

Wilding Teacher Education: Responding to the Cries of Nature

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Abstract

The first climate change conference was held in 1979 in Geneva and sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization. Since then there have been many other initiatives and accords along the way. Each report appears to present an evermore grim picture than the previous one. Cumulatively, we have had more than enough science to know what to do, and yet we still hurtle towards catastrophe. From an educational perspective, this paper explores two questions: What will it take to nurture healers and restorers of the earth? And what holds us back? These questions are examined, as they relate to teacher education, through the lens of “wild pedagogies.” Two new touchstones explicitly for teacher educators are developed in response.

Résumé

La première conférence sur le changement climatique s'est tenue en 1979 à Genève, sous l'égide de l'Organisation météorologique mondiale. Depuis, de nombreuses autres initiatives et ententes ont vu le jour, mais le portrait de la situation semble néanmoins s'assombrir d'un rapport à l'autre. Malgré le fait que nous ayons accumulé plus de données scientifiques qu'il n'en faut pour connaître la direction à prendre, nous filons toujours tout droit vers la catastrophe. Dans une optique éducative, le présent article explore deux questions : Que faudra-t-il faire pour enseigner à protéger et restaurer la nature? Quels sont les obstacles qui nous en empêchent? Comme ces questions sont en lien avec la formation des enseignants, elles sont examinées sous le prisme des « pédagogies environnementales non directives ». En réponse, deux nouveaux « principes de base » ont été expressément élaborés pour guider les formateurs des enseignants.

Keywords: environment, education, wild, wilderness, wild pedagogies, touchstones, teacher education

Mots-clés : environnement, éducation, nature, monde sauvage, pédagogies environnementales non directives, principes de base, formation des enseignants

Preamble

In this essay, we draw on our own conversations and experiences to work out a philosophical narrative for teacher education—one that can provide the disruption required to effectively respond to issues of our time. The writing itself is also an integral part of this inquiry and the process of working out our ideas.

As Laurel Richardson asserts, “*Writing is a method of discovery*, a way of finding out about yourself and your world” (2001, p. 35). So, too, it is for us.

We also provide a nod of gratitude to those whose work has directly influenced our thinking. However, we want our narrative to do work within teacher education communities—to encourage experimentation and activity. With this in mind, we have tried to foreground our ideas and reduce, to the extent we can, burdensome referencing.

Finally, this essay builds on *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (Jickling, Blenkinsop, Timmerman, & Sitka-Sage, 2018). That book was largely written for practitioners and learners. Here we have developed new work, primarily in the form of two touchstones, written explicitly for teacher education. We provide a summary of the earlier work to create a context.

Seeking a Response

Two days before the annual conference of the North American Association for Environmental Education, in October 2018, the International Governmental Panel on Climate Change released its *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 C* (IPCC, 2018). At the same time wildfires raged in California—and other places. Shortly after that, the WWF released its *Living Planet Report* suggesting that more than 60% of the total numbers of amphibians, reptiles, mammals, fish, and birds that existed just 40 years ago are now lost (WWF, 2018). For many, a gloom descended over the frequently upbeat and forward-looking event.

What struck us was that this *Special Report* moved climate change from a distant abstract catastrophe to a phenomenon within a more concrete and tangible timeline. We have, it reported, just 12 years to radically change the course of carbon and other emissions to avert the worst outcomes (IPCC, 2018). It has become apparent that—as if wildfires and hurricanes aren’t enough—time-lines for change are so urgent that climate change will likely influence our lives dramatically. But, the consequences facing our children and grandchildren are catastrophic. In the meantime, nature is crying.

If this evidence is pointing towards the need for significant change and not just mere tinkering, then education must be at the heart of that project. Change does not happen by naming the possible goal and hoping the populace gets there. To move people, a culture even, from where they are—ontologically, ethically, metaphysically, practically—to somewhere else involves teaching and learning. If we are to heed the warnings, it will be a challenge to get to somewhere that is more ecologically and socially equitable, relational, viable, and sustainable. Teacher education programs must rise to the challenges. To disrupt the current pace of environmental destruction and climate change, we cannot continue to do the same things that we’ve been doing; we cannot continue to be the same people; and, we cannot continue to be the same teachers.

