

Guest Editorial

Wild Pedagogies for Change

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Introduction

Human behaviours have major consequences for nature, the more-than-human world, and issues linked to social and ecological justice. Our ways of living, sometimes framed as modernist, globalized, westernized, euro-centric, neo-liberal, colonial, Cartesian, and/or anthropocentric, are disturbing natural rhythms and social processes. That is why many are calling these times the Anthropocene—a proposed geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth’s geology and ecosystems, including anthropogenic climate change. Thus, the future seems more uncertain than ever before. This has been confirmed in the Sixth assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and of course throughout the recent COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.¹ We cannot keep doing the same things and expect different results. We need significant—indeed radical—change.

There have been many warnings. One of the most important of these, and a milestone for modern environmentalism, was the book *Silent Spring* which was published in 1962 (Carson). Another milestone, Norwegian ecophilosophy, evolved in the late 1960s and early 70s through strong links to the *friluftsliv* tradition. Philosopher Arne Næss was an important contributor and he foreshadowed our current predicament two decades ago in *Volume 5* of this journal: “As to ecology, we have had for a long time more than enough ecological knowledge about how to mend our ways” (Næss & Jickling, 2000, p. 55), yet we are still on the same trajectory, heading towards ecological collapse.

Many have underlined the complexity of the challenges ahead of us—proposed solutions and suggested answers. For us as educators, the only way to handle this complexity is to meet it with courage and energy. David Orr once said, “all education is environmental education” (1994, p. 12) suggesting that all aspects of education necessarily involve environmental responsibility. Our hope is that the variety of examples we have presented in this special issue will add energy to the task of environmental education and inspire educators to find new and courageous ways to prepare young people for an uncertain future—in all aspects of their practices.

As editors, our approach to the complexity of the challenges we face, has been to create openings for methodological diversity in the research presented. This approach appreciates ontological and epistemological diversity. We also acknowledge the many ways of communicating research and have chosen

to support a variety of representational forms. We are happy to say that the variety of themes, methodologies, and communicative forms exceed our expectations. Themes from this issue, “Wild Pedagogies for Change,” include: immersive experiences in experiential, Indigenous, and traditional education; aspects of *friluftsliv* and Outdoor education; impressions of, and connections with nature and the more-than-human world; and ideas about education in the Anthropocene and the unpredictable and uncertain future.

In this special issue of the *CJEE*, we provide a channel to explore some of the general research questions framed within the Wild Pedagogies literature. Common to the papers included is consideration of practical paths forward, particularly through the Wild Pedagogies reflective touchstones.

Many people, particularly in the Eurocentric world, are technology optimists, believing that technology can solve all our problems. And while we believe that there is some truth to this, there is other work to do, too. In our opinion, it is also important to challenge dominant attitudes and behaviours, and to live in a more nature-friendly way. This is formulated in a seminal Norwegian document, the Stetind Declaration, that asserts “There is no path to harmony with nature. Harmony with nature is the path.”²

As editors of this special issue, we do not think that the problems the planet is facing can be solved by technology, only. It is risky and reckless to do nothing while waiting for elusive technological solutions.

Wild Pedagogies

Wild Pedagogies rest on the premise that, as outlined above, we cannot continue as we are. Effective responses to the crises of our times, will need to be less anthropocentric, less hierarchical, and more equitable. Education must be a part of any response that requires such a fundamental rethinking of ideas and practices. Yet the globalized world, in which we are situated, has knitted together values, behaviours, and assumptions into a resilient status quo that seems difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge.

Wild Pedagogies thus arises within a complex of concerns about such control. Meaningful change will require disrupting the present status quo and the re-wilding of education as we know it. Our work is, first, to persistently concern ourselves with how issues of control can limit possibilities for change—explicit control, as well as more implicit controls embedded in contemporary language, metaphor, and cultural practices. Second, our work is to resist this control in ways that are imaginative, expansive and that contribute to ever-widening ways to understand and respond to relationships in the world.

