**Abstract**

The environmental challenges of today require us to increase our ability to hear the voices of the more-than-human as were central to our ancestral practices. Efforts to develop pedagogies that redirect the way we learn to *be in the world* are emerging under the broad title, wild pedagogies. This article describes Deep Ecology Campfire events as they are organized and experienced by teacher candidates at [University Name] field camp. Details of the campfire activities are given as well as an evaluation of the event’s efficacy as an alternative experience of Fire.[[1]](#endnote-1) A contrast is made between the Deep Ecology Campfire Experiences and those associated with conventional campfire activities. The Deep Ecology Campfire experience is explored in the context of the *Six* *Touchstones for Wild Pedagogies* *in Practice* as listed by the Crex Crex Collective, a group of wild pedagogues whose 2018 publication provides a framework in support of the growth and adoption of wild pedagogies. Student narratives documented subsequent to annual Deep Ecology Campfires serve to illustrate the success, challenges and, development of teaching philosophy, as the students are guided through the discovery of Fire as a more-than-human voice. The narratives in conjunction with the touchstone framework, provides insight into the subjective experiences of becoming a wild pedagogue. The six touchstones serve as an effective means to elaborate and expand upon the constituents of a wild pedagogy activity in the form of a campfire experience.

*Keywords*: Wild Pedagogies, Deep Ecology, Campfire, Education, More-than-human

**Exploring Deep Ecology Campfire Experiences with Wild Pedagogy Touchstones**

**Introduction & Background**

Each year beginning in 2001 the [University name and location] has offered teacher candidates a Deep Ecology Campfire experience at their annual five-day field camp. On the first night, I as course director facilitate the evening, so it is quietly spent by everyone, sipping tea while overlooking a lake. It is explained to students this is a time to spend focusing on the location and what it has to offer after a long day of meeting new classmates and learning about their upcoming program.

The schedule provided to students outlines the following three evenings as campfires. Each teacher candidate has earlier in the day participated in an activity that has delegated them to one evening’s leadership team. The leaders for the second field camp night are informed to draw from their own repertoire of typical campfire activities. The final evening is to capture the entire field camp experience and the group bonding that has occurred. The third evening I refer to as the Deep Ecology Campfire, but I share this theme orally only with the leaders when explaining their task. On everyone’s schedule the campfire is called *Flaming Coals* and teacher candidate will name and describe the evening in their own way with *Primal* and *Wild* the predominant terms of expression. Only the teacher candidates’ narrations concerning the Deep Ecology Campfire will be used to explore the *Six Touchstones for Wild Pedagogies in Practice* as outlined by the Crex Crex Collective (2018).

On the first day of field camp the Deep Ecology Campfire leaders are self-selected after considering their subjective interest in; drumming, chanting, dancing, animal mimicry and other creative expressions. Overall, [program name] teacher candidates tend to be energetic and strongly motivated to think outside of the box.

The instructions provided to each year’s Deep Ecology leaders have evolved over the twenty years of field camp; at the same time, they have stayed true to the core reasoning that defines the evening activities as *deep ecology*. Very few students have ever heard of *deep ecology* and I briefly explain this underpinning philosophy in which I ask them to imagine pollution floating down a river:

*Some people are gathered around the shore focused on picking up all the litter, this is often considered shallow ecology, while a smaller group of people are looking upstream, trying to determine the source—the how and why pollution is being made. Think of your leadership group as comprised of those people who are looking for the source of pollution so they can understand why it is being made and how to prevent it; although in your case you are seeking the appropriate activities to be done in Fire’s presence. Maybe, instead of singing songs we have learned from Disney movies, we should be creating our own chants and dances or joining the coyotes and howling at the moon. Your task is to get people up, moving, dancing, chanting, basically celebrating their ability to be with Fire—thinking about Fire in a new way. If you could ask Fire what we should be doing in Fire’s presence, how would Fire respond?*

The Deep Ecology Leaders are also informed that everyone will have a shaker to use and that popcorn can be made. Overall the Deep Ecology Campfire nights have proven very successful and they are the evening I most look forward to during the school year.

