timeline in general is around a hundred years, as if the world before and after that does not really exist. When we become more eco-literate, time expands, and we begin to be curious about how life was sustained prior to our existence and consider more seriously how the way we treat our planet will impact those that come after us. The idea of leaving a legacy extends beyond the next generation.

Professor Colin Meyer says: "The purpose of life is to give purpose to lives, so that society thrives and the world survives."

The world surviving is fundamental for life itself. The growth mindset is often more about bigger, better, faster and less about true discovery. We might think connecting with nature is primitive, instead being lured by shiny technology, material wealth and ideas of acquisition. In fact, enabling our clients to build closer relationships with the natural world is a win-win – not only do they gain the health benefits of time spent outdoors with wildlife, the connection they create encourages advocacy.

Colin Meyer also described corporate purpose as being "to produce profitable solutions to the problems of people and planet, and not to profit from producing problems for people or planet." Whether we apply this idea to our business coaching clients or to ourselves practising as professionals, we can only make wise choices in this respect from a place of eco-literacy.

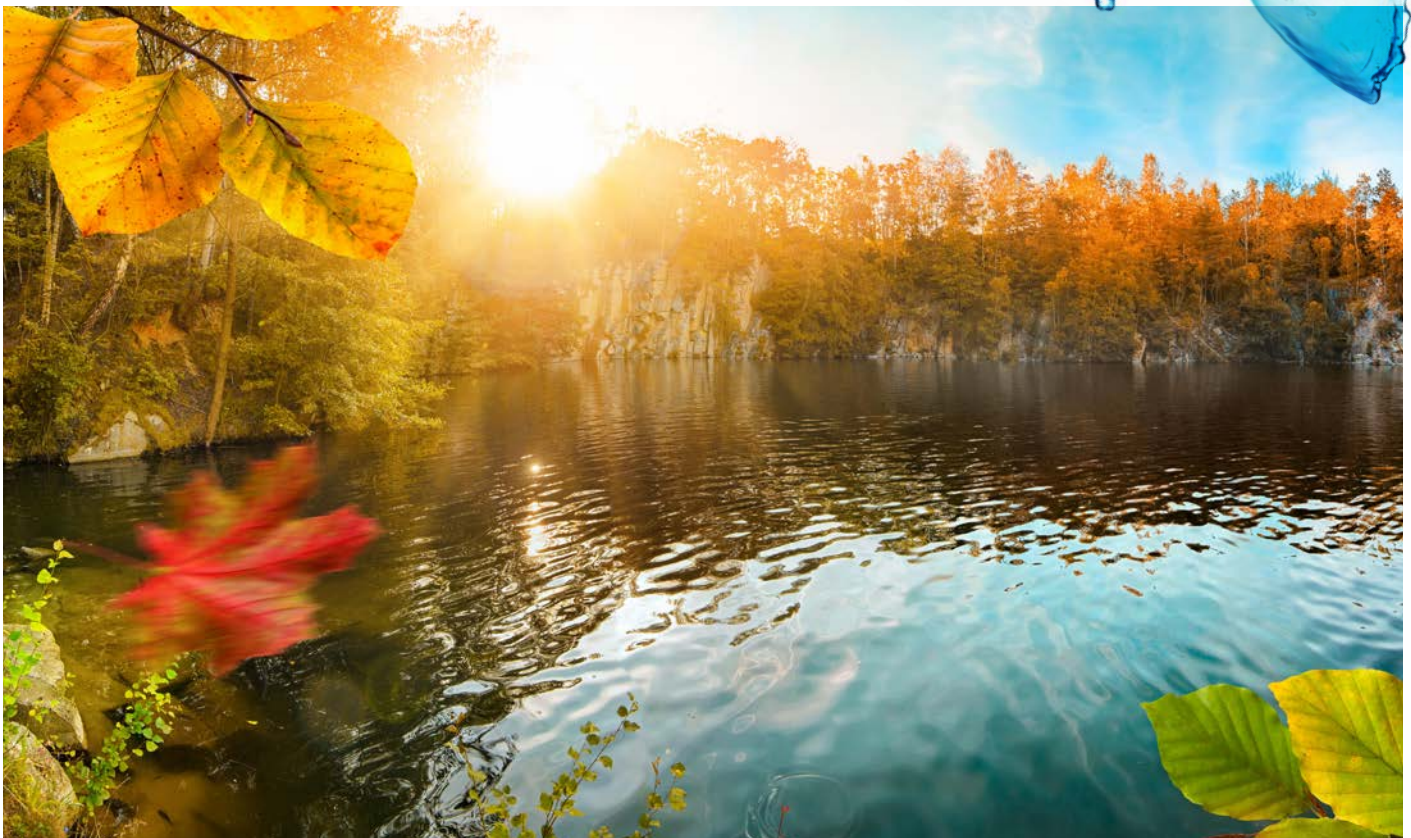
So how do we acknowledge the value of nature?

As a blue health coach™ I advocate for water ... so it is fitting to chunk down to water to summarise. Beyond the vast social, physical, spiritual and psychological benefits of water it can be enlightening to simply marvel at the water cycle as a great place to start. As you begin to take some childlike curiosity into how amazing water is and how (clean) water has the ability to cycle around and around promoting life, you can start to really acknowledge how essential eco-literacy is for our collective wellbeing. The water cycle is powerful for the very reason that it brings to our conscious awareness that, as coaches, adding in reference to nature as an afterthought is ridiculous if at a cellular level we ARE a manifestation of nature. We see this in the way water travels through us. Taking time

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to discover more about the natural world is in essence an act of self-discovery and as such eco-literacy is an expanded form of self-reflection.

And so, when I am asked questions like "How can we bring nature into our coaching?" my response in general is "It is hard for me to contemplate how it would be possible to not bring nature into your coaching!" ■



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