Concerns about control are also considered within our relationships with the more-than-human world. Relationships of control are frequently manifest

by interpreting elements of nature as inferior others, resources, and objects for consumption. Our work here is to seek an expansive view that acknowledges the agency of the more-than-human world, brings it into our conversations, and seeks its guidance as a co-teacher.³

Importantly, Wild Pedagogies also includes a series of six initial touchstones as ideas intended to support the work of educators. They are an attempt to recognize the difficulty in achieving sustained cultural change, by providing ideas that can be held and returned to—for potential reference, guidance, and support. In a sense, they offer the beginnings of reflective pathways to pedagogical action. They are intended to be revisited, refined, and reconsidered, but they can also stand as points for departure. These touchstones are drawn from experiments in practice and attempt to bring the more-than-human world actively into educational conversations.

Wild Gatherings

The pervading idea of this series of colloquia has been to combine a mode of travel embedded in a landscape with thought-provoking seminars. The travelling has been punctuated with times for participants to share ideas. It is through these ongoing and immersive travelling dialogues that the ideas of Wild Pedagogies have evolved and expanded.

The first gathering was a “paddling colloquium” on the Yukon River in 2014. This was followed by the hiking-based “Tetrahedron dialogue,” the Franklin river rafting colloquium in Tasmania, and a sailing colloquium on the west coast of Scotland. The latter colloquium gave rise to the Crex Crex Collective and the book, *Wild Pedagogies* (2018). As a result of these gatherings papers have been written, and special ‘wild pedagogies’ issues have been published in the journals *Pathways* (2016, 28(4); 2020, 32(3)) and *The Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* (2018, 23(1)).

While we were on the brigantine, *The Lady of Avenel*, sailing on the west coast of Scotland, the idea of having a seminar in Norway was discussed. In the end it was decided to meet in Finse, at the top of the railway line between Oslo and Bergen. Meeting in Finse also allowed for the possibility to pay a visit to Næss’s famous cabin *Tvergastein*. Finally, meeting in Norway offered the opportunity to connect the Nordic concept of *friluftsliv* with wild pedagogies. 28 engaged pedagogues met at Finse and they came from Japan, Australia, Botswana, USA, Canada, and Norway. Interesting discussions took place and new ideas were generated, including the responsibility to publish special issues in the following journals: *Policy Futures in Education* (2021, 19(3)) and this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* (CJEE).

This Special Issue

The call for papers for this special issue of CJEE outlined our aim to “provide a channel for researchers to explore some of the general research questions regarding WP in education.” We suggested at the time that themes could include the more-than-human world in education programming, ecocriticism, immersive experiences, or experiential education.

Participants of the Finse gathering, and other scholars, were invited to share their research. The result is a diverse collection that doesn’t comfortably follow traditional academic “rules” or structures. It has been important for us to open space for the more unconventional. Since this special issue focuses on wild pedagogies, we have also included “wild” papers! Given that Wild Pedagogies should move away from the type of education that maintains an untenable status quo in society, it follows that we should embrace papers that are radical in structure and that demonstrate how even academic writing sometimes can do the unexpected.

This issue of *CJEE* starts with an invitation by Bob Jickling and Marcus Morse to embrace methodological diversity and a little re-wilding. Their paper, inspired by lyric philosophy, invites us into an ontological experiment while exploring fresh ways to represent places and ideas. Working together with some of the Finse participants, their use of pinhole cameras provides an excellent starting point. These simple cameras have no viewfinders or light meters. They require time and attention to frame images and gauge light. When images were developed in the evening, participants had good discussions about what they really saw. These photographs, combined with bits of grounded text, generated a series of linked lyric arguments to assist others in getting a sense for what was seen, felt, and experienced within the place.

The next two papers continue to explore qualities in nature and ways to connect with a place. They ask us to consider: What lies beyond our connection with these places? What are the risks? In *The Paradox of Wild Pedagogies*, five participants—Lee Beavington, Chris Beeman, Sean Blenkinsop, Marianne Presthus Heggen and Erika Kazi—continue to test unorthodox academic forms. Together, they present an experiment in multi-vocality—both human and more-than-human. Through five creative segments, including short texts, lyric pieces, and even a sound file, they record their parallel yet differing experiences at Finse. As each of them takes time to listen carefully to a fading glacier, they explore a deeply emotive aspect of the more-than-human world that often goes unnoticed.