Each year is unique, and the evening will unfold with both leaders and participants demonstrating innovative activities that lead to varying degrees of expressed freedom, abandonment and self-censorship; frequently a spontaneous howling like a pack of wolves will erupt and the creation of amazing rhythmic vocalizations will be heard. Over the years the Deep Ecology evening has given birth to a wide range of activities that stimulate everyone’s ability to be with Fire in a deeper manner. Most transcendental or altered states of consciousness experienced in a campfire setting, both in historical and modern times, have involve the use of drugs or alcohol. It is worth noting that the Deep Ecology Campfire achieves a consciousness expanding experience, focused on the here and now, without involving any chemical stimuli.

The campfire leaders typically organize the evening activities such that they can gather participants to begin, build intensity and close the evening in impressionable ways. Over the years the initial warm-up activities have included participants being blind folded and led on a sensory walk, face painted with mud or charcoal, assuming the identity of a selected animal as they wait in a field for darkness to arrive and parading to the designated campfire setting. On the way to the fire ring they might follow a trail of lit lanterns or be asked to move towards the sound of intense drumming. One year’s introductory activities were exceptionally alluring. Everyone waited in a line behind a tarp which blocked the view of the fire. As they waited unusual sounds issued from the fireside. One by one the participants were guided to take a handful of wood shavings to the fire side of the tarp where leaders made gestures indicating they should throw their shavings into the fire as a contribution. This action resulted in sparks flying and everyone cheering allowing for the cause of the strange sound to be understood.

One effective activity frequently used by the Deep Ecology leaders has been to produce the sound of a thunderstorm. The activity uses few words and depends upon participants imitating the leader’s gestures. The process has been particularly effective at encouraging participant’s interaction and setting a precedent to follow the non-verbal clues. Call and response is another technique the leaders use to get participants involved in the creation of a soundscape. A metaphor of animals approaching a watering hole is invoked by placing a bowl of popcorn in the middle of the circle and having participants approach it as if they were an animal. One year, a particularly creative group of leaders only allowed the participants to grab a handful of popcorn if they growled at the leader who was protectively holding the pot. Generally making bird-like sounds yields a soundscape that intuitively feels harmonic with the forest setting and at the same time encourages participants to lose their inhibitions, helping them to overcome the fear of blending their voice with others. I have observed that when leaders create rhythms on large rain barrels, the participants are often moved to get up and dance.

Each Deep Ecology evening the leaders designate an activity to mark the ending of the planned experienced. Many times, over the years the evening has concluded with a spontaneous outbreak of euphoric group-howling. One year ended when the leaders all pointed to the fire until everyone copied them; then the leaders pointed to the sky and one by one all spiraled away from the fire to lie alone in a nearby field, fingers pointing upwards. For me, the connection made between Fires on earth and that of the distant stars engendered a strong sense of wonder.

The feedback provided by students at the Deep Ecology Campfires serve to further my recognition of the evening as a core component of wild pedagogy. I receive student feedback on the Deep Ecology evenings three different ways: post event discussions, field camp journals and a final paper assignment entitled *the Significance Paper*. Over the course of twenty years, the most popular subject matter chosen by the teacher candidates for their *Significance* *Papers* has been the Deep Ecology Campfire evening. The student’s ideas and accounts of the Deep Ecology experience align well with the six wild pedagogies touchstones presented by the Crex Crex Collective (2018).

**The Six Touchstones for Wild Pedagogies in Practice**

My idea to develop a Deep Ecology Campfire originated in part, from my own journey as a child interested in primitive skills through to my professional work as an outdoor environmental educator. After reading *Wild Pedagogies* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018) it was apparent to me that the six touchstones presented in the book strongly reinforced that the Deep Ecology Campfires constituted an example of wild pedagogy, one crafted to further the rewilding of education. “Re-wilding education thus requires learning from place and landscape. Listening to voices from the more-than-human-world” (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p.x). Throughout my career I have asked teacher candidates to listen to Fire—a more-than-human voice. The *Six Touchstones for Wild Pedagogies in Practice* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018) provide a useful framework to study the components of the Deep Ecology Campfires, at the same time they serve to illustrate the flexible and evolving character of wild pedagogy. I agree with the Crex Crex Collective’s premise that “there will never be—nor should there be—a single wild pedagogy” (2018, p.xi).