Of course, there are many superb teachers who push limits and disrupt the status quo. As Wayne Au remarks, even in the face of high stakes testing there will be teachers who find ways to do what they call “real teaching” (2011, p. 39). We expect this special issue will shine light on some of the alternatives and offer bold paths forward. From this short but evocative expression of our present situation, two questions arise for consideration in teacher education programs: First, what will it take to nurture healers and restorers of the earth? And second, what holds us back?

In this paper, we begin examining these questions through lenses of what we call wild pedagogies. This approach intends to offer some theoretical grounding through the reconceiving of education—and here specifically teacher education—in a “wilder” form. It also aims to support practice through a series of “touchstones” that are concepts and questions intended to support and challenge the work of wild pedagogies.

We first summarize the evolving idea of wild pedagogies and, second, develop two touchstones to help teacher education programs and participants grapple with the two questions posed above.

Wild Pedagogies

Wild pedagogies is a relatively new idea that has been discussed by a growing and international group of educators since 2014. Together we seek to explore and expand this idea as an agent for significant educational change. In 2018, the book *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* was published as a provisional gathering of ideas resting on two premises: First, the modernist relationship to the natural world must change, urgently; and second, education is a necessary, even fundamental partner in the project.

The combination of “wild” and “pedagogies” arose from a timely confluence of two projects. One project sought ways to refresh perceptions and discussions of human and nature relationships by re-examining notions of nature, human, wildness, and wilderness. The other project was driven by the frustratingly difficult task of enacting meaningful educational change. What unites these projects and gives some shape to ideas about wild pedagogies is the core aim of problematizing control—as it relates to, for example, educational structures, teaching and learning styles, creation of knowledge and understanding, hierarchies, and relationships both among humans and between humans and the more-than-human world.

In problematizing control, we are not suggesting a free-for-all, or the elimination of all controls. Rather, we mean looking critically at the aspects of control—implicit or explicit—that limit imaginative possibilities for humans, and diminish the wondrous range of beings with whom we share the planet. This includes looking at aspects of control in Western, European, and increasingly

globalized conceptions of education. It also includes looking at discourses about human relationships with the more-than-human world that “attempt” to place humans in positions of dominance and control (Abram, 1996).

Wildness, Wilderness, and the Self-Willed

The idea of “wilderness” has received much criticism for its role as an agent of colonialism. It has been used to disenfranchise people and cultures the world over (e.g., Cronon, 1996). We recognize that wilderness can be presented in a way that reduces its value to that of a backdrop for human-centred, self-serving, and colonial ends (Stewart, 2004). We join in these critiques.

Despite these liabilities, wilderness persists as a potentially useful concept. For those who travel to and live in the remote regions of the world, there are still places where more-than-humans flourish and where humans enter on terms that are more equitably dictated; wilderness is more than just an idea. At the same time, physical wildness is being located and encountered much closer to home—even in urban areas—by those who are looking.

Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) idea that concepts are constantly being created and recreated, it seems timely to think again about what wilderness is becoming or could become. We argue that a robust conception of wilderness does not necessarily rely on the disenfranchisement of people from their homelands (Jickling et al., 2018).

In making this renewed case for wilderness, we appeal to the Old English etymology. Here the word “wildoerness” can be said to derive from “wil,” which in turn can be linked to wild or willed. “Doer” can be linked to beast, and “ness” is linked to place or quality. Putting these together suggests that wilderness can be thought of as a place of wild beasts, or more evocatively, *self-willed land* (Foreman, 2014). When this idea of self-will is juxtaposed against domestication, where “domesticate” is used in the sense of humans bringing others under control (Livingstone, 1994), the inherent agency of wilderness is given weight. Its wildness is celebrated; it informs us; and indeed, it teaches us if we watch, listen, and feel.

We acknowledge that wilderness and domestication should not be thought of as absolute qualities; wildness occurs in varying degrees, perhaps along a continuum. Capacity for self-will, or wildness, hints at concepts like freedom, flourishing, self-determination, and intrinsic value. For wild pedagogies, it also helps to problematize ideas related to control while at the same time acknowledging the wild *agency* of the more-than-human world.