Experiencing the glacier at Finse can be emotionally tough. The beauty, awe, and joy of the place is tempered by sorrow. Like other glaciers around the world, it is disappearing. The third paper explores the potential of using ruins and sites of destruction as places of “wildness” and, thus, as places to

practice Wild Pedagogies. Using the example of the Hanford Nuclear Site in Washington State, USA, Jenne Schmidt explores how “a place of ruin” can open new and interesting ways for students to learn with and from nature. For her, this approach reveals a method for critically examining current and past human relationships with nature, land, water, and places themselves. Her intent is to foster new types of connection, nurturing, and accountability.

The next series papers are concerned with traditional outdoor education. Zabe MacEachren writes about how she and Canadian teacher candidates experience campfire activities. One of the first signs of a human culture was the ability to make a campfire to keep warm, prepare food, and gather around. It is said that one of the reasons we are still so fascinated by bonfires is this archaic connection. Students’ narratives tell how co-created campfires can act to broaden participants’ perceptions in new and profound ways.

The following two papers explore the Nordic tradition of *friluftsliv*. Jørgen Nerland and Helga Aadland depart from the *friluftsliv* of personal development and outdoor skills and pursue the environmental dimension of *friluftsliv* while speculating about whether *friluftsliv* can be a wild pedagogical path towards environmental awareness. Then, the team of Kari Anne Jørgensen-Vittersø, Sean Blenkinsop, Marianne Presthus Heggen and Henrik Neegaard seek to put *friluftsliv* and Wild Pedagogies into a dialogue with each other. They draw on the work of Arne Næss to inform a discussion about how the six touchstones can both connect with and challenge various traditions of *friluftsliv*. They explore how the two concepts may, in combination, inform changing views of children, knowledge, and nature.

In the last paper in this series, Kgosietsile Velempini and Mphemelang Ketlhoilwe describe how they have implemented outdoor education activities in teacher education in Botswana. Inspired by Wild Pedagogies, they reflect on these practices and the testimonies from their teacher education students. They conclude that a wilder form of experiential learning, “is more valued by learners as it is not constrained by predetermined learning outcomes.” Students said that they could observe, feel, experiment, reflect and connect with nature without being influenced by the teacher.

The next selection of papers explores traditional and Indigenous aspects of education and shows some of the potential they have as agents for change. NB Lama Jigme takes a critical stance to the ideology of economic growth and asks, “what is the purpose of knowledge and education? And what is wellbeing?” Jigme explores ideas of knowledge and wellbeing based on the Nepalese contemplative tradition of “Dudjom Tersar” and the six touchstones of Wild Pedagogies, as he seeks alternative ways to practice education and wellbeing.

Carie Green’s paper investigates the wild pedagogical potential in decolonizing native children’s experiences with the land. In her study, she follows a group of Alaskan pre-school children, teachers, and volunteer parents

into the wilderness. Looking at the children's interactions with the place, and how they exercise their Inupiaq values, she reveals the children's living relations with the land, and claims that the land in the lives of these children, "establishes a pathway towards sustainability and survival." The connection to the Land and place can help us to re-attune ourselves. Green, in turn, examines links between Indigenous values and Wild Pedagogies.

The next section of papers looks further into another aspect of cultural change, namely how the different languages of literature and music influence our perceptions about relationships in human and more-than-human worlds.

David Hebert argues that nature conservation and music sustainability are unified by shared concerns. He postulates how commodification and economic development can engender approaches to the exploitation of culture that are often identical to the strategies for corporate profiteering of natural resources. He looks at Wild Pedagogies and soundscapes as especially promising approaches toward fruitful collaborations between the fields of nature conservation and music sustainability.