***Touchstone #1: Nature as Co-Teacher***

“This touchstone reminds educators to acknowledge, and then act, on the idea that those teachers capable of working with, caring for, and challenging student learning include more-than-human beings. . . .it includes learning with and through it [the natural world] as well; and thus, its myriad beings become active, fellow pedagogues” (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 80).

The directions I provide to the campfire leaders introduces the perspective that—the more-than-human—Fire—is to be considered a co-teacher. The oral directions emphasis on imagining a dialogue with Fire and asking Fire directly what we should be doing in Fire’s presence sets a tone that Fire (is not an *it*) but is a teacher worthy of being asked questions. Our task as humans is to be open and able to listen. For what is likely the first time, leaders are asked to consider the source of the campfire curricula they have been exposed to in their past and question the role of popular culture (E.g. Disney, Hollywood etc.) in their campfire experiences. By referring to Fire as a being, I provide the opportunity for leaders to recognize their own conditioning to attend to human constructs rather than the more-than-human, particularly, Fire as a valid teacher. The concept of Fire as teacher redefines Fire by decentering the anthropocentric voice. The campfire leaders are asked to do what the Crex Crex Collective describe as touchstone one: “carefully listening to available voices and building partnerships with seashores and forest dwellers. And it will, at times, involve actively de-centring the taken-for-granted human voice and re-centering more-than-human voices” (p.81). Upon hearing their directions, the leaders often stare back at me wide-eyed, expressing a mix of excitement and nervousness. They are thrilled at the possibilities but challenged by the novelty of the process.

Any additional questions from the leaders regarding their task are answered by me and they are then informed that it is their responsibility to plan and discuss the deeper meanings that they want to present and how to best support the Fire-paradigm shift. They have two days to prepare for their evening during which time they must integrate the new concepts to the point that they can successful articulate to peers a new way of being around Fire. One student’s journal entry captures their overall impression of the evening, “It was interesting and awesome to find myself in a situation that brought me back to my roots and primal instincts” (student journal).

A wonderful example of the way leaders one year conveyed how Fire had become their teacher is illustrated by their chosen opening activity. The campfire evening began as the leaders circled Fire, took a long slow bow in unison, then turned to face their peers, and bowed again before they returned to their seats in the circle. Immediately, and in unison, the participants stood, imitated the gesture, walked closer to Fire and bowed, then turned and bowed to the seated leaders. Watching teacher candidates silently circle the Fire and bow reverently to the more-than-human teacher before turning and bowing to the humans, struck me as a beautiful poignant act. It demonstrated in a profound way how much we all owe to Fire. The respectful bowing to Fire as teacher, acknowledges the archetypic importance of Fire to humanity. Two additional journal entries provided by students that support this touchstone include: “What an experience! I felt so connected to the earth and to nature” and “Holy Fire. It was incredible to feel like I was a part of such a meaningful and respectful experience” (student journals).

***Touchstone #2: Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity***

“Embracing complexity will require encounters with that “which cannot be known,” which cannot be predetermined and prescribed in advance. . .. Complexity can be understood as dynamic, fluid, and unpredictable, and is best described in reference to qualities without fixed boundaries” (Crex Crex Collective p.84).

Over time I have increasingly encouraged Deep Ecology Campfire leaders to communicate without words. Upon first encountering the concept of silent communication, teacher candidates are often both thrilled and terrified; they are sensing the unknown possibilities of the second touchstone. The removal of the ability for spoken communication eliminates leader’s usual method of providing instruction and the subsequent acknowledgement that given directions are understood and will be complied with. The non-verbal aspect of the evening moves the participants into the unknown—bringing the need for flexibility of perception and spontaneity of action, because, without words the requisite space for subjective interpretation of events is created.