A Wilder Form of Teacher Education

In gathering ideas about wild pedagogies, we suspect that we are giving a name to what many teacher candidates already know about. As teacher educators ourselves, many of our most inspiring candidates come with educational experiences acquired outside of formal schooling. Some have been outdoor leaders, wilderness guides, environmental educators, or interpreters. Others have been involved in social justice issues and worked with the homeless, the marginalized, and those with special needs. Still others have been involved in community educational projects, cross-cultural settings, or have worked abroad. What seems to unite their enthusiasm is a passion for making a difference and a knowing-sense that mainstream education is, at best, incomplete.

These candidates have learned through experience that some of the most significant learning is encountered outside of formal education, or at the very margins of their schooling, by brave, insightful, and rebel teachers (Blenkinsop & Morse, 2017). Sadly, these students often struggle with a teacher education system that has pushed to the side most of what they value. As it turns out, most of their transformative experiences, as students and as informal teachers, do not fall into the prescribed teachable subjects.

Perhaps the keyword is “prescribed.” When framed using this term, student learning and student-teacher learning must serve the ends of the education process based on predetermined outcomes—and preferably those that are measurable. There is a great deal of research that suggests curriculum content and pedagogical strategies are bent to align with testable outcomes as learning that is less amenable to testing is edged out (see, for example, Au, 2011; Jickling, 2015; Smith, 2016). Even in education faculties, there can be enormous efforts made to prescribe and control the education of teacher candidates (Jickling, 2009).

Despite curriculum control, testing pressures, and deeper cultural constructs, many committed teachers find ways to resist, to create space for what they consider a meaningfully transformative—even a wilder kind of—teaching. Many educators are finding ways to act in solidarity with the marginalized, to bring the voices of the voiceless to their students, to push back against the often implicit and anti-environmental orientations of the cultures in which they are immersed. They are enacting pedagogies that are less objectively oriented and more co-constructed, less human-expertly known and more epistemologically spontaneous, less universal and testable, and more place responsive. In short, they are wilding their practices. But can teacher education programs keep up with these developments, or even show leadership?

We prefer to present wild pedagogies as a heuristic—that is, as an agent for discovery rather than as a rigid framework or plan of action. As such, this heuristic represents an invitation to any individual or group to experiment with conceptions of education within their places in the world, particularly those who share concerns about control. We anticipate multiple responses, and these are

reflected in the pluralized use of wild “pedagogies.” Our work to date provides small inklings into a broad array of possibilities.

Touchstones

Crucial to any success of wild pedagogies will be the formation of concrete links between ideas and practice—that is, developing pedagogies on the ground. We need to understand that social systems are often hostile to change and subject to forces that bend actions back in the direction of the status quo. It is easy to lose sight of progressive, and indeed rebellious, aims as we try to work out how change might manifest itself in what we do (Blenkinsop & Morse, 2017). We have been developing what we call touchstones to aid in this process.

The six previous touchstones (Jickling et al., 2018) serve as reminders of what wild pedagogues are trying to do, especially when engulfed by the fog of daily demands, or when stuck. As such, they serve as reminders—place-holders to return to over and over again, to regain focus, to suggest ways forward, to animate imaginations, to act as agents of exploration, discovery, and change. Touchstones are typically most effective when thought of as stimuli for exploration rather than destinations. They play out in places and are context-dependent. They need to be continually revised and developed. With this impulse in mind, we develop two new touchstones for thinking about and enacting teacher education.

The touchstones that follow are framed by the earlier questions: What kind of education will be required to nurture healers and restorers of the earth? And what holds us back?

Teacher Education Touchstone # 1: Learning That is Loving, Caring, and Compassionate

We believe that humans are able, if given the opportunity, to develop rich relationships with myriad members of the more-than-human world. And, that these relationships of reciprocal care are part of overcoming the alienation that exists between many humans and the natural world.

In the search for care, one line of inquiry has been to look at significant experiences of historical figures and to seek common elements in their development. How have they learned about and fostered relationships with more-than-humans? These common elements, in turn, direct us to opportunities for reconsidering the pedagogy, content, and emphases in teacher education programs. Here we look at formative experiences in the lives of Arne Næss, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson.

