

\*\* Please note: this document was translated from the [original Spanish](#) by Google translate. It has been cleaned up a bit, but is still not perfect. \*\*

## Exploring the effects of Joanna Macy's "The Work that Reconnects" (WTR)

Felipe Landaeta Farizo  
www.holotropica.cl

In February 2019 I attended the intensive of The Work That Reconnects in El Manzano (Chile). It was a very mobilizing experience, both due to the personal experiences, the contents reviewed and the community that came together to learn and reflect on issues related to nature. It was fascinating to be able to meet a group of human beings mobilized by personal growth and by the desire to promote changes in our contexts in favor of life.

During the WTR, the motivation to want to share part of this content at the university and with students arose in me. It seemed like a great opportunity to introduce these topics that are so necessary and contingent. At the retreat I asked myself about the bibliographic material and the previous studies carried out in this area, and I realized that it was necessary to start researching. Despite the great influence and recognition that Joanna Macy has in different areas, no studies had been carried out regarding "the practical descent" that her work has. The research could be both a contribution to the field of study where psychology and ecology intersect, as well as an invitation to reflect on these highly relevant issues.

For this I met with Rocío Cerda, psychologist and university professor, with whom we asked ourselves the following research question: **What is the perceived impact of the intensive of The WTR?**, which we explore through 6 interviews with people residing in Chile (3 women and 3 men).

The way to collect experiential, deep and vivid information was through interviews semi-structured, those that sought to investigate in 3 moments of time: (a) the period prior to WTR to explore reasons for participating; (b) experiences during the retreat; and (c) the subsequent perceived effects. In this way we think that we could start exploring this terrain.

When analyzing people's responses, we found the following:

- (a) **The WTR experience** possesses certain experiential qualities that included the importance of experiencing rituals, promoting greater self-awareness and awareness of one's own processes, the experience of connection with a greater reality and to feel one with nature, as well as the resolution of emotional issues.
- (b) **The effects of the WTR** that are perceived beyond retirement included the levels emotional / psychological and behavioral.
  - At an emotional / psychological level, a greater understanding of emotional

processes, as well as a feeling that the process was continuing beyond retirement. For some people there were subsequent challenges returning to everyday life, which was seen as part of the process.

Likewise, half of the participants reported an effect on interpersonal relationships, which seems to be a consequence of realizing during the retirement.

- At the behavioral level, greater responsibility was reported in relation to caring for nature, as well as the transfer of learning to the personal, work context and / or work project. The latter could be related to the motivations for training in this area that reported who participated in the study.

(c) A third category of results was the recognition of **elements of the context affecting the experience and results of the WTR**. One of these elements are personal expectations, which in the case of the interviewed group mainly related to theoretical interests and to learning new methodologies. In addition, the context of the workshop seemed to have a great relevance, including the characteristics of the physical place and the group as well as the importance of the facilitator and the methodologies used to have a positive experience.

Based on these results, some of the reflections made are the following:

In relation to the ritual quality of the WTR, it seems important to have an adequate *mindset* or an attitude that facilitates entering the mental state for the rites, as well as the importance of this happening in a group context. It seems that the power of WTR lies, in part, in the ability to create meaningful group rituals. This ritual quality invites us to face the dynamics with an attitude and inner openness that seems to facilitate access to a depth of experience different from dynamics or games in nature.

The rituals during WTR seem to facilitate the connection with information that is deeper than that accessible in the waking state, thus giving access to symbolic and emotional content of a personal nature (related to the experience of the individual) and transpersonal (beyond the individual). This is similar to trance states and rites of passage.

Access to meaningful information and experiences beyond one's own body ego suggest contact with transpersonal (or archetypal) realities, suggests that expanded states of consciousness occur during dynamics, similar to those that occur in dynamics and rituals that are performed in different cultures and that have been implemented in different times and places in the world.

The reports of feeling part of something larger and that transcends the individual (and of experiencing oneself as part of nature) make us confirm from an experiential plane the theoretical pillars of WTR (deep ecology, ecopsychology, systemic perspective, spiritual traditions). We can assert, from the experiences of the people interviewed, that identity goes

beyond the limits of the individual ego and body, and that human beings are in intimate connection with the natural world.

The recognition of interdependence with the natural world seems to generate an effect that can lead to a change in values and worldview. The WTR seems to fulfill its objective of raising awareness of the basic interdependence with life. The depth of information and analysis have continued over time, as we see that the therapeutic dimension of WTR has profound implications, which will surely lead us to continue investigating and disseminating what we are learning from this beautiful work.