Leaders and participants must rely on their ability to read facial expressions and other non-verbal clues. Initially, leaders are often unsure if others will follow and join in their efforts to express their joy with a dance or chant around Fire. Further, leaders commonly fear that participants will sit at Fire uninvolved thinking that their antics are crazy or meaningless. At the same time, participants are uncomfortable; they are unsure of what is going on or whether they are supposed to join in with the seemingly odd physical expression the leaders are demonstrating. Although initially experienced as uncomfortable or foreign, silence or wordless communication provides the means to spontaneously communicate in new and pleasant ways building upon our sensations of the more-than-human. During these silent moments it is as if we are allowing the more-than-human voice to be heard and we are giving ourselves permission to develop novel ways to participate and be with Fire, landscape, ourselves, and others. One student wrote, “The lack of speaking and the unifying feeling that the drums and shakers created was definitely a unique one; and one that I had never felt before and very much enjoyed” (student paper).

It is noteworthy that in all the years I have offered the Deep Ecology Campfire, only two times has it resulted in prolong moments of bewildered staring, and minimal participation in the movement and dancing component. When participants in the Deep Ecology Campfire evenings embraced the challenge of responding to non-verbal directions, they are, without knowing it, engaging in what the Crex Crex Collective refers to as “unknown and unclear spontaneous involvements’’ (p. 84). Journal entries by teacher candidates repeatedly describe the evening as having invoked something powerful and foreign. Their entries confirm that the teacher candidates feel encouraged and supported to question and think deeply about what they have experienced. One student wrote, “Wow! I don’t know what that campfire was all about, but I want to learn more” and another shared, “Later we had a great conversation about age-appropriate ways to execute the primal fire. I would love to be able to offer this next summer at camp to my tripping group” (student journal).

Each year, I evaluate the cumulative experience of the previous Deep Ecology Campfires and I modify the description I offer to the campfire leaders when necessary. I give consideration of what has led to either euphoric, or awkward moments in the past. Student journal entries and group discussions have proven critical input in helping shape the directions I provide the following year. For example, after the second, Deep Ecology Campfire, my explanation to the leaders emphasized the importance of beginning the evening with sensory-based activities (e.g. blind folding, mud paint, animal calls etc.). Student feedback included: “To give up my sight forced me out of my normal comfort zone. . . being blindfolded allowed me to learn to trust those who were leading the activity” (student paper). During the third Deep Ecology Campfire one nervous leader, talked on and on, disrupting our ability to focus on anything but their words. This experience led me to strongly discourage any talking in subsequent years. As the years went by, I set the bar of non-verbal communication even higher, informing each new crop of leaders that in previous years that the entire campfire had been successfully carried out using no words.

One year the leaders took my directions to say nothing so literally that they did not provide the participants with any information at the beginning of the evening and participant involvement was slow to emerge. In subsequent years I made certain that I clarified to the leaders that communicating some information is essential in facilitating the participants ability to let down their guard enough that they; expect the unexpected, and feel free to participate.

As the field camp schedule is busy, students often only find time to record in their journal significant impressions or key points they want to record of what constitutes effective instructions so they can later recall valuable leadership techniques. One year I noted that many students recorded in their journals what they remembered of the instructions provided prior to a particularly successful Deep Ecology Campfire, “The only instructions provided were to meet at the rock outside the dining hall when you hear howling and then follow along. Bring your flashlight if you want for your walk back to your tent afterwards. Also bring your completed shaker and an open mind! Then they added deliberately “No words will be necessary”” (student journal).

The no oral communication directive is effective because it requires participants to reclaim the spontaneous and creative way of playing through imitation that predominated in their childhood.One student commented, “During the campfire tribal ceremony, it was really interesting and fascinating to see in action just how instinctive and easy it is for humans to observe and mimic one another” (student journal).  Imitating others may trigger our earliest ways of being in the world when we are incapable of distinguishing ourselves from that which surrounds us, especially the more-than-human world. Imitating the more-than-human, without judgement, offers a way to access and learn what Devall and Session describe as deep ecology “a more sensitive openness to ourselves and the nonhuman life around us” (1985, p. 65).

Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, aptly referred to one of the industrial world’s societal deficit as ‘spectatoritis’ that resulted due to a decline of initiative and enterprise (https://vobs.org/blog/outward-bound-history-kurt-hahn/). My experience with the Deep Ecology Campfires has highlighted the importance of having leaders set up the experience so that participants, especially adults, will understand enough of what is taking place that they will feel inclined to imitate and participate, enabling their ability to briefly reclaim their childlike tendencies to perceive the world holistically and in the present moment. One student noted this holistic form of communication, “loud drums and odd sounds pierced the power that lies within all humans to feel rhythm. It was the best conversation of field camp so far and came as a result of primal fire” (student journal).

***Touchstone #3: Locating the Wild***

“The challenge for many urban-based environmental educators is, then, that the murmur of wild can be overwhelmed by the noise, smell, and dominion of human constructions.” (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p.90).

The [university program] field camp is run in a beautiful forest location on the Canadian Shield overlooking a lake. The setting provides four semi-permanent existing campfire rings. The location is surrounded by wild, and its’ presence colours the local. Campfire leaders face the challenge of facilitating the ability of participants to focus so they can attend to the wildness of the setting and central Fire, rather than preconceived concepts of what should occur around a campfire.

The lyrics of the *Campfire Burning* song (origins unknown) is a simple song sung in a round to the tune of London Bridges that asks the singers directly to “draw nearer, draw nearer” to the lessons of Fire. In contrast, many contemporary songs and activities done around a campfire encourage us to laugh and sing, building a foundation on our collective popular culture and in so doing they pull us away from the wild, directing us toward what can be conveyed by electronic screens by profit driven industries eager to make our watching addictive. Locating the wild, even when situated in a campfire ring deep in a forest, requires the development of *patterns of being* that diminish the role of modern constructs in our lives, replacing them with practices that help us to focus on the immediate.

A notable relevant truism was stated by a student leader who had discovered it in the course of her improvisational-acting studies: “No matter what happens, remember that we [all of us leaders] will have your back and be following you” (student journal). The other campfire leaders expressed strongly that their conversation around the point had served as a pivotal moment in the shaping of their plan, as well as their ability to successfully lead the nights’ campfire activities. They agreed that their confidence in their own leadership, was the result of the support they had agreed to give each other. Likewise, they agreed that their collective self-confidence had resulted in successful, participant engagement. The universal acknowledgement of all the leaders on the importance of mutual support, reinforced in me that this concept should be stressed with leaders in the years to come.

We can best help students to locate the wild, when we, as wild pedagogues are supported on our own wonderous journey to meet the more-than-human. When leaders are hesitant to act the fool or are reluctant to share their wild encounters fearing their story will fall on deaf ears, we diminish our ability to grow as wild pedagogues. With each successive Deep Ecology Campfire, I realize I must find the means to effectively communicate my support to both leaders and participants helping to foster an environment in which they can venture into new perspectives and relationships with Fire. Two student journal entries addressed this topic: “An interesting point came up about being genuine & honest & invested in the ritual in order to inspire others who may be concerned about their image as they “let loose” in front of their peers” (student’s journal). “Something that was brought up was our idea of ‘crazy’ and why we thought acting ‘primal’ was considered crazy—we call things were [sic] not used to or familiar with ‘crazy’ even when they are not. Goal: Eliminate the word ‘crazy’ from my vocabulary” (student’s journal).

***Touchstone #4: Time and Practice***

Here intuition, a product of deep time, plays a more important role than reason, which is a product of more recent cultural history (Crex Crex Collective, p.94). Closely associated with time are invitations to practice. The first invites teachers to develop their own practice in a way that deepens relationships with local places and beings (Crex Crex Collective p.95).

Time and practice aid in the formation of a wild pedagogues’ deep awareness of the more-than-human. Even after twenty years of experiencing Deep Ecology Campfires, and countless hours spent cooking over fires, stoking winter woodstoves and attending community events (E.g. Solstice celebrations) I still seek to spend more time with Fire and to create a deeper practice and understanding of Fire. OEE students likewise vocalize and express their craving to spend more time outdoors with the more-than-human. One year an OEE student who had been one of the Deep Ecology Campfire leaders, chose to improve her fire-making skills as part of a course assignment. In pursuing her goal, she spent a lot of time and established a practice of being with Fire over two school terms. At her classes’ year-end gathering, she shared with her peers what her time and practice with Fire had resulted in; what I recognized as the further development of her skill as a wild pedagogue pertaining to Fire.