Consider the Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Næss, famous for coining the term “deep ecology.” He was explicit about the origins of his empathy, compassion, and solidarity:

My standard example has to do with a non-human being I met 40 years ago. I looked through an old-fashioned microscope at the dramatic meeting of two drops of different chemicals. A flea . . . landed in the middle of the acid chemicals. To save it was impossible. It took many minutes for the flea to die. Its movements were dreadfully expressive. What I felt was, naturally, painful compassion and empathy. But the empathy was *not* basic. What *was* basic was the process of identification, that “I see myself in the flea.” If I were alienated from the flea, not seeing intuitively anything resembling myself, the death struggle would have left me indifferent. So there must be identification for there to be compassion and, among humans, solidarity. (Næss, 1988, p. 22)

Næss repeatedly points to this experience as one that shaped the contours of his thinking. In recognition of his empathy for and affiliation with the flea, he began to see, encounter, and even be in the world differently. He continued to wrestle with these revelations, developing his theory of ecosophy, for more than four decades.

For Næss, ecosophy is rooted in deeply intimate relationships that shift one’s self-concept from an egotistical “self” to the more expansive “Self” as expressions of identification, relationship, and compassion. The accompanying “Self-realization,” as he called it, can be described as an ecological approach to being-in-the-world. But first, he needed to have an experience; there needed to be a context out of which this realization could arise.

For teacher educators, this raises intriguing possibilities. If Næss is correct and there is a basic experience of identification with the other that is necessary for empathy, then it is important to provide opportunities for having those experiences. Such opportunities could encourage both latent empathy and the work of moving from self to Self-realization. This will likely involve pushing back on how most teacher candidates understand their worlds and position themselves therein.

We asked teacher candidates, for example, to spend significant time in a particular place, focussing on the local community. This was a familiar activity for many, but we felt we could expand and enrich it dramatically during a nearly two-year program. Part of the work was having these candidates begin thinking differently and being differently in these places. We encouraged them to consider the activity, agency, and vibrancy surrounding them—to recognize that these are places of birth, life, and death, places where beings feed and clean themselves, and where they exchange information. These are cultural places where intruding humans don’t speak the languages or understand how things happen. However, with care-full observation and time, candidates can begin to notice that there is an order to everything, that morays are created and maintained, and that lives are lived in richness and complexity. In short, this work challenges some of the teacher candidates’ implicit understandings of expertise, communication, learning and understanding, and the value of other-than-human beings. In light of such cultural challenging, we now turn to the well-known American conservationist, Aldo Leopold.

Leopold encountered the limits of his cultural conceptions on the day he watched a wolf die. Working as a wildlife “manager,” he recounted the day he and some colleagues spotted a wolf crossing a river:

In those days, we had never heard of passing up the chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy. . . . When our rifles were empty the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide rocks.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. (Leopold, 1966, p. 138–39)

Early academic influences shaped Leopold’s schooling. A Yale School of Forestry graduate, he understood the world to be a resource for human use, and our responsibility was to use it wisely. From his perspective at that time, the world was most certainly not made up of independent agents—such as wolves and mountains—with ideas and viewpoints of their own. This encounter with a different kind of knowing shook him to his core; up until this moment, knowledge was the purview of the learned and hierarchically superior humans.

Then there was the dying wolf. This moment fell outside of his normal experiences and his school-taught abilities to explain. He wrestled with this disturbing experience for the rest of his life. As Leopold’s thinking evolved, he eschewed ideas that rested on the presumption of human dominance. What is more, he gave us the idea that “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (1966, p. 251).

In Leopold’s case, we hear more clearly how the cultural norms of schooling might act to obscure this basic experience of care and compassion. Allowing care to flourish means undoing some of the explicit and implicit constructs of institutional schooling and then rethinking how candidates create themselves as teachers. For us, this has led to having teacher candidates design lessons that are tied directly to particular places and that actively engage with the natural world as a co-teacher. This move to encountering other living beings as active, agential teachers has helped them to disrupt their definitions of knowledge, and who “has” it. It brings more-than-humans into the discussion as part of the learning and knowledge process. We have found that this often leads to rich questioning and discussion as candidates develop a criticality towards implicit assumptions about self, subject, classroom, and institution.