Meghan Richey claims that the way we story our lives shapes the way we understand and experience the world. In her paper, she explores how narratives, co-created with the wild, may influence our ecological selves by introducing language that represents more-than-human beings as subjects rather than objects. Her paper draws on the reflective touchstones of 1) *agency and role of nature as co-teacher* and 2) *locating the wild*, to frame experiential learning pathways that enter a wild pedagogy of nature.

Estella Kuchta argues that ecofiction is a valuable resource for fostering social imagining and community building. The uncertain future "calls for pedagogical practices that support holistic learning, community building, ecological awareness, and adaptation skills." She finds that ecocritical instruction guided by a wild pedagogy supports student's emotional, social, and ecological selves.

Fundamental to Wild Pedagogies is the need for urgent change. This issue has shown some of the diverse fields where Wild Pedagogies may contribute to this change. In the last paper, Catherine Hemsall plumbs the core of this need through her question: Is the theory of Wild Pedagogies the utopian philosophy the Anthropocene needs? She explores relationships between utopian ideas, generated by these times of upheaval and change, and Wild Pedagogies. Here, she finds that the theory of Wild Pedagogies performs an abstraction of, rather than an iteration of, outdoor learning, and that this provides an overarching philosophical framework that challenges the status quo and fulfils the criteria as a utopia for the Anthropocene. We find it logical and natural that this paper concludes this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*.

Conclusion

For this issue, we invited researchers to explore general research questions about Wild Pedagogies and education. In this invitation, it was important that the resulting work would include more-than-human voices. We wanted to challenge dominant attitudes and behaviours and to encourage more nature-friendly ways to live. We wanted to connect theory and practice. To this end, a common thread in the papers presented here is a consideration of practical ways forward, particularly through the use of the Wild Pedagogies reflective touchstones. We think that the problems the planet is facing need a variety of paths forward, changing educational practices, and some fresh ideas. And this is what we got—a wide variety of ideas and practices.

Our aims have been richly achieved through the diversity of participants and the complexity of their contributions. This special issue presents the work of authors from seven countries, and there are as many females as male writers – in other words this volume has achieved, to some degree, both diversity and balance. About half of the authors and papers are written by participants from the Finse gathering and reflect their experiences in that place. On the other hand, we are very happy to have many papers from authors that did not attend the Finse gathering. We take this range in participation as a promising signal about common interests in the ideas of Wild Pedagogies.

In our attempt to categorize the papers we ended up identifying five themes. We encouraged readers to seek additional themes as ways to connect to their own work, and their own places. One important thread running through all papers, in addition to Wild Pedagogies itself, is the connection to the touchstones and their links to pedagogical implementation. In keeping with the action-oriented link to the touchstones, the papers in this issue are also connected to concrete experiences or active research projects.

In the end, we wanted papers for this special issue that would channel the authors' burning interests and challenge them to present their wild ideas, in wild ways. We are happy to have so many good examples.

A problem often found in education is the loyalty of educators to their leaders, their policymakers, and their prescribed curricula. It is precisely this system of unquestioned assumptions, attitudes, and loyalties that sustain the status quo that Wild Pedagogies is attempting to disrupt. We think that addressing the uncertainty of our times, and its social and ecological injustices, will demand a kind of rebelliousness (Blenkinsop and Morse, 2017) towards these dominating systems and ways of thinking. We take the complexity and engagement you read about in this special issue is a sign of hope for the future.

Endnotes

- ¹ See for example: (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocene>, 15.08.21, and (<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>).
- ² The “Stetind declaration” was formulated by the Norwegian “Council for Eco-philosophy” in 2009. The declaration is translated into many languages. The “Council for Eco-philosophy” has its background in the Norwegian and Nordic ecophilosophy tradition. (<http://www.xn—stetinderklringen-1rb.no/index.html>)
- ³ A more comprehensive description of the origins and theorizing about Wild Pedagogies can be found in a book of the same title (Jickling, Blenkinsop, Timmerman, & Sitka Sage, 2018). For a more recent consideration of the cultural forces that shape and control the status quo, see an earlier paper in this journal (Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020).

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