One of the student’s objectives was to learn various ways to make fire by friction and her practiced skill allowed her to confidently aid her peers at the final class gathering so they could do the same. In organizing her classmates, she provided few oral directions, and everyone worked co-operatively together to create fire by friction using a large spindle. As they worked, she softly sang a tune about *finding the fire in your heart.* Soon, as the smoke began to rise, and the cord whipped back and forth on the spindle a corresponding, enthusiastic chanting arose from everyone. The spark successfully was fanned into a small Fire, cheering erupted and all began to joyously dance around the flame.

Witnessing the spontaneous eruption of song and dance as the students responded to their deepening connection with Fire affected me profoundly. I mark what occurred this evening as one of my proudest teaching accomplishments; particularly, as the teacher candidates had risen to *an expression of the wild* through their collective activities without my direct input. What was important to note was that students had underwent the creation of a second, Deep Ecology Campfire and in so doing demonstrated their willingness and ability to further experience the wild. The furthering and deepening of being with Fire was due to one practiced peer and everyone’s previous collective experience of the first Deep Ecology Campfire evening.

The first few years of offering a Deep Ecology Campfire felt like I was venturing into unknown pedagogical terrain. I worried the evening would be a failure. However, with every successive year I observed the leaders offering innovative Deep Ecology Campfire activities, followed by the written and oral reflections on the night’s intent, my confidence grew. Any insecurity about offering this activity to teacher candidates, even without the use of words and the goal for everyone to dance freely around a Fire, decreased each year with time and practice. The positive feedback from the student’s journal entries as well as the fact that most students had chosen the Deep Ecology Campfire as their final assignment (entitled “My most significant field camp learning experience”) provided me with enough of a positive outcome to continue to offer the evening.

I came to understand and appreciate how strongly teacher candidates craved wild pedagogical opportunities to learn. Consequently, I came to realize that one of my primary tasks as a wild pedagogue is to expand the opportunities for students to learn around a campfire as opposed to the sterile conventional classroom environment of most schools. Additionally, I needed to find the means to create assignments and lessons that would enable students increased time and practice spent interacting with the more-than-human. One student expressed an interest in practicing teaching without the use of language, “this use of silence intrigued me and I hope to try to experiment with it across a wider range of programs. In a world that seems to be so language driven, I would be interested in seeing the effects of removing such an integral part of everyday life, just like the organizers of this campfire did” (student paper).

***Touchstone #5 Socio-Cultural Change***

We believe that the way many humans currently exist on the planet needs changing, that this change is required at the cultural level, and that education has an important role to play in this project of cultural change (p. 97).

In Canada, the increasing awareness of cultural appropriation and the stereotyping of Indigenous people brings attention to the need to examine the appropriateness of contemporary engagement in traditional, pan-cultural activities and rituals (e.g. drumming, chanting and face-body painting). Wide-spread media coverage about the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Calls for Action* has rightfully raised awareness regarding the appropriation of Aboriginal cultures (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) living in Canada.

As wild pedagogues we must ensure that our efforts to encourage ethical socio-cultural changes in society, do not simultaneously impose counter-productive limits on learning and personal growth. Seeking a broader understanding of the historic role of pan-cultural campfire activities (e.g. drumming, chanting) can facilitate participation in archetypic practices leading to connection with the more-than-human.

Participation in diverse art forms and workshops (E.g. pew dancing, hand drumming, Feminist Spiritual circles, 5Rhythm dance (Roth, 1989)) broadens my ability to recognize and acknowledge numerous cultural practices that can be used to heal the damage to ourselves that results from the modern disconnection from the more-than-human. Redmond writes about how drumming is again becoming a tool for individual and cultural healing and transformation (1997, p.2) “I’ve been teaching and performing with the frame drum for many years now, and I’m continually amazed by its enthusiastic reception. Its voice inspires instant communion with everyone who hears it. I am convinced that the new drumming phenomenon answers a deep cultural need to reestablish our rhythmic links with nature and one another” (p.3). Clifford ‘s book *Wilderness Rhythms* (2012)focuses on exploring how playing music enhances the nature experience. He describes how skills like drumming and music-making are “timeless skills that aid our ability to connect” (p.8).