Criticality is also part and parcel of Rachel Carson’s famous work, *Silent Spring* (1962). Her bold, heartfelt, and challenging critique of the pesticide DDT challenged the *status quo* of the time. However, it is important to remember that she was a nature writer and lover long before she was an activist. It is a matter of some conjecture as to whether Carson had such a single and defining transformative moment as those described above. What is clear is that Carson thrived

during her rural childhood on the family farm. Here she rambled extensively, sometimes with her mother, and developed her senses of curiosity and care. In a story for the children's *St. Nicholas* magazine she wrote confidently, with the deep knowledge of the humble observer, and a staggering intimacy for a girl of just thirteen:

Soon our trail turned aside into deeper woodland. It wound up a gently sloping hill, carpeted with fragrant pine-needles. It was our discovery, Pal's [her dog] and mine, and the fact gave us a thrill of exultation. It was the sort of place that awes you by its majestic silence, interrupted by the rustling breeze and the distant tinkle of water. Near at hand, we heard the cheery "witchery, witchery" of the Maryland yellow-throat. For half an hour we trailed him until we came out on the sunny slope. There in some low bushes, we found the nest, containing four jewel-like eggs. To the little owner's consternation, we came close enough to snap a picture.

Countless discoveries made the day memorable: the bobwhite's nest, tightly packed with eggs, the oriole's aerial cradle, the frame-work of sticks which the cuckoo calls a nest, and the lichen-covered home of the hummingbird.

The cool of approaching night settled. The wood-thrushes trilled their golden melody. The setting sun transformed the sky into a sea of blue and gold. A vesper-sparrow sang his evening lullaby. We turned slowly homeward, gloriously tired, gloriously happy! (Carson, 1999, p. 10)

The particularly of Carson's knowledge hints at intimate relationships with her surroundings. Her writing also alludes to the agency of her cohabitants and their roles as teachers and co-knowers. And, learning during these days on the trail could be joyous.

With this understanding of Carson's childhood, we can reconsider her later book, *Silent Spring*, about the dangers of using pesticides. The teacher educator can begin to trace the influence that her encounters and immersion in a living place had—beginning as a child—on her deepening curiosity, care, and love for her world. These qualities find expression in her beautifully written prose. But in *Silent Spring* we also notice that the care and wonderment of a nature writer become active, even activist. Carson, the scientist, names troublesome truths about chemical use and bears witness to a problem that her culture would prefer to ignore. We sense that this process of caring, naming, and responding to critical issues of our time also has significant ethical implications for teaching. And it will be challenging to do.

Remember that the first public reaction to Carson at the time of her book's publication was vilification. Her work describing the concentration of toxic materials in food chains was criticized before the public as inaccurate and emotional, in *Time* magazine (1962). The journalist assured the readership that while some pesticides may be dangerous, many are "roughly as harmless as DDT" ("Pesticides," p. 47). The major concern expressed by the *Time* writer was that Carson's outburst in *Silent Spring* would do little good for the things that she

loves while risking considerable harm by alarming the “nontechnical public” (p. 48). She was being marginalized, among other things, for breaking from a rigorous style of purely discursive and rational argumentation (Greenwood, 2018). Fortunately the nontechnical public was capable of understanding the ecological concepts and was moved to action themselves through evocations of Carson’s activism.

Silent Spring went on to become a prizewinning bestseller. Fortunately, Carson was able to withstand the onslaught, supported by her empathy, deep understanding, and skill as educator, writer, and scientist. Here, too, there are lessons for teacher educators. Just as Carson was marginalized for straying into the subjective territories of emotions such as care and compassion, so too can educators. We live in a time where evidence-based inquiry, learning, and evaluation are given primacy. As teacher educators, we can see that the kinds of experiences that can nurture “loving, caring, compassionate, and competent healers” (Orr, 2017, p. x) are at best undervalued, and often marginalized.