Overcoming my personal reluctance to feel musically competent and capable of participating in rhythmic-based movement practices has developed with experience. I now recognize the ancient participatory aspect of these art forms around the world and that they are not exclusive to any specific cultural group or community. The more exposure I have to traditional folk traditions from around world the more I realize most practices from the past emphasize participatory collective forms of art and expression in contrast to paid art forms given by specialized so-called-*experts*. The Deep Ecology Campfire provides the opportunity for teacher candidates to experience the participatory aspect of a broad spectrum of artforms demonstrating the commonality of these practices in all cultures through time.

With increased student awareness of the issue of cultural appropriation, it has become more common for students to express concerns about the subject after the Deep Ecology Campfire. Students ask questions such as, “should we have sung that song it sounded Native?” “Did we chant words from another language, what do they mean?” It is important that participants begin the evening with an appreciation of the diversity of cultural practices particularly those concerning human relationship with place. Lacking awareness of the pan-cultural, archetypic character of many cultural practices participants may worry that they are inappropriately copying another culture. It is valid that students raise these concerns, however it is more important that any concern does not hinder their ability to be present in the here and now.

When appropriation concerns first arose, I dealt with them by interjecting at these moments with a response directed at quelling any rising fears. I raised questions asking students to think about what cultures they are aware of that do not have a tradition of dance, or music that is used to expresses their understanding of the world or spiritual connection? I asked students to explore if these practices are specific to one people or culture or if they have common threads. I may also ask students to reflect upon the reason human’s use fire for other occasions such as the lighting of a candle in celebration. Ultimately, I want students to feel comfortable dancing and singing around a fire and by asking students to explore the commonality in a diversity of cultural forms of expression I hope for them to recognize their own ability to participate in these practices because they broaden personal perspectives.

I began to prioritize students’ ability to embrace the Deep Ecology Campfire by encouraging them to explore their own family and heritage. I did this by placing on the field camp equipment list that they were to bring an example of a celebratory activity that they identify as connecting people to the land from their own cultural ancestry and experiences. These activities are shared and discussed in association with the Deep Ecology Campfire and allow students to consider their own ethno-cultural heritage and recognize elements of indigeneity in their own and everyone’s place of ancestry. Although it is challenging to walk with students through what is admittedly a cultural, intellectual, and political minefield, it is both necessary and rewarding to create the type of environment where a cultural transformation can be undertaken to foster wild connections through community learning. One student commented: “Why would we think of dancing around a fire as something *crazy*? I think this speaks to a settler/colonial attitude that values a specific kind of ‘rationality.’ Anyone who does not meet this standard (read: animals, Indigenous peoples) are ‘othered’ and consider to be lesser than. Thus, there is lots of work that needs to be done in order to respect and elevate Indigenous perspectives and decolonize our minds!” (student journal). Another student summarized this cultural shift of negotiating appreciation versus appropriation as “learning is un-learning” (student journal). The deep ecology campfire and these conversations about expanded consciousness in cultural practices ultimately serve to allow education to reclaim its ability to cultivate our character and in so doing allow us to heal not just from our industrial-dependent lives but also by finding commonality in many cultural practices of the past that retain association with the land. By recognizing and reclaiming cultural practices that connect us to the more than human world we will do what Orr describes as the education required at this time because it begins “in values that stress our connectedness in the fullest sense of the word” (Jickling & Sterling, 2017).

***Touchstone #6 Building Alliances and the Human Community***

Healthy communities are places where people can take risks, where we can try out new ideas or practices, where we can depart from the *status quo*. People find belonging, friendship, and joy in their communities. We all need supportive communities as we attempt to re-wild our lives, pedagogies, and places where we live (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p.104).

Early in my career as I sought a deeper understanding of the influence of Fire on our civilization, I conceived of and began to develop the Deep Ecology Campfires I now offer to teacher candidates. My broad objective has been to take my personal interest in Fire to a wider audience to work collectively to build alliances between ourselves and Fire. The energy and openness of teacher candidates in the [program name] community has been fertile ground that supports this objective. The positive comments from students that I receive each year indicate that the Deep Ecology Campfires have succeeded in offering what is referred to as an “agent of continued discovery” by the Crex Crex Collective’s rational in *why wild pedagogies* (2018, p.20).