When surveying the above examples, it is possible to trace some entwined traits:

- They share something deeply visceral, relational, and intimate.
- They are profoundly sensual and arise out of first-hand experience; they require being-in-the-world. They remind us that we are always and already in-the-world.
- They evoke care through emotional engagement, empathy, and identification. This care can also evoke sadness, disenchantment, and anguish (the latter being important to recognize as teacher educators).
- They are relational—ecologically, biotically communally, Self-realizationally.
- They point to understandings that aren’t located solely in individual humans. They aren’t just descriptive, analytical, logical, falsifiable, or narrowly rational. They exist and are inextricably part of the beings we all are.
- The care they hold includes responsibility and inspires activism. This care can lead to questioning core cultural assumptions, and it can inspire dedication to changing the environmentally problematic way things are. This will take time.
- And, many of these examples reveal listening to, learning from, and engaging with ways of knowing and speaking that arise in the more-than-human world.

Such a collection of traits has significant educational implications for teacher educators. What does the practice of education look like if we take these insights seriously? If, as Michael Derby suggests, “We have come to experience ‘school life’ and learning as fundamentally prosaic; characterized by fragmentation, emotionless and exacerbated by the privileging of epistemic foundations such as anthropocentrism, reductionism, linear causality, and dualism” (2015, p. 25), then there is a lot of work to do.

We finish our study of Touchstone #1 with some questions that can act as supportive agitations and critical reminders to those who seek to wild their practices:

- Given that the collection of traits described above cannot be abstracted, reduced, or taught in isolation from the world, what did I do today that required teacher candidates to be experientially present in their learning?
- The outcomes described in the experiences of historical figures are wild; they defy prediction and control; they just arose from the experiences and were suddenly present (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2016; Jickling, 2016, 2015). What can I do this semester to create spaces where transformative experiences can arise?
- What have I done in a teacher education context to accommodate experiences that exist beyond the capacity of language to fully describe and evaluate?
- Given that analyses of transformative experiences may only be possible in hindsight, inclusion will require more than market-driven and outcomes-oriented visions of education. What imaginative and creative approaches am I using to describe this aspect of my daily work in teacher education?
- Even though the kinds of understanding that we have been talking about cannot be measured, they still exist. How can I create a positive space in my evaluation scheme to honour this existence?
- Even though some understandings are educationally unmanageable, they can still be transformational. Indeed, the facility to care may be a prerequisite to transformation. What opportunities do I provide teacher candidates to nurture care for other humans and the more-than-human world?
- Have I allowed the teacher candidates opportunities to encounter the other, to feel care, and to notice how self vs. Self-realization is enacted?
- Have I considered how to hold space for teacher candidates as they encounter a range of emotions that appear in response to burgeoning care? What kinds of skills and supports can I offer as candidates act in ways that are, at times, contrary and threatening to the systems in which they live and work?

Teacher Education Touchstone #2: Expanding the Imagination

We believe that the ecological world has changed dramatically and that public education has to change in response. Future teachers can no longer be trained for a system that leaves students ill-prepared to respond to current crises and imaginatively unable to create new responses.

To understand the role imagination plays in supporting or hindering the creation of innovative schools and practices, we draw on research from a pretty radical public school in Maple Ridge, British Columbia (Blenkinsop, Maitland, & MacQuarrie, 2018). In that work the authors, all key members of the school's creation team, identified four ways that policy can hinder innovation. The way most relevant to this discussion was identified as "self-limited imagination." We

believe this thread has important implications for development of wild pedagogies as part of teacher education.

The emergence of self-limited imagination was a surprise. But it is a clear response to our early question: What holds us back? Although a surprise, once named, its presence became visible all over the place. Self-limited imagination is not a case of something that has been thought of before yet is ignored for a good reason. Nor is it something that is deemed impossible. This was more about alternatives not being imaginable at all! It was about people not having the experiential materials, the flexibility of mind, the institutional permission, the cultural range—whatever the blinder—to bring an idea into consciousness. This was about imaginary limits. When something beyond these imaginary boundaries was offered, the response was often complete blankness, or the muttered “I have never even thought of that” So, how do we expand our imaginative range?

The idea of a self-limited imagination is striking. When not addressed, it stands to thwart far-reaching, or radical, innovation—and indeed to obstruct wild pedagogies. Perhaps the “self-limited” part of this discussion is a misnomer. As we explored the idea, it became clear that imaginative limits are also contained within cultures and cultural systems. So, what “cultural limitations” might be present in the Canadian public school system, in teacher education programs, and in universities? Perhaps imagination is not as broad and flexible as suggested by quotidian understanding. For the rest of this paper, we explore imagination, its possibilities, and its limitations as the basis of a touchstone for teacher educators.

In its first year of existence, the faculty and research team at Maple Ridge Environmental School decided that it was important to give students significant amounts of unstructured playtime in the forest, working on forts.¹ Research (Sobel, 2001) suggests that time with nature, child-centredness, and constructing forts are important, even necessary, parts of building environmental relationships. However, something odd began to happen within a month of having an hour per day in the “forts village.” Systems of currency and governance began to develop in the fort village. Soon it became akin to an authoritarian police state, with one older boy assuming the role of leader supported by a posse of henchmen and bodyguards. The buildings became jails, casinos, and shopping complexes. Resources were hoarded by particular members of the leadership group. The natural world became a resource for individual enrichment, and particular areas of the village were denuded of life. It is important to note that not all the student voices were in line with the macro-narrative at play; however, those outside voices tended to be those of younger, more marginalized players.

As this authoritarian community structure became manifest, teachers began to engage more actively. As a result, governing committees and councils were created, and the shape of the village changed; interestingly, the change was minor. Even the teachers were having a hard time imagining what a different

kind of community might look like. Like the children, they had to use the governance and community making tools that were available to them—from the culture in which they, too, were immersed. Teachers and students alike were imaginatively limited to the cultural and experiential realities of their lives. These realities did not seem to include, for example, more equitable, eco-centric villages in action. Intriguingly, even after spending enormous amounts of time in the natural world, the quiet voices of both the marginal children and the natural world were being ignored.

Outcomes such as these have important implications. As this example shows, teacher educators will need to recognize their culturally-bound imaginative limits. And, an important part of our pedagogical work will be to expand the range of cultural tools available to teacher candidates. For Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), human development is a sociocultural event. For him, we are born into a culture that offers psychological and sense-making tools that help us to understand and then position ourselves within our world. Tools such as language, story, and even humour are incorporated into the selves that we become. These tools assist us in understanding the world and help us belong to the cultures and communities in which we find ourselves. Not only do we gather these sense-making tools and begin using them, but in the process of gathering and using we are also being shaped by the tools themselves. The languages we learn to speak and the foundational stories we are told shape who we are in the world. But they also limit what we can think and imagine.

Indigenous/Greek scholar Thomas King illustrates these points in another way. In his Massey lecture series *The Truth About Stories* (2008), he suggests that all we are is stories. In ways that seem to resonate with Vygotsky, King shows us how we become those stories that: we are immersed in; our culture chooses to tell us; we tell ourselves; and are told to us by marketers, politicians, family, and teachers.

King illustrates his discussion by placing the Genesis creation story side by side with an Indigenous creation story. The contrast reveals possibilities for enacting radically different ways of being-in-the-world.² And, it suggests that Indigenous knowledge can provide a countering to Western hegemonic forms of control. The Genesis creation story presents an omnipotent, all-knowing, male God who makes all the decisions, whereas the Indigenous story presents a female Ancestor in conversation and negotiation with already existing animals and birds. For King, these foundational stories have deep implications for the cultures they sustain. Each foundation offers possibilities. Each assists individuals in making sense of the world, but neither is opening the entire panoply of what it might mean to be human. There are limitations to each, and as a result those who are shaped by these stories and languages are limited as well in, among other things, their imaginative capacities.³

For teacher educators and wild pedagogues this challenge of expanding one's imagination, and those of their teacher candidates, is difficult. However,

there are some things to consider. We can help teacher candidates name this limitation and respond to it in practice. This might, in turn, act to de-centre teacher as expert and open the space for risk-taking, for pedagogical exploration, and humility. If we are imaginatively limited by our histories then none of us has the whole answer. This might leave more space for the unusual, the crazy, the spontaneous, and the “it just won’t work” to find fertile ground in which to prosper. The best ideas for responding to our changing world may just come from these places.