More recently, I have begun to introduce the practice of Deep Ecology Campfires to outdoor education allies through conference presentations. The feedback received is supportive, some colleagues plan to run similar activities at their work and one person a year later that he thinks about my workshop every time lights a fire now.

After receiving an invitation to attend a local event associated with the *Sacred Fire Community,* I began to understand that there was a growing effort worldwide to build community through the work of rekindling and reintegrating our relationship with Fire. The larger movement aims to inspire people to manifest deeper courage and insight in meeting the challenges of our lives (<https://www.sacredfire.org/>). Attending my friend’s event reinforced for me the ways sitting around a campfire and dialoguing about our personal experiences of connection with the world is a nurturing experience, heightened by the simple ritual of acknowledging Fire’s presence through offerings. Attendees ultimately benefitted by spending *time* with Fire and developing a monthly practice of gathering around Fire as a central focus.

Twenty years of receiving journal entries and papers that articulate the ways the Deep Ecology Campfires have encouraged teacher candidates to relate to Fire in new ways has simultaneously confirmed how many simple aspects involved in gathering around a campfire builds a sense of community. Fire can not only be co-teacher but co-nurturer to community building efforts and the development of wild pedagogues. One student rationalized this idea as follows: “I once read a paper about how important it is to have campfires while camping. In the article, it explained that this practice comforts us because, as humans, there is a deep connection to our ancestors, which makes campfires a very emotional-spiritual element of spending time outside. People feel the need to gather together, be present in the moment, and enjoy the company when a fire is ignited” (student journal).

The presence of Fire at our community events aids our ability to grow as a small spark eventually expands outward and ignites. As we watch flames shimmer on the boundary of a dark night sky, we recognize the edges of our own knowing; we see reflected outwardly our dancing comrades radiating an internal glow; the power and beauty of the more -than-human world resides in an ever-growing concentric ring of connection.

One student recognized how the event allowed them to move forward as a teacher with a broader vision of what education concerns: “It made me think that as teachers, we always seem to focus on what we should be doing based on curriculum documents and other teacher’s examples, but what we really should be thinking about is what we could be doing. As a teacher it is important to break out of the ‘normal molds” (students journal).

Whether we call ourselves a teacher, educator or wild pedagogue it is important to identify with others through our collective experiences and build upon activities that provoke our sense of ourselves as extending beyond the boundary of our skin. The following student entry summarizes how they plan to take forward the lessons they learned from the Deep Ecology Campfire: “I thought the primal campfire was extremely well facilitated and thought provoking. I have never considered running a program like this but have been forced to question why I haven’t and how I can apply these concepts and learning to my future as an outdoor educator and as a teacher” (student journal).

**Summary**

The six wild pedagogies touchstones presented by the Crex Crex Collective provide a relevant and timely context to examine what often appears to be an intangible relationship with the more-than-human. Modern western culture and language encourage the adoption of an anthropocentric philosophy, one in which we perceive ourselves as separate from the more-than-human. Commonly, anthropocentrism leaves us without the ability to attend to phenomena that is not of human origin and production.

The voices of teacher candidates confirm that the co-created campfires act to broaden the participant’s perceptions of the world in new and profound ways centering on Fire as more-than-human. Further, the narrations of the teacher candidates, when viewed through the lens of the six wild pedagogies touchstones, confirm that they serve well as an effective means for wild pedagogues to enrich their own, and others connection to the wild.

Educators regardless of their role (student teachers, environmental and outdoor educators, wild pedagogues) can share the models and methods described herein to further develop and create their own wild pedagogy. The touchstones offer wild pedagogues a functional unorthodox tool which helps them to think outside and beyond conventional learning techniques. In so doing the touchstones constitute an important component of wild pedagogues’ primary directive, that of re-wilding our lives.

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1. Endnote: Fire is capitalized herein to encourage this more-than-human phenomena to be considered co-teacher.

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)