We might take a hard look beyond our cultural norms to seek ways of teaching and being that are different. This is not about appropriating others’ pedagogical styles, but about expanding our own—allowing us to offer more tools to our teacher candidates. We might adapt ourselves, and help teacher candidates to adapt, to what Blenkinsop (2012) suggests, is a Foucauldian stance of “hyperactive pessimism.” Here the challenge is to increase one’s vigilance and self-reflexivity in everything related to practice. For example, knowing how ineffective modern Western education has been in engaging in environmental matters, one can *expect* to misstep along the way; we must be vigilant. Other missteps can include our “normal,” “common sense” intuitions. When we realize that intuitions have grown out of our histories, we can understand why many of our first impulses are likely ones that have been shaped by the very *status quo* that we seek to challenge. The point is that we have to watch everything we do, and we should expect to find in our practices things that we would rather not do.

We should also expect that while imaginative capacity will always be limited, there are ways to expand our reach. This will require: a humble orientation; a willingness to change; an active gathering of ideas about how to be-in-the-world, both within one’s cultural reality and beyond; a constant expanding of the tools that are being made available; a careful consideration of the stories, metaphors, and languages one is using; and a thoughtful engagement in an ever-widening range of experiences. The last consideration is proposed not to create students who run thoughtlessly through hundreds of new adventures, but because the imagination also relies on the “stuff” with which it has to work. This includes ideas, concepts, experiences, encounters, etc. It is up to teacher educators to carefully consider their learners and offer wilder possibilities for expanding their imaginative potential.

With that, we finish with some questions that wilder teacher educators might want to consider:

- What did I do with my practice today that pushed outside the students’ previous experiences and my own imagination?
- What new “stuff,” experiences, and stories did I add to the mix? How are students taking up, working with, and being changed by these diverse cultural tools?
- Did I notice my proclivity to “not do” the seemingly unusual, or limit the

teacher candidates seeking to do the unusual? If so, did I make a considered attempt to provide space for the unusual to happen?

- What cognitive, physical/cultural, and natural tools are teacher candidates working with right now? And, what new ones can I introduce? Where might I look to find future additions?
- Where are the edges of my experience, my imagination? How do they limit my ability to imagine different kinds of education?
- What are sources of inspiration (e.g., experiential, trans-cultural, literary) that I am seeking to support and enhance my pedagogical changes and development?
- Do I have a sense of the edges of imagination that exist in my school, community, larger culture? And, how are these being engaged and explored with teacher candidates?

Conclusion

Our goal is not to undermine or discourage good work that is already occurring. We hope, rather, that committed and determined educators can see something of themselves in this paper. We hope they will take this as an affirmation of their work, a recognition that they are not alone, and an encouragement to go on, and go further. And, we hope that their work will serve as exemplars for others. The kind of cultural change required is still a way off.

We want to stress that this work is meant to be seen as a heuristic rather than a fixed plan. Make it your own and revise things to suit your own needs and places.

In this spirit, we have taken our previous work and wondered how it might function in the context of teacher education. This has led to the development of the two new touchstones presented here. We have just scratched the surface and limited this iteration to the work of individual teacher educators. This seems a good place to start. Exceptional individuals can often find ways to do good work and help others (Astbury, Huddart, & Théoret, 2009; Au, 2011).

We invite those in leadership positions—deans, chairs, department heads—to consider what touchstones they would like to live by. Wild pedagogies might be just one way that the boundaries between teachable subjects can be made more permeable, and little “cracks in consent” can be worked (Marino, 1997). There is a lot of hope in this conclusion, but as David Orr (2011) reminds us, hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up. Thank you for what you do, and good luck.

Notes

- ¹ See the Maple Ridge Environmental School: <https://es.sd42.ca/>. For other related research, see Blenkinsop, 2012; Blenkinsop and Piersol, 2013;

Blenkinsop, 2014; Blenkinsop et al., 2018.

- ² Our interest in this concept mostly arises from Arne Næss (1988) and comments by First Nations colleagues, most recently by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017). However, other readers will undoubtedly wish to trace this back to Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" (1962).
- ³ A discussion about Indigenous concerns with the concept of "wilderness," and some possible alignments with wild pedagogies can be found in the book, *Wild Pedagogies* (Jickling, et al. 2